

## Transcript 84

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. One of the things we want to do on our podcast is to answer some questions that we receive frequently at Gotquestions.org, and we've received a lot of questions that have a counseling component to them. But we are very careful to always tell people that we are not a counseling ministry. There's only a limited amount of counseling you can actually do in an entirely online environment, so we always want to point people. If you feel yourself in need of counseling to speak to your pastor, to speak to a biblical or Christian counselor in area, but don't rely on an email or an online conversation to take the place of in person counseling that you need.

Shea Houdmann

So with that said, we do receive a lot of questions with the counseling component and one of the struggles in the Christian counseling arena, so to speak, is to what degree can modern psychology and be integrated into Christian counseling? So today's guest is Doctor Luther Smith. He's the department chair of the Biblical counseling department at Calvary University and is also the Dean of the College. So Doctor Luther Smith welcome to the show.

Luther Smith

Thank you, thank you very much for having me. I appreciate it.

Shea Houdmann

So my first question, what I want to lead off with, kind of a general one, but how would you distinguish biblical counseling from Christian counseling?

Luther Smith

That that is a very interesting question. Because I know that within the world of biblical counseling and kind of the discussion that goes on here within this particular sphere. Usually when Christian counselors talk of biblical counselors and biblical counselors, talk of Christian counselors there is some sort of distinction that that for the biblical counselor, who sees a Christian counselor, they would say that the Bible is more of a supplemental tool. That's what biblical counselors would say about Christian counselors that it doesn't. It's not the. It's not the primary thing that drives the car, but it's more of a supplemental type thing that's used within techniques and things like that.

Luther Smith

For the Christian counselor who is talking about a biblical counselor, they would say that what they're doing is great, but the Christian counselors kind of contention with biblical counselors is that they're kind of narrow, focused, only looking at the scriptures, but not implementing or adding other things that could be helpful for a person who might need help in counseling and things like that. For me personally. It's really, really difficult for me because we find in the Bible the word Christian is used. It's used to Peter. It's recorded in Luke, you know, and so I find that this distinction it almost it doesn't help anyone on the outside of the circle.

Luther Smith

I would say that a biblical counselor is a Christian counselor. That a person who and I'm and I'm kind of going away from the distinctions that are made between kind of both camps. That a person who is a Christian, a believer acknowledges the scriptures as the as the authority by which we are, that gives us the substance of man, the substance of humanity, how we are to live, how we are to function. And it just so happens that a believer is also known as a Christian.

Luther Smith

You know, because they believe in Christ, right? That he is he is Messiah and Lord and God. So I find that this the question I think that needs to be asked before we get into the distinctions is what is psychology? Right and what is it? And is it something that the scripture speaks about?

Luther Smith

That's really the question before we get into these distinctions because I find that that in both biblical counseling and Christian counseling, it's really easy for us to set up strawmen. You know I'm saying and kind of bludgeon those without actually defining terms.

Luther Smith

I'm I. I'm not trying to dodge the question, I just I'm trying. I'm trying. I'm trying to be very specific in the question itself. Is for me I don't find these distinctions beneficial because both of them from both sides could be used as a pejorative, and that's not helpful.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, and I trust me, I've experienced the exact same thing with this struggle and people from both sides having a caricature of what the other side actually believes and does. So you said a better question would be how about we go with that? What is psychology and what does the Bible say about it.

Luther Smith

That's a great question, and I can probably see someone's probably head would explode while we go through this, but psychology itself comes from 2 Greek words, right? Sookie, which is our soul sometimes it's translated mind. Right and and loggos, right the discourse. Just the words to speak, right?

Luther Smith

So essentially it is the study or the Speaking of the humans of the soul right, now depending on what worldview you have, you're going to define this term very differently, and I would submit to you that the proper way that biblical that those who have a biblical worldview ought to observe this word is that is that humanity is made up of both material and immaterial, right?

Luther Smith

We see the human body. We see the physical aspect of the material aspect of humanity in Genesis 1, right? Where all of the activity that God gives humanity is all physical, right? That they were to rule over creation that they are there to reproduce and fill the earth, right that they were to eat the seed of the plants and things like that. All of that is physical, right? We also observe in Psalm 139, David attributing

the act of conception. The physical making and creation to God himself. So there is a material aspect of humanity that shouldn't be overlooked.

