2009 D.Min Pre-readings and assignments

Dynamics of Biblical Change
   David Powlison, instructor

Apply yourself to the reading with all diligence. This DMin program provides an opportunity for you to give yourself to intensive study of things that will affect the rest of your life and ministry. Take the opportunity. Don’t take shortcuts or get sidetracked. Our weeks together at the end of August will be short and intense. There is no way that such a short burst of study can achieve either the scope or the depth of necessary and valuable wisdom needed for personal ministry in our times. Your application both before and after our weeks together will make a significant difference.

Assignment to be completed BEFORE the August module:

Read the “Clyde” case study carefully (attached). Read it again. Mark it up.

Ministry response paper. Put your initial response to Clyde into a concise paper (1 page, 300-400 words, typed). The last page offers you some pump-priming questions. I’m not looking for “the right answer.” I’m looking for how you instinctively tend to approach people. This paper helps me get a feel for the class. Please email to Karen Schoch kschoch@ccfe.org by August 10. This is the only pre-assignment that should be handed in before the modules; everything else should be handed in on the first day of each module.

Read the following items by Powlison:

- *Speaking Truth in Love*, chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6.

Ministry response paper. As you reflect on the items you’ve read, what are the two or six or twelve or however many leading points that strike you? On 1-2 pages, give a bulleted list with a brief discussion of the implications for your counseling ministry (a
sentence or two each if you have more items; a paragraph or two each if you have fewer items).

**Human Personality**  
Ed Welch, instructor  
Assignment to be completed BEFORE the August Module:  
*Love’s Executioner*, by Irving Yalom will provide a useful way to develop our biblical anthropology. Read the prologue, in order to get Yalom’s theory of the person. Then read the case studies called “Love’s Executioner,” “If Rape Were Legal,” “Fat Lady,” “Three Unopened Letter,” and Therapeutic Monogamy.” For each case study (1) highlight what is challenging and provocative to you, and (2) show how your theology would guide you in understanding the case. You won’t need to write more than one page per case study.  
Second, read the article, “How Theology Shapes Ministry: Jay Adams View of the Flesh & a Theological Alternative” JBC 20:3, 2002, pp 16-25. (Don’t bother with the last section of the article where I, Ed, offer a curious perspective on the flesh.) Write no more than a one page response

**Methods**  
Ed Welch, instructor  
Read  
*Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands* by Paul Tripp  
*Heart of a Servant Leader* by John Miller (read the first ½ of the book)  
Assignment  
Write a two page summary of your strengths and weaknesses as highlighted/exposed in the Instruments book.  
Bring me a real letter you wrote to someone that has been informed by your D.Min readings and in particular the letters in the Miller book.

**Theology & Secular Psychology**  
David Powlison, instructor  
Read well! Read thoroughly and thoughtfully. Of course, you are busy with life and ministry. But this D.Min. program provides an opportunity for you to give yourself to intensive study of things that will affect the rest of your life and ministry. Take the opportunity. Don’t take shortcuts. You enroll and pay tuition to buy time to think. Our time together at the end of August will be short and intense. There is no way that such a short burst of study can achieve the scope or depth of necessary and valuable wisdom needed for personal ministry in our times.  
Assignment to be completed BEFORE the August module:
This first group of readings introduces you to the origins and ongoing development of the counseling program here at Westminster Seminary and CCEF.

*The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*, USA: New Growth Press, 2009. This contains Powlison’s dissertation at University of Pennsylvania, *Competent to Counsel?: The History of a Conservative Protestant Biblical Counseling Movement* (1996), and three appendices below. If you have the book you don’t need these three articles below. If you have the original dissertation from the CD-ROM then you will also need these articles below.


Here’s how the preface to the dissertation describes the appendices. “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies)” updates the history, but in a way that openly reveals my commitments and hopes. “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling” outlines my assessment of balances and imbalances in Jay Adams’s model. “Biological Psychiatry” updates the discussion of what constitute ‘truly organic difficulties’ in the light of developments in psychiatry decades after Adams wrote his views.

Write a 3-4 page response paper of 1000-1500 words. I would like to see two sorts of things that communicate something of your own experiences in the personal, private, face-to-face, know-your-name, counseling aspects of ministry.

First, describe and comment upon the impact of the secular psychologies – ideas, practices, professions, and institutions – that you’ve seen in your previous education, in churches and ministries, in individuals you’ve ministered to.

Second, respond in a personal way to these readings about the biblical counseling movement. What strikes you? Strengths to build on? Weaknesses to overcome?

Those preliminary readings give you a sense for the history of our program in biblical counseling, setting these developments in the context of the mental health establishment. In our class time together, we will spend most of our time on a different aspect of the relationship between Christianity and the secular psychologies. We will consider how to reinterpret what they see. Here is one article to prime the pump of your thinking about this issue:


Write a 1-page response.

