

Presuppositions of Biblical Counseling: What Historical Biblical Counselors Really Believe, by Lou Priolo. Conway, AR: Grace and Truth Books, 2023. 138 pp. \$12.49.

Loneliness: Connecting with God and Others, by Lou Priolo. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2023, 64 pp. \$6.99.

Lou Priolo (1954–2023) recently went to be with the Lord (November 28, 2023). He was counseling pastor at Christ Covenant Church in Atlanta, Georgia, and founder and president of Competent to Counsel International. In addition to writing many books, articles, and other publications, he wrote for the Resources for Biblical Living Series for which he also served as series editor. Lou was a Fellow in the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. He began as a full-time counselor in 1985.

In the first book reviewed, the author tackles presuppositions, which are by definition *a priori*, “what comes first.” Another way of understanding *a priori* is “before knowledge.” We might think of presuppositions as “assumptions.” Crucially, what counselors presuppose will ultimately dictate their philosophy and methodology of counseling. Historical biblical counselors presuppose in general what the Bible teaches. This is how we understand what biblical counseling is: “Biblical counseling is essentially practical theology. It is not a theory of counseling but rather a theology of change (the theology of progressive sanctification—how man is transformed into the image of Christ” (83).

As such, biblical counseling has presuppositions. In this study, the author treats twelve presuppositions (originally postulated by Jay E. Adams) to help readers understand what distinguishes biblical counseling apart from other theories (really, theologies) of counseling. The author’s choice of presuppositions is in order—God is in control; man is responsible; connecting the dots between sin and misery; the Bible and psychology; sickness and sin; loving God and loving neighbor; counseling and regeneration; the Spirit and the Word; principles and practices; expecting results and seeing results; discipline and the local church; calling and equipping (vii).

Conspicuous absence of the definite article in the title reminds us that the author makes no attempt to be comprehensive. This fact speaks to the importance of the book’s message. These are presuppositions the author values as salient, if not crucial. But it includes neither all presuppositions nor necessarily orders them in importance.

To underscore our tendency to change in our presuppositions the author starts out by sharing his story of biblical counseling (ix–x). It is a journey much like many others that moves from broadly defined counseling to a ministry driven by strong biblically based convictions. It is a story about the author’s journey toward the presuppositions he addresses in the book. This alone gives the book signature relevance. We are all on a presuppositional journey in our theology and our methodology.

A good example of our theology of counseling is the first

presupposition, God is in control. This presupposition precludes the others. The author says, “helping people comprehend the sovereignty of God is one of the surest ways to offer people biblical hope” (1). He continues, “the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe could remove the problem from the lives of his children (or kept it from happening in the first place) but often, He chooses not to because He is more interested in glorifying Himself and reproducing His character through their trials” (1–2). This umbrella presupposition reminds us that all presuppositions are not equal in scope or impact.

Returning to the counselor and counselee being transformed into the image of Christ, the author believes that the image of God is in us and is damaged. “Every human being bears the image of God. Yes, that image was very much distorted by the fall, but is still a representation of the Creator and as such should be shown respect” (11). It might be better to argue that although we were created in the image as the biblical text says, the image is untouched by sin for it is God’s image. Our assigned role is to *connect* with God in relationship and *reflect* His image before others. We are damaged and marred by sin; the image is pristine and perfect and will not change.

An example of a methodological presupposition (there are no rigid distinctions) is to connect the dots carefully between sin and misery: “Many counselees fail to connect their sins with the misery that impelled them into your office. It is your job to connect the dots for them.” But in balance, “you must be sure you do not connect dots that shouldn’t be connected” (14). The author continues, “why are they so miserable? It is because the thoughts and intents of their hearts are sinful” (16). “All misery, including most pain, is the result of sin.” But again, in balance, “not “all pain is the result of *our own* sin” (18).

Priolo’s Socratic (question asking) style is inviting. “If all counselors are trying to bring about change, what are they changing their subjects into?” (12). Also, he prioritizes the big questions: “While changing people is one of the goals of Christian counseling it is not the ultimate goal” (12). He says, “the ultimate end of everything the Christian does is the glory of God” (12).

The author’s treatment of counseling and regeneration (presupposition 7) and the Spirit and the Word (presupposition 8) speak clearly to the means of grace for the people of God. This Gospel-driven section is my favorite part of the book for its emphasis on how God has designed true change for our counselees and us. If in reading the book we expect a throwback to the early 70s with the release of Jay Adam’s *Competent to Counsel*, we will probably recognize forty years of deepening thought and refinement.

Lou Priolo has left us a highly useful book based on a lifetime of ministry reflecting on what biblical counseling is and how it should be done. Readers may disagree with the author on this or that point, particularly when he trails off into epistemology in chapter 9, but I believe they will appreciate a passionate challenge from a biblical counselor who has truly lived out his convictions to Christ and Scripture. This reviewer

highly recommends this book as a compelling reminder to think clearly about counseling ministry beginning with our presuppositions.

