

**Review of *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture*, by Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert, editors, Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2012, xv + 308pp., hdbk, \$32.99.**

**By Paul Henebury**

This book is a much needed fillip to those of us who try falteringly to help hurting people by pointing them back to Christ and His Word. There are many resources now available to the biblical counselor to guide him or her in their attempts to become better and more effective at what they do, but I know of no resource of case studies to compare with this one. Although the book deals with "Crisis" cases, the principles given out are applicable to every situation.

The book has an introduction, eleven chapters, and conclusion. Each chapter is written by a seasoned biblical counselor. All the contributors consent in pointing to the solutions residing in the Bible and the Christ of the Bible. Much stress is laid upon the giving and sustaining of hope to counselees, and many of the authors say that, unlike the aloofness recommended in secular therapy, the biblical counselor cannot do their ministry aright if they do not openly sympathize with the counselee, or on occasion even share their own struggles to obey God.

The Introduction by Heath Lambert provides a strong foundation in the doctrine of the Sufficiency of Scripture. I was very pleased that this subject was not consigned to a short preface but got full treatment at the head of the case studies (many of the authors subsequently reiterate this central theme). Lambert also takes the opportunity to outline the book's purpose and use.

The first writer up is Laura Hendriksen, writing about a particularly distressing case involving sustained parental abuse. "Mariana" was the product of her grandfather's rape of her mother. She was rejected by her mother and given to her father as a sex object when she was only seven years old (26). Not only did she have to endure the continual sexual abuse of the father, but her troubles were compounded by the mother who hated her and abused her emotionally and physically. One can hardly imagine what it would be like to live with such ongoing wickedness from early childhood into young adulthood. How does Dr. Hendriksen describe her encounters with Mariana? Well, there is no simplistic and sentimental treatment to be found.

Indeed, one of the refreshing things about this book is the way the writers admonish the reader of the need to treat each case with the seriousness it deserves. Hendriksen recalls the failure and harmful effects of psychologists' advice (27f.), including unreliable attempts to evoke "lost" memories (31), and the well-meaning but ill-informed help from friends. Her prolonged counseling eventually, by God's grace, enabled Mariana to overcome the devices and victim-mentality she had developed (and in some cases been encouraged to develop), and which were destroying her and her marriage.

The importance of sound doctrine, of reminding the counselee of what is true about Christ and what is true about them, comes through again and again in this chapter (e.g. 32, 36, 38, 44). It is almost worth the price of the book alone.

Steve Viars writes the next chapter on “Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.” When he drives his car “Brian” will not turn left. Viars relates competent biblical counseling to thorough data-gathering (69), and whole-person ministry (70). He says, “I often start with what is occurring emotionally because that is where people in crisis are living” (71). That is a wise observation. Emotions are not guides to truth, but they are a place to start and move back towards the problem from. Through listening intently Viars discovered that Brian’s bizarre behavior was a kind of self-inflicted punishment to atone for the sin of lust. Not that Brian understood his behavior that way; Viars had to make the connection. Once the sin was uncovered, steps toward repentance could be taken (74, 82).

The next chapter, by Heath Lambert, deals with so-called Postpartum Depression. The most striking thing about this chapter is Lambert’s refusal to say anything which would stigmatize the unfortunate woman who could not feel close attachment to her newborn (104). Lambert points out the importance of prioritizing help (95). The first thing to be arranged, of which the husband was given responsibility, was rest for his wife (“Sarah”).

Dan Wickert, a physician, has a chapter on “Mary” and Paralyzing Fear. He stresses the same themes as the other writers: the importance of listening and of giving hope. I liked the way that Wickert assured the reader that they were not ill-qualified to counsel because they were not medical professionals (115. Cf. Lambert on page 92). Mary had become germophobic and had developed a fear of contracting AIDS. At first her dilemma was not taken seriously enough, and the author has a few admonitions for those who prescribe Bible verses like pain-killers (118. Cf. 138). The chapter goes on to deal with the problem in terms of worldly values (124), and putting feelings before God’s Word (126-129, 131).

The chapter on Anorexia is written by Martha Peace. Once more we get the stress upon listening and information gathering from “Ashley” before counseling proper (144). The perfectionistic tendencies of many young woman who strive to be what society calls “beautiful” are brought out well. These drives are sinful (147, 152 – “her self-image had become her god”). By spending time studying biblical passages and journaling, Ashley’s thought-life was impacted positively. I was impressed that Peace had finally given Ashley A. W. Pink’s *The Attributes of God* to study. As with many of these cases, Ashley was not cured overnight. But understanding and repentance from sinful goals eventually (after 5 months) allowed joy to break in upon her life.

Following on from these case studies are others addressing “Bipolar Disorder,” (Garrett Higbee) “split personality,” (Stuart Scott), addiction (Robert Jones), and hearing voices, etc., (John Babler). Each chapter is valuable. But I will finish the review with a short note on Kevin Carson’s piece on homosexuality.

Carson’s chapter demonstrates sensitivity to this issue which has sadly eluded many Christians (see Carson’s advice on this, 228, 238). In counseling “Jason” he was sure not to make him feel like a moral pariah. Although homosexuality is what the Bible calls a “high-handed sin,” it is sin nonetheless, and

must not be placed in a category apart from other sins (249). Like some of the other writers in the book, Carson had Jason compose a weekly journal to help him track his thoughts and temptations. Not surprisingly in counseling homosexuals, there was a big setback (250-252), but this reversal was turned to the good by the Holy Spirit who is far more patient than we tend to be. Carson epitomizes the right attitude when on page 254 he calls it a privilege to still be working to help Jason.

The work closes with some brief reflections by the two editors centering on the sufficiency of Scripture. This, to my mind, is one of the very best counseling books I have read. The book is a real coup for Broadman & Holman. I highly recommend it!

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