In these and other response papers, aim for thoughtful, concise and precise writing, the product of working and reworking your thoughts. Don’t just hand in a first draft in which the ideas are half-formed and still forming. Don’t summarize the readings. Give your
response: comments or applications or disagreements or implications or illustrations or questions, etc. Read well, and distill your thoughts into a carefully articulated statement.
Clyde Case Study

“Clyde”

Clyde is 35 years old, married, with two children. He works as a medical doctor, practicing internal medicine at a suburban hospital outside Philadelphia. He is 5’6” tall, weighs 220 pounds, wears thick glasses, and seems a bit uncoordinated physically (you’re relieved to know he’s not a surgeon!). He’s evidently intelligent, witty, gregarious, and likeable. He’s a member of a believing church, is quite generous with his money, and knows his Bible fairly well.

But all is not well in Clyde’s life. He has sought help for mounting problems: “My life is out of control. I feel overwhelmed, preoccupied, hopeless. I get so tense and anxious inside that it disrupts my ability to function. Sometimes I feel like ending it all.” Marital arguments are increasingly frequent, intense, and insoluble. Divorce threats are in the air. Clyde is shamefaced to admit that over the past six or eight months he has been stopping off at a bar on his way home from work for “a few drinks,” and that pornography has again become an issue after being quiescent for a number of years.

What more do we need to know? We’ve learned Clyde’s marquee sins and their sequela: heavy drinking and pornography; the anger, fear and turmoil of interpersonal conflict; electric anxiety and dark discouragement; suicidal ideation; confusion, guilt, shame and regret. But we haven’t located his troubles in a comprehensive understanding of the man in his world. What sort of world does Clyde live in, and how does he put his world together? Currently we know almost nothing of these things. His marquee struggles appear in a vacuum.

We’ll begin with his circumstances. What Clyde faces does not explain him, but it locates him. It describes the stage on which he lives (the biblical peirasm, pressures and influences that try and tempt a person). For starters, he puts in very long hours in a high stress job. That’s never insignificant. Also, he’s experienced fluttering heart pains in recent months. As a doctor, he knows what that means. Either he’s developing heart trouble or he’s a self-diagnosed mental case. The first option seems plausible: he’s obese,

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1 Clyde is a composite, based primarily on one person. All identifying details have been changed. Other details have been added, adapted from other people whose struggles are consistent with his.
sedentary, high-stressed, and his Dad died of a heart attack at age forty-six. The second option is equally plausible: he’s not dealing well with stress and anxiety. Neither option is a happy thought.

What about his family life? His children are ten and twelve, on the cusp of becoming teen-agers and then young adults. Clyde has sacrificed a lot of family time for career. He fears they’ll grow up and he’ll have barely known them. His mother’s health is seriously failing but she won’t willingly leave her home. She’s increasingly domineering, crotchety, and recalcitrant. His brother and sister are ne’er-do-wells, so responsibility for making and carrying out the hard decisions rests on Clyde. His wife, Corinne, is a nominal Christian. She has a marked shrewish streak, is money- and status-conscious, is highly invested in her own career, and pushes Clyde to be more aggressive in his career and to make more money.

Capping off the current stressors is something which at first was a feather in his cap. Eight months ago, his supervisor, a respected and helpful mentor throughout Clyde’s career, got him appointed to the hospital ethics committee. The committee proved to be highly politicized. Clyde disagrees in principle with the hospital’s abortion policy, but taking an unpopular point of view seems dangerous to professional health.

What we’ve said about Clyde’s immediate life situation only begins to consider the variety of influential forces and factors. For example, Clyde lives amid atmospheric cultural values that teach all of us to look down our noses at clumsy, 5’6”, 220 pound middle-aged men. Other voices teach us to look up in admiration at medical doctors. Does Clyde have ears for those voices? How does listening affect him? A cacophony of voices teach us to view wealthy people with an ambivalent mix of [1] envy (I want what you have), [2] inferiority (You’re somehow better than me), [3] disdain (You don’t know what life’s like), and [4] self-righteous judgment (You have an unfair advantage and should care more for the poor). Does he listen? That’s but a sampler of what the Bible labels the world/kosmos expressing ramifications of “The Lie.” A thousand voices weigh in to assign relative value and stigma in any arena.

Those are present tense pressures and voices. But human beings also imagine trajectories reaching into the possible future. Clyde is gripped by intense, barely conscious fears. These prophetic voices speak on the inside and threaten disasters. Will I
drop dead of a heart attack? Will my family have enough money? Will my kids hate me or shrug off our non-relationship with a “Whatever”? Will my marriage collapse into animosity and divorce? If I force my mother into the care facility she needs, will she make my life miserable and cut off my inheritance? Will I be humiliated by public exposure of my vices? Will I have a nervous breakdown? Will anxiety attacks prove that I am a weak person? Will I get axed for poor job performance? Will I get pushed aside for standing against the power-brokers in hospital administration? What will happen to me? The cultural voices converse with the internal voices. A gossip culture revels in the failures of others. A success culture pontificates, “Believe in yourself and you can accomplish your dreams.” Clyde is more frightened by the former than allured by the latter.

