

Biblical
Counseling
and Mental
Health

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Biblical Counseling and Mental Health

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Purpose

1. To help everyone who counsels others, from parents to friends to pastors, to understand that importance of Biblical counseling, and its supremacy above all other counseling.
2. To help students understand the differences in the secular and Christian paradigms for mental health and assumptions about the existence of God, characteristics of religion, and the nature of man underlying those paradigms.
3. To briefly introduce students to competing practices from mental illness, including Freudian, Skinnerian, Rogerian, Mowrerian (integrity groups), and Christian.
4. To teach pastors and other leaders in the local church how to counsel their parishioners and others needing help in the context of medical and medical illness.
5. To teach counselors several techniques, faith-based and secular, that they can use with appropriate modifications in biblical counseling.
6. To make readers more like Jesus



Vignette 1: Ukrainian Trauma Forum

- Christian Event: Ukrainian Week in Washington DC, Feb 2026
- Focus on trauma and healing in wartime
- Christian mental health experts emphasized DSM-5-TR
- Minimal mention of Christ or the Bible

Vignette 2: King Saul's Distress

- Symptoms
 - Saul tormented by 'evil spirit from the Lord'
 - Mood swings: rage, fear, paranoia, despair
 - Spiritual disorientation and violent behavior
- Interpretations
 - Traditional: Spiritual judgment due to disobedience
 - Modern: Depression, paranoia, PTSD-like symptoms
 - Synthesis: Spiritual and psychological distress



Vignette 3: Global Mental Health Crisis

- 1.1 billion people suffer from mental health issues
- Mental health is leading cause of disease by case count
- Conflicts and war worsen mental health globally
- Mental health in the U.S. and Ukraine is declining



The Bible in Mental Health today

- Mental health as a field is failing, with poor mental health growing worldwide. Nonetheless, we hesitate to use the Bible.
 - We don't believe the Bible is applicable
 - We are ashamed of the Bible
 - We deny individual responsibility
 - We don't like moral constraints, such as the Bible's rejection of homosexuality
 - We don't know how to understand Biblical examples of mental illness
 - We don't focus on God in our efforts but we focus on man

Theology and Anthropology

- Assumptions determine conclusions
- The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 9:10)
- Logic is in the Eye of the Beholder - what counts as logical or reasonable is not an objective, universal standard, but rather shaped by the person doing the reasoning (Gloria Steinem)
- Beliefs about God and man shape responses to suffering
- Material vs spiritual views impact coping mechanisms

Worldviews and Modern Mental Health

Paradigm	Composition	Moral Nature of Man
Buddhist	Nothing exists, including man. Some might posit the existence of an ill-defined, Buddha-like nature	None
Hindu	Man has a perishable body and imperishable soul (atman), which transmigrates from body to body (samsara) until merging (moksha) into the universal spirit (Brahma)	Neutral, can be good or bad depending upon circumstances and one's personal choices.
Secular Humanist	The body and the physical world exist, but there is no God, no human spirit, and no spiritual world. Man is a highly developed animal.	Neutral, though morality itself is a societal construct. Egoism, the pursuit of one's own desires, is the fundamental driver of human behavior.
Gnostic	The spirit and spiritual world exist, but the body and the physical world are far inferior, or perhaps an illusion.	Matter is evil, and spirit is good
Islam	The material and spiritual worlds both exist, created by God and proclaimed "good".	Man is born good, submitted to Allah, but he becomes evil as he thinks and acts badly
Christian	The material and spiritual (immaterial) worlds both exist, and man has both material (body) and spiritual (soul/spirit) components. All were created by God and proclaimed "good".	Man was created perfectly good, but chose evil, and now is scarred by original sin. Man is spiritually dead

What is a Paradigm?