Luther Smith

There's also an immaterial too. We see this underscored in Genesis 2 right where God breathed into the nostrils the Breath of Life and Man became a living soul right? We see Proverbs 20:27 that the lamp that the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord. Right? I'm searching the innermost parts of his being. Even in even in Zachariah chapter 12 verse one we observe that before God gives essentially a judgment to Israel, he kind of pulls this calling card out and summarizes Genesis. That you know this is the Lord who made the heavens and the earth and forms the spirit of man within him. So there are two distinct aspects of humanity. That's clear, right?

Luther Smith

I would define psychology from a biblical perspective as the complete aspects of humanity, both material and immaterial. When we talk about psychology from a biblical perspective, we're talking about both aspects of humanity. Material and immaterial so and the discourse of that. The problem is when you have individuals who come from a different worldview, perhaps, maybe in a worldview that believes that God is not. All they have is the physical.

Luther Smith

That's all they accept and all they submit. But we see that the biblical worldview teaches us that there's the material and the immaterial right? And you can't weigh the immaterial. You can't measure it. You can't put it in the you know, put it on an X ray. You can't put it in a microscope. You can't see that. That's something that God has revealed, and quite honestly, I mean, he's the one that has the pay grade. So we don't, so I would say that psychology rightly understood through God revealing reality to us by his word is man is physical, but he's also spiritual too.

Shea Houdmann

So I love how you explain that it makes a lot of sense in my different training. I mean, when I was at Calvary University a long time ago, I took some several different biblical counseling classes and was presented with more biblical counseling focus, and more recently I've taken some other counseling classes in a different school. I thought there were excellent classes. I learned a lot, but it was definitely from a more like integration to standpoint where the professor believes that we can take certain aspects of modern psychology where they're only looking at the physical. And implement that because as you said, there's a soul aspect and there's a physical aspect, and they both impact who we are as a person and how we think, how we feel, etc. So let me just ask you to what degree, if at all, do you think modern psychology can be integrated into a counseling ministry, as they as Christians.

Luther Smith

Umm, the question itself, from what you're asking, it's loaded. It's like first of all the word integration. Again, that's another kind of word that gets those who operate in biblical counseling circles. That gets some squeamish because that you know, again, the integrationists or something that you know you're kind of implementing things that are not biblical, you know and may lead someone down the wrong path in terms of their thinking.

Luther Smith

Oftentimes when I talk to individuals about what we do here at Calvary and, and especially outside of Calvary and then we get into the psychology. I asked him a question I asked him. Do you believe that psychology is a worldview or a field of study field than observational discipline? And a lot of them, some of them say both, but a lot of them say that it's a worldview, and I would I push back on that a little bit and I and I asked them is psychology. Does it make truth claims? Or does the philosophy in psychology make truth claims? Because if psychology is an observational discipline, then it doesn't make any truth claims, it just observes things right? And it's the philosophy that governs and guides our observations.

Luther Smith

It's kind of like, I use this example a lot, where you have two individuals and they're looking up at the stars in the sky. Right, and they're observing the Milky Way and the one on the right goes oh my gosh, it's so beautiful right? There both of them are marveling at the at the beauty and grandeur of the of the Milky Way. And one of them goes, oh my gosh, it's so beautiful, right? And the other one goes. Yes, I know it's so beautiful, right? Once a Christian, another one isn't. And then the other Christian. The non Christian turns to the Christian and goes isn't it wonderful how many you know how many billions of years has gone by to where we can actually observe this beauty and grandeur right and the other one turns and goes. I don't think so.

Luther Smith

The beauty and grandeur comes from the fact that God created this in six days. They're both looking at the same data. They're looking at the same stars, same stars in the sky, same Milky Way, same everything, but they're coming to two different conclusions. You know what I'm saying and it's because their worldview is informing them of how to observe even the same data, and I find that this is the this is one of the challenges in psychology.

Luther Smith

We can look at something and what informs us of what we're looking at. Right is it? Is it, you know? Uh, God is not view or God is view. We could look at the same thing, same brain scans, same MRIs, same things like that. So I would say if this kind of area kind of runs into the a problem with techniques.