We’ve described present and future situations. But human beings live an unfolding story, and always come with a significant past. Current life-patterns do not emerge new-hatched each new day. Current reactions show continuities with patterns built up over years. Clyde points to two particularly significant circumstances.

First, his family moved from a town in the South when he was in 6th grade. His Dad had been a successful sales manager, and was promoted to a vice-presidency in New York City. The move and adjustment were traumatic. It was summed up in an event the first week in his new school. His mother visited the classroom and drewled, “Wayull, Clawd honey…..” The routine viciousness of middle-school bullies took it from there. They’d found a target in this short clumsy kid with glasses who talked funny: “Clod-honey” became his tagline.

Second, both his mother and father were opinionated, demanding, and upwardly mobile. They significantly pressured Clyde regarding major life choices. His Dad offered to pay for med school or law school, but if Clyde wanted grad school in English lit, he was on his own. He became a doctor. And his parents pressed him to marry “the right kind of wife,” who would enhance the fast-track to success. Two artsy and literary college girlfriends didn’t fit the ideal, and came in for strong disapproval after meeting his parents. Corinne does fit the parental ideal.

Clinical case studies tend to major on the negative (particularly negative experiences in the past because of a bias towards personal history determinism). But I
don’t share that bias. Just as past, present, and future all matter, so the positive counts along with the negative. Clyde has been greatly blessed with good fortune. Though he was mocked by some classmates, his wit and gregariousness made him rather popular on the whole, especially with the girls. He also enjoyed many advantages from his family’s relative wealth and status: freedom from poverty and danger, opportunity for a good education, entrée into professional circles, great vacations, freedom from debt, nice cars. He’s intelligent, successful in his career, and lives far above the norm in financial security and privilege. Despite the tensions that thread through his roles as husband and father, he does experience satisfactions and pleasures in relation to his wife and children. He’s not socially isolated (though during his recent troubles he has kept a lot to himself and has felt very alone). Clyde is also a Christian who has known the mercies and goodness of God. He came to Christ his junior year in college, and rapidly broke away from a party lifestyle of drinking and womanizing. He has used his medical skills on a yearly mission team to Haiti that brings great satisfaction.

There’s a quick overview of Clyde’s life situation. What are the patterns that he brings to the table, his manner of life (the biblical anastrophe)? We already know what’s currently playing on the marquee: unpleasant emotions, unsavory behaviors, unhappy relationships, ungluing thoughts. But what broader patterns normally play?

With his mother, Clyde mainly tiptoes and tries not to rile her. That’s been so since childhood. It’s easier to avoid upsetting her than to survive her firestorms.

In relationship to Corinne, in the past Clyde has often enjoyed what’s implied in a “pretty good marriage”: basic commitment, sharing out responsibilities, sexual compatibility, a willingness to move on from conflicts. But on the negative side, he tends to move between appeasement, avoidance, and arguing, in that order of frequency. Recently that order has been reversed. He finds the increase in mutual hostilities, hair-trigger resentments, parallel lives, and secrecy to be quite distressing.

With his children, he can be a genial dad who enjoys play and activities on vacation. On the negative side, he’ll move from general neglect (he’s busy and preoccupied), to buying their favor (when they happen to show up on his radar), to bullying (when they inconvenience him), again in that order of frequency.
His work life evidences yet another tricorner pattern. In general, he’s hard-working, putting in very long hours. He’s earnest to please both patients and superiors, and to prove himself a good doctor. But with subordinates he has a different reputation. Nurses, techs, secretaries and housekeepers feel used. They find him self-absorbed, demanding, nit-picking, impersonal, and uncaring. The third corner is what Clyde does with his down time. He collapses in front of the TV set and eats junk food. Outside the home he gives play to what he calls his “shameful vices.”

Clyde experiences ethics committee meetings as poignantly stressful. His actual behavior is polite silence – justified by being the new kid on the block, still learning the ropes. But, inside that awkward and mute exterior, he has vivid fantasies of messianic confrontation, where he stands up heroically for truth and right, and then is persecuted by the dark force of powers that be. He trudges out of meetings, extremely dissatisfied with himself, and wanting only to slug down a few cold beers to drown his troubles. As mentioned, he’s been feeling overwhelmed, bleak, and confused. In some of the darker moments of brooding, he wonders if his whole life has been a big mistake – school, career, marriage. He fantasizes that he should have gone off and become an English teacher or a rock star. But he sees no way out, and the thought of suicide dangles promises of relief.

I hope that readers feel a bit overwhelmed – and intrigued. Real life does that.

We can’t help if we can’t make sense of what we come to know. The secular psychologies offer their labels and explanations. My favorite DSM-IV category is 309.4: “Adjustment Disorder with mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct.” That fits Clyde to a T. In street talk: “Not Responding Very Well to the Pressures of Life Disorder.” Those shoes fit you and me, too. It’s the metaphor for all of life.

But how do you organize what you’ve come to know? What explains Clyde? If you were pushed into a corner, how would you answer the question “What is his problem?” in 50 words of less?

If God brought him into your life asking for help, where would you start?
What would you aim for, pray for, and discuss?