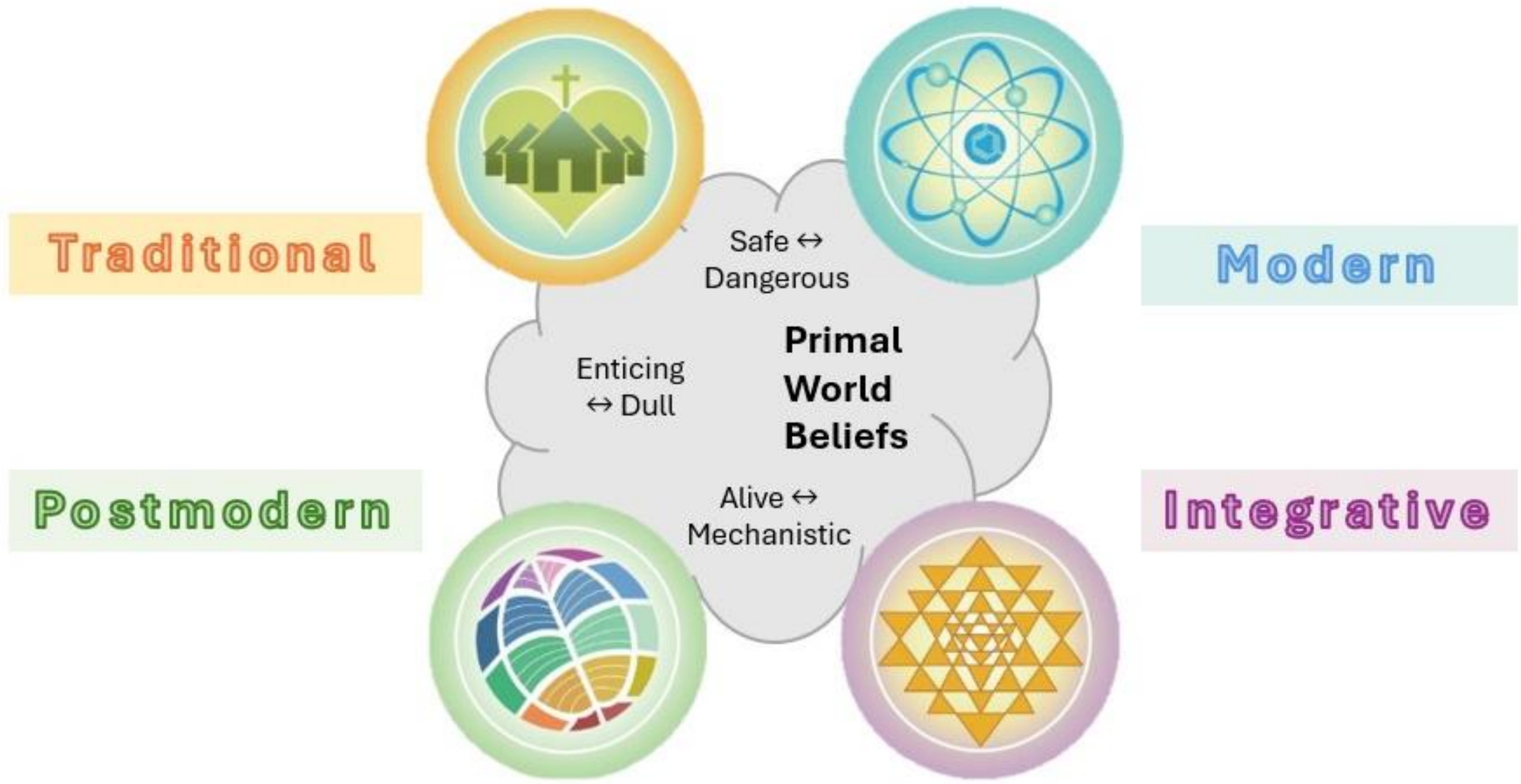
- A way that one looks at reality
- When applying the medical paradigm to health, diseases and injuries arise from observable causes through logical mechanisms, and diagnoses and treatments are objective and effective.
- There is no room for sin, guilt, or miraculous healings in a purely scientific (materialistic) paradigm.
- Different religions and philosophies lead to different approaches towards health and mental health



Two Paradigms for Health

- Medical/Material/Humanistic Paradigm
 - Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Health is about the individual.
 - The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.
- Christian paradigm
 - Health is Christlikeness
 - The purpose of health is not the benefit of man, but the glory of God
 - Health is not a right, but a gift from God.
- Christians believe in the body and spirit, together comprising the soul. Further, we know that God made all creation. Therefore, the Christian paradigm includes all of creation (material) and Biblical (spiritual).