So let's say, uh? Person has, you know, is dealing with anxiety. A person who has a God is not view would sit would use breathing techniques and would conclude that you know these breathing techniques are helpful and they are. This is what the data shows, right? But a person who is a biblical a person who has a biblical observation may use breathing techniques in addition to or may use scripture in addition to breathing techniques. Why? Because they understand the physical aspect of man and how breathing affects the Physiology of a person, and they understand that one's worldview and perspective probably needs to be altered at some point somewhere along the line, right from what you're dealing with.

Luther Smith

We see this in scripture all the time. Philippians 4. Uhm, even Matthew even Matthew 6 so. So uhm, I would say that the question isn't can should some aspects of modern psychology be integrated into counseling ministry? 'cause I can ask the question what in modern psychology? Yeah, I'm saying what?

What are we talking about? Are we talking about philosophy or are we talking about technique? If we're talking about techniques, well, then I think that there's a.

Luther Smith

I think that there's a discussion that we can have, because, again, the biblical worldview, as it observes, psychology sees both the spiritual and the physical as import. Right, if we're talking about integrating philosophes, do this because your chakras will be cleaned out. Yeah, I'm saying or something like that if we're talking about integrating philosophes that is incompatible. It's incompatible, because now we're talking. Now we're talking about who you are right and what you have, and the Scriptures don't reveal that reveal chakras or, you know, reveal you're just only material. You know I'm saying so.

Shea Houdmann

Excellent explanation and it really helps, helps me to process, this is still something I'm wrestling with in trying to figure out so at Got Questions if we're a ministry that's focuses on answering questions from the Bible and someone asked us a question that as a counseling component, we have to address that from the Bible, especially with the limitations of trying to do any sort of counseling exclusively online, but in some of the studies, like reading for example about cognitive behavioral therapy and just reading some of this, and I'm like now a lot of this reminds me of be transformed by the renewing of your mind. That as God renews our mind that impacts our behavior. And obviously we could do an entire episode just discussing cognitive behavioral therapy, so I don't want to go too much into the weeds, but I see like what you're saying with some techniques that they've discovered through observation that actually works. I don't really see why that be contradictory to biblical counseling, but in terms some of the philosophes that's behind cognitive behavioral therapy. Those are not compatible. So is that sort of the right balance here you're hinting at.?

Luther Smith

Yeah, I would even go so far as to say these individuals who use these techniques, they haven't discovered them. Does that make sense? They are using them. See for those of us who believe that the scriptures that that God has revealed everything right, that that everything we're in relation to man and the substance of man, and how man functions right for those who like, have these techniques, I would submit to you that they borrow from the biblical perspective. That they borrow from them that that they understand by observation that the material aspect of humanity is important, and when you address those you know and give comfort and things like that, that a person there's benefits to that well, we would say the same thing too, as a matter of fact, we would, we ought to be, you know, pounding our fists on the lectern going yeah this is what we believe too, this is this is a part. This is an area that that is of importance to us

Luther Smith

As a matter of fact in first Thessalonians chapter 5, verse 12, I believe, Paul at the completion of his letter, basically summarizes essentially the activity of the Saints in Thessalonica, and he says admonish the unruly, encourage the faint hearted and help the weak. That word weak in the text refers to a person who's physically ill. Who is incapable.

Luther Smith

So you can put those who deal with sickness. You could put those who have, you know, specific disabilities you can put that in there that we are to assist them that is completely compatible with individuals who are working in using techniques to address physical things, but. We would also include that there is an aspect of humanity and in material aspect that must be addressed as well right and for the unbeliever to present to them while even while we're dealing with their physical needs. But to present to them the grace of God found in the gospel, right? So that they will know and believe, and once they become believers to build on that knowledge of what they know, so that they will know how to observe reality and make good choices right in their relationships. In in, in the way that they function in the world because God has given us all of this wisdom.

Luther Smith

So I would. I would agree with you that that I'm like, you know we CBT and all of those. I would say that they didn't. They didn't discover anything. This this has been wisdom and insight that has been given to us in God's word. They just happened to package it and put it in a model. Yeah, I'm saying, with a with perhaps even poor philosophy behind that model. You know, yeah.