In the second book reviewed, Priolo expands his earlier treatment, “Why Are You Lonesome Tonight” (P&R, 2012) with the conviction that you cannot solve a problem biblically unless you first diagnose it in biblical terms. This clear and welcome response to a complex problem sets the tone for the book’s importance.

After briefly describing the loneliness epidemic, the author leads us in a self-assessment, a Loneliness Inventory. Assuring us that loneliness is widespread, he proposes a definition of loneliness followed by a challenge to rethink what loneliness means biblically considering that definition. The author summarizes a two-page discussion concisely in a recent interview in a Grace and Truth broadcast: “Loneliness is really a compound emotion that is not experienced exactly alike by every person.... Sometimes people are lonely because they have never been saved from their sin. Consequently, they have not been indwelt by the Holy Spirit and do not have his abiding presence in their lives” (8 April 2023).

The author’s universal diagnosis for loneliness is refreshingly clear: “Loneliness may be the result of not being in or enjoying fellowship with God at all” (10). Without equivocation, our relationship with God is the universal solution to all forms of loneliness. What about our human relationships? God uses these because he “is able to minister to us in our loneliness *through other people* and certainly does so at times. But He also ministers to us in a more immediate, direct, and personal way: *through prayer and the Word*” (13). Our lifeline communication, most critically, our communion is with our heavenly Father. It is our direct line with him.

Following this biblical framework, the remainder of the book focuses on the thirteen causes and the nineteen biblical cures for loneliness. The book’s back matter includes a Reconstructed Thoughts Worksheet with a helpful chart and a template for a loneliness journal that will help readers identify patterns leading to loneliness among other useful insights.

Although loneliness is a common human experience, the author does not trivialize it. Loneliness is a quiet killer. But what if you like being alone and do not feel the need to connect with others? And how do you know you are lonely? The author says, “our goal is not primarily to eliminate the indicators but to treat the infection, whatever and wherever it might be” (8). The author refreshingly rescues loneliness from the stigma of undesirable feelings: “Loneliness is indeed an emotion, but it is an emotion that God created—and, like every other human feeling, it serves a good purpose in our lives” (12).

The tendency toward loneliness may increase with age. As we move into our later years we are increasingly confronted with loss and being alone. Our family members and friends depart this life and leave us feeling left behind. People with disabilities from birth or development due to illnesses, motor vehicle or industrial accidents, experience loneliness far more than the rest of the population. Isolation may be the result of a

functional limitation or a lack of social interaction. Not being able to come to church can be spiritually devastating. People feel like the world moves on and they are left behind. But the book of Job reminds us that we can easily misread our loneliness and God's presence: Job cries out to God feeling alienated and scared. Yes, the comforters are with him; but Job wants God. When God comes to Job in a whirlwind—an answer to Job's prayer—and responds to Job's accusations, he demonstrates that his silence is no indication of his absence. God stands silently with Job through every painful moment. Job has no reason to feel alienated. God was there all the while. God was all Job needed.

Everyone will experience a measure of loneliness in his or her life. But the author argues biblically that the presence and severity of our loneliness is largely a choice. God offers us the means to engage him and to defeat our loneliness. What is more, God will use our loneliness to draw us closer to him. This reviewer highly recommends Lou Priolo's most recent book to all Christians who struggle with loneliness as well as those who would like to help them.

Dave Deuel

Joni and Friends International Ministries, Broadalbin, NY

Gratitude: Why Giving Thanks is the Key to Our Well Being, by Cornelius Plantinga. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2024. 176 pp. \$22.99.

The author, Cornelius Plantinga (PhD, Princeton Theological Seminary) is president emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary. He is the author of many books, including the *Christianity Today* Book Award winner *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be*, *Under the Wings of God: Twenty Biblical Reflections for a Deeper Faith*, and *Morning and Evening Prayers*.

Plantinga tackles the challenge of defining gratitude: "Gratitude is a glad sense of being gifted with something by someone and thus being indebted to the giver." Further, "it's a mixed sense of being blessed by and therefore indebted to a giver, usually accompanied by warm feelings toward that giver" (7). Feeling both warmth as a recipient and gratitude as a debtor capture two related but distinct responses to beneficence.

For Christians, we respond gratefully to God's most incredible blessings. The Apostles' Creed says, in him we have "the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." "You might say that the whole Christian life is a way of trying, however inadequately, to give thanks for these magnificent gifts" (2). For this reason alone, gratitude is "an urgent necessity" (3), a proper response to God we cannot afford to miss.

Are there personal benefits to being grateful? Studies demonstrate that grateful people have higher energy and lower blood pressure. They have less frustration and insomnia. They have more patience and hope. In fact, gratitude is the single best predictor of human well-being (4).