Worldview Framework



Two Paradigms for Mental Health

- Materialist (WHO) - Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and can contribute to his or her community.
 - Based on naturalism; excludes spiritual causes
 - Mental illness treated like physical disease
 - Diagnosis based on subjective criteria
- Christian – To be maximally healthy is to be maximally like Jesus Christ; to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.
 - Health = Christlikeness
 - Illness stems from sin, demonic activity, or the Fall
 - Spiritual health prioritized over physical

Why Biblical Counseling and Mental Health?

- Despite billions of dollars spent on diagnosis, treatments, and research, mental health in the USA is getting worse.
- Mental health problems are also growing in the whole world.
- Ukraine is not exempt, with the self-reported prevalence of mental health conditions increasing dramatically from 2002 to 2023.
- Researchers and caregivers alike flounder, jumping from one theory to another in their attempt to find something that makes people complaining of mental health problems feel better. Metabolic and environmental toxins are a recent favorite.
- But are the powers that be willing to accept God's answers?

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

- Physiological → Safety → Love → Esteem → Self-actualization
- Focus on self and material needs
- Late addition: Self-transcendence



Ill-Health Sources and Practices in the Bible

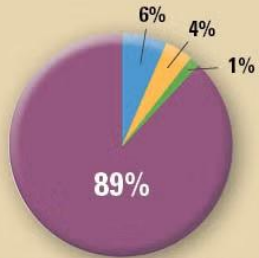
- Sources of Ill Health
 - Organic illness (physical causes)
 - Demonic activity
 - Personal sin
- Practices
 - Forgiveness and reconciliation
 - Resisting temptation and sin
 - Healthy living as honoring God

662
Number of specialty behavioral health hospitals in the U.S. in 2023

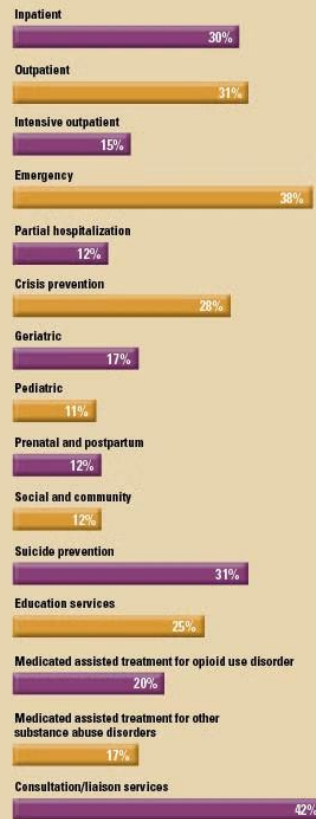
DEFINING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Behavioral health conditions include both mental illness and substance use disorders. Specialty behavioral health hospitals, as well as community hospitals with behavioral health services, provide unique treatment programs to meet the health needs of patients with behavioral health conditions.

11%
of all U.S. hospitals were specialty behavioral health hospitals

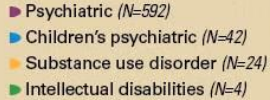


Community hospitals provide a variety of psychiatric health services, 2023

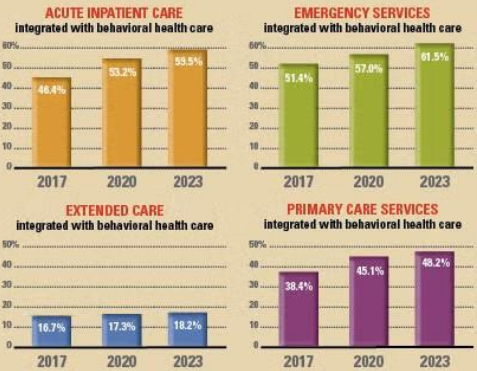


26
Increase in number of behavioral health hospitals since 2019

U.S. specialty behavioral health hospitals, 2023



Behavioral health integration with other health services is growing



The provision of integrated physical and behavioral health care services in a range of settings has been increasing, and hospitals often provide a variety of behavioral health treatment programs beyond the inpatient setting.