Shea Houdmann

Well said to the philosophical side of psychology, briefly, if I often hear the saying like all truth is God's truth, trying out there that if a unsaved secular psychologists philosophers discovering something that's true, it's true because it's God truth and when I look at someone like Sigmund Freud or some of the early psychologists, even some of the Popular psychologists today. Looking at their background, I don't think God hating Atheists, is a pejorative in that sense, and their. No, that's really who they are. To me. It's almost like the a broken clock is right twice a day concept in that just from where human beings created in the image of God, even when we don't know him, we can discover truth. But I really, really struggle with trying to implement anything from a person from that perspective. Knowing their worldview really creates a barrier for me in trying to think anything they could possibly discover would actually be true and good and valuable.

Luther Smith

Right I think all truth is God's truth that is a true statement. Because God is the ultimate source of truth, right? He is the absolute reality, right? But I think even more so when we talk about that statement. I think that there needs to be a discussion about the various. All truth is God's truth, but there are different categories.

Luther Smith

OK, so. For instance, when we talk about creation itself and how we function as human beings, we are in one sense talking about material truth, right? So when scientists or biologists examine the cell right or they examine minerals and chemicals and things like that. We're working with material means. The best practices for pregnancy and conception and delivery and things like that. We are looking at natural observation, right? So then there's that there's that natural truth, and that material truth, I call it.

Luther Smith

And then you have the what I said the in material right and all of the faculties and abilities of the in material, the mind, the will, the emotions I. There's and as a matter of fact I could remember in my

studies being taught that memories are stored in the brain, right? And the argument that they use is observing people with Alzheimer's right that that the degenerative properties that happen within Alzheimer's, that the plaque that they call it plaque within the brain, it doesn't it inhibits basically neuronal functioning within the brain. That people forget things right. They forget who they forget where they you know they forget who they are, they forget what other people are or even dementia, right? Which is a deterioration of the brain and they concluded that because of that, because a person doesn't remember. That that's where memories are stored, right? That's not what God's word tells us. God's word tells us who knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of a man that's in him. Just because we see the brain lighting up right and activity. That doesn't mean. That that's where it starts.

Luther Smith

Yeah, I'm saying that the spirit and the body integrates right? And so and so as the as the as the spirit thinks and ponders and questions and things like that that comes out of one's spirit, one in material right again that's something you can't weigh. You can't weigh, you can't see you, could you?

Luther Smith

It doesn't matter if you drink all of the all of the of the liquid and the fluid in the world for an fMRI scan, you're not going to see that, right? That's something that God has informed us about in his word, so you have material truth and then you have in material truth. That's truth too. And then you have what I call operational or functional truth.

Luther Smith

That's the truth that's found in proverbs how you live your life with wisdom. Proverbs one to know wisdom and instruction to discern the sayings of understanding. To receive instruction in wise behavior, righteous justice and integrity. Right to make wise choices. That's truth too, right? So to say, all truth is God's truth there, that is a truthful statement. The problem is individuals who see truth and use a worldview that doesn't acknowledge the source of that truth. So atheists those or those who are hostile to God, they can observe things that are truthful.

Luther Smith

You know, a cell divides. That's what it does. This is what we see. Why does the cell divide? Oh, because billions of years ago over the process of time, genes decided that they, you know they you know the best genes decided that they wanted to do this. Now we're talking about something different. You know, I'm saying. We can acknowledge that the cell divides.

Luther Smith

I've never heard you know another thing too that that's interesting. I've never heard an atheist say that beating your spouse is the best thing for your marriage. I've never heard that I have heard some other crazy things, but I've never heard that right. See, they acknowledge the truth. They just deny the source of it.

Luther Smith

Yeah, so I. I would say that all truth is God's truth, but what truth are we talking about? Are we talking about natural truth? They can acknowledge that. That are we talking about in material truth? They probably won't acknowledge that because their worldview won't allow them to. You know, I'm saying.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, so as a Biblical counselor and this may be our last question. Obviously there's way more that we could go into. We could do probably an entire episode on most of the different items we've talked about today. What does it mean that you that the Bible is sufficient in terms of counseling? So does the Bible truly tell us everything? We need to know in order to be able to adequately give people the counsel that they need.