Critique of DSM-5-TR

- Lists subjective criteria for mental disorders
- Lacks objective tests (labs, imaging)
- No consideration of sin or spiritual factors

Case Example: Unforgiveness and Depression

- Patient with fatigue, anger, hopelessness
- Root cause: unresolved conflict and unforgiveness
- Healing through forgiveness and spiritual restoration

Case Example: Saul's Spiritual Decline

- Disobedience led to spiritual and emotional collapse
- David's music provided temporary relief
- Illustrates spiritual and psychological interplay

Secularized Mental Health

- Purely naturalistic – no mention of God or religion
- Blaming genetics and brain chemistry with neither scientific evidence nor hint of personal action being involved.

MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Common Issues

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Bipolar Disorder
- PTSD

Symptoms

- Sadness & Hopelessness
- Irritability & Anger
- Fatigue & Insomnia

Causes

- Trauma
- Genetics
- Stress
- Brain Chemistry

Coping Tips

- Talk to Someone
- Therapy
- Exercise

SEEK HELP WHEN NEEDED

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual - DSM-5-TR

- The DSM-5-TR lists symptoms, which are real, and places them under constructs, which are diagnoses. Restated, what is called a “diagnosis” is only a label for a set of symptoms that a committee of “experts” has decided to use.
- The DSM-5-TR provides a standard language for communicating mental health conditions to label patients, communicate with colleagues, defend oneself in court, and bill for reimbursement.
- Case Study
- Twelve step programs and activities of daily living

General Approaches to Counseling

General Approach	Specific Type	Man's Problem	Solution
Expert knowledge	Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)	Poor socialization (often blames the church and family)	Resocialization by an expert (psychiatrist or psychologist can fix you)
	BF Skinner (1904-1990)	Environmental conditioning	Reconditioning by an expert (like training an animal, changing the total environment)
Common knowledge	Carl Rogers (1902-1987)	Failure to live up to one's potential	Resources found in oneself (the answer and power are within you)
	O Howbart Mowrer (1907-1982)	Bad behavior towards others	Resources in Self and group (Integrity groups)
Divine knowledge	Christian	Sin against God	Resources of the Spirit in the Word and others

Persons and Principles involved in Counseling

- Persons
 - Holy Spirit
 - Counselor
 - Counselee(s)
- Principles
 - Hope
 - Reconciliation
 - Forgiveness

The Language of Counseling

- Listen carefully
- False accusations
- Euphemisms and misunderstandings
- The real battle is spiritual, and the real problem is sin.

Process of Biblical Counseling

- Biblical counselors empathize, making the counselee's problem their own. They do not merely sympathize and then never support sinful behavior.
- Check the counselee's motivation to change
- Dehabituation and Rehabituation
- Prework and the First Session
- Asking Questions
- Homework – Bible reading, other reading, prayer, forgiveness, church activities, etc.
- Interpreting counselee data

The Primary Care Medical Models of Counseling

- Experience from other disciplines can improve effectiveness
- Models used in primary care can be used in part to address problems facing pastors.
 - Transtheoretical
 - The Five As
 - FRAMES for addressing risky behaviors
 - Motivational interviewing
 - BATHE for addressing health risk behaviors

Mental Illness and Medical Illness

- Brain injury
- Cancer
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Infectious disease
- Respiratory disease

Biblical Approaches to Mental Health

- Secular vs. Christian “soul care” and a General Plan for Counseling
- Specific Conditions
 - Anger
 - Envy, Brooding, Fretting, and Self-Pitty
 - Depression and Bipolar Disorder
 - Fear and Anxiety
 - Post Dramatic Stress Disorder
 - Schizophrenia
 - Sexual Dysfunction



The Chaplaincy

- History
- Mission
- Biblical Counseling and the Chaplaincy
- Training
- Common duties

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

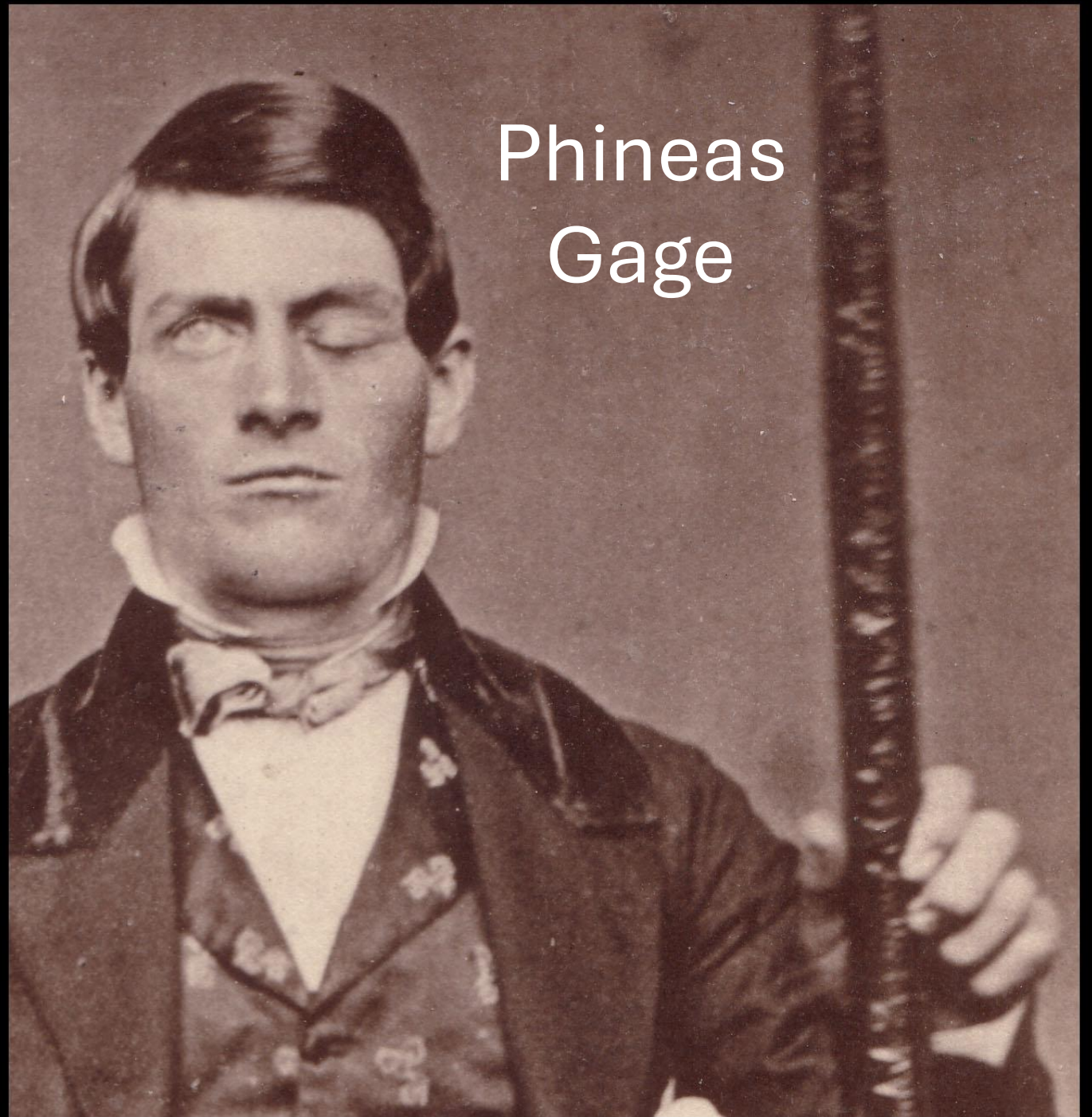
- Individuals taking control of their thoughts to glorify God in Christ and improve their lives
- Romans 12:2
- 1 Corinthians 2:16
- Philippians 2:5

Church CBT Workshop

Renewing Your Mind & Spirit Through Christ



Grow in Christ, Renew Your Mind!



Phineas
Gage

Further Reading

- Biblical Counseling and Mental Health – paperback and Kindle book on Amazon. Just published!
- Religion and Art – paperback and Kindle book on Amazon.

Questions?