Luther Smith

When we are talking about the substance and nature of humanity and how humanity is supposed to function in the world. And if we're talking about the source and the origin of this wisdom and who gave us this wisdom, the Bible is indeed sufficient. It is enough.

Luther Smith

It is enough now, some might. Some might argue. Well, it doesn't tell us, you know about antidepressants. And it doesn't tell us about psychiatric drugs. And it doesn't tell us it doesn't have to and, and because the reason why is because of Ephesians 2 because of Titus two that we are God's workmanship in Christ Jesus. Created to do good works. I put that under the realm of good works.

Luther Smith

The Bible is indeed enough to tell us about the function and nature of humanity. That man indeed has an active sin issue. That it we are hostile to God. And I know that people don't. People don't like to hear that, but that's the truth and the scriptures outline this clearly right? Romans 3 right? Ephesians 2 all of these things are outlined clearly. There's also the aspect and reality of the fact that we live in a cursed world, due to the sin of humanity and the world at large. So the you know we grow even if we didn't commit one single active sin, we're still going to die because that is the result of the fall. We grow old. Things don't work well. You know I'm saying people are born with defects. This is the nature of where we live, so we acknowledge that too.

Luther Smith

As a matter fact, the same verse that I used earlier, 1st Thessalonians 5 verse 12, has within it the component of dealing with active sin and the effects of what has gone on and living in a cursed world admonishing the unruly. That's clearly a. That's clearly an issue of active sin. Clearly you are to warn and instruct those who act disorderly, but encouraging the faint hearted. There are things that happen in this world that is not our fault. And deaths in the family people dying, you know. And we didn't expect that. Those things hurt and sting, right? Because of the reality of death, which praise the Lord will end soon. And then to help the weak. That there are things that happen to us physically. Sometimes we can be healthy and eat well and things don't work well because this world is this world is under a curse, unfortunately. But we have the hope of it being remedied in the future by him.

Luther Smith



But I would say yes, the Bible is sufficient. It is enough when it comes to the substance and will of man and the activity and who God is and what he's done and what he's accomplished. It is enough we ought to use the Bible when we counsel individuals we ought to.

Shea Houdmann

Amen, I really enjoyed our conversation today. Just helpful reminders to me. It re energizing me too when people ask us questions with a counseling component to point people back to Scripture. What scripture says about the Soul. What Scripture says about our condition that we find ourselves is falling humanity and how that impacts everything, including our our physical being. And if that if sometimes counseling may require some sort of pharmaceutical assistance that's something for a medical doctor or trained medical doctor to decide that's not, I remember several years ago a friend of mine who discipled me when I was younger came to me and he had actually suffered a stroke and the stroke resulted in some damage to his brain and he was really, really struggling with depression and a doctor prescribed some antidepressant for him and he was really struggling with taking it. It's like shouldn't I be able to overcome this depression just through spiritual growth through discipleship? Through studying the word through prayer? And I was like, well, if you broke your arm. If you sprained your ankle and would you not seek medical attention for those things? So if you have actual physical damage to your brain that is causing some problems. I don't see why taking a pharmaceutical drug antidepressant from a legitimate Doctor who studied these things, and there's been tested. It does seem to help, it's at least worth a try to see if getting the physical in line where it's supposed to be could possibly help you with some other things in your life, so it's a struggle. It's something I've struggled with and knowing how to counsel people, how to help people.

Shea Houdmann

So I really appreciate your insight and I would love to have you back on and there's obviously more questions we could dive into, so maybe that'll be a future episode if you're willing. So Luther thank you for your time today.

Luther Smith

Yeah, very much so. Thank you. Thank you very much. I really enjoyed this. I would I look forward to Lord willing if we ever get together and talk some more. Yeah, I look forward to they're gonna do these questions and topics.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely. So this has been the Got Questions podcast with Doctor Luther Smith from Calvary University. We'll include some links to where you can learn more about Luther in the show notes at [podcast.gotquestions.org](http://podcast.gotquestions.org) and also on YouTube in the description field when this video goes live. So again, this has been the Got Questions podcast. Hope our conversations been informative. And encouraging to you. Got questions? The Bible has answers and we'll help you find them.