

MOBILIZING CHURCH-BASED COUNSELING

MODELS FOR SUSTAINABLE CHURCH-BASED CARE



Foreword by J.D. Greear

BRAD HAMBRICK

“I’m excited to see a book that addresses ethical issues in church-based counseling with such wisdom and clarity. In addition to outlining a practical and innovative model of counseling, this is exactly the book that churches need to help them think through confidentiality, referrals, documentation, and other ethical concerns that can be tricky to navigate in church settings.”

Esther Smith, Director of Christian Trauma Counseling; author of *A Still and Quiet Mind*

“More and more churches are realizing the need to provide soul care to the people in their congregations. However, most pastors and church leaders are overwhelmed by the mere thought of the task. *Mobilizing Church-Based Counseling* is here to help. Brad Hambrick brings a wealth of insight and knowledge about people, churches, counseling, pastors, and the systems that are needed to bring these things together to offer helpful, biblical, sustainable care through lay counseling ministries. Whether you are looking to start a counseling ministry, seeking wisdom to sustain a struggling counseling ministry, or building on an existing one, *Mobilizing* will help.”

Curtis Solomon, Executive Director, Biblical Counseling Coalition; program coordinator for biblical counseling, Boyce College

“Many churches love the idea of being a place of care, but they are sobered by the possibility of hurting rather than helping. Strong pastoral counseling, lay counseling, and counseling groups truly are difficult to do in an organized and effective way. Brad has done church leaders a real service by offering a realistic template for providing relational ministry wisely and well for the problems of life. Highly recommend.”

Michael Gembola, Director, Blue Ridge Christian Counseling; author of *Anxious about Decisions*

“Many churches recognize the need to provide a faithful counseling ministry but simply do not know how to start or what to do. *Mobilizing Church-Based Counseling* addresses these challenges with wisdom,

guidance, and practical plans for implementation. Thankfully, this book does not advocate a one-size-fits-all approach but provides adaptable models to choose from. Brad Hambrick is both a seminary professor and a local church counselor and is the perfect person to author this much-needed book.”

Daniel L. Akin, President, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“*Mobilizing Church-Based Counseling* is the most practical thing I have ever read. Brad’s years of experience navigating the problems churches face creating structures is pervasively evident. If you want a *sustainable* plan for the most common counseling challenges churches encounter, you couldn’t do better than this book (and you might want to get a dozen copies to share).”

J. Alasdair Groves, Executive Director, CCEF (Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation); coauthor of *Untangling Emotions*

“In *Mobilizing Church-Based Counseling*, Brad comes alongside you and explains exactly what you need to know to start a church-based counseling ministry. He’s anticipated your questions and highlights the information that’s most important for *you*, given your church’s goals and resources. Reading the book is almost like talking with Brad. *Mobilizing* is an easy-to-understand guide that you’ll refer to often.”

Sam Hodges IV, President, Church Initiative (GriefShare and DivorceCare)

MOBILIZING
CHURCH-BASED
COUNSELING
MODELS FOR SUSTAINABLE
CHURCH-BASED CARE

Brad Hambrick



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FOREWORD

Around The Summit Church, we have a handful of sayings we call “plumb lines”—short, pithy statements that help us direct and measure our ministry. Brick masons use plumb lines to build a wall straight and true. Our plumb lines help us build God’s church the same way.

One of my favorite Summit plumb lines is this: “Show your work and let others copy your paper.” No, this isn’t a statement endorsing plagiarism. It captures our desire to do our ministry work with intentionally open hands. What we do in *our* church, for *our* people, in *our* context—and this local context is always paramount—just might be fruitful for other churches and people and contexts.

Multiplication is at the heart of the Great Commission. We are not only supposed to do our work well, but to teach others to do it also—sometimes better than we do it. We are called not only to be successful, but to reproduce. If God prospers you at something, take that extra time to write down the secrets of your success so that others can do it too. Though that might feel at times like a cumbersome process, the benefit it brings to others will more than make up for any inconvenience. Proverbs 12:27 (NIV) says, “The lazy do not roast any game, but the diligent feed on the riches of the hunt.” Making the kill is only half the success of hunting; dress the game and get it into the refrigerator so that others can feast on your success later!

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When I think of people who do this well, at the top of the list is our pastor of counseling, Brad Hambrick. I know few people with the wisdom and insight he possesses. But Brad is also a master at showing his work. Which is precisely what he does here, in *Mobilizing Church-Based Counseling* and *Facilitating Counseling Groups*. He's showing his work, letting your church replicate two highly effective, much-needed ministries.

G4 (support and recovery groups) and Gospel-Centered Marriage (our premarital counseling ministry) are two ministries that have mobilized our members and served the Summit well for over a decade. I cannot imagine the life of The Summit Church without them. Or, maybe more honestly, I don't want to.

I've seen more lives changed as a result of these ministries than I can recount. But it's not the result of Brad's magical hand. It's the result of a gospel-driven process—one that your church can and should learn.

We end every worship service at the Summit with a simple commission: "You are sent." It's a reminder that every member of our church has been sent by God to bring God's healing and hope into the world.

That's my dream for these books, too. We are sending them out into the world to bring God's healing and hope—beginning, perhaps today, with your church.

J. D. Greear

Lead Pastor, The Summit Church, Raleigh-Durham, NC

Preface

HOW TO READ AND IMPLEMENT *MOBILIZING*

In the pages ahead you (the reader) and I (the author) will be taking a journey together. At the same time, you and your church will be exploring the possibility of mobilizing a church-based counseling ministry. This preface is meant to help you synchronize these two journeys. Since starting a counseling ministry is a novel endeavor for most churches, I want to help you and your church's leadership to understand how to avoid three common mistakes that can create frustration on the road ahead.

First, read the entirety of *Mobilizing* before you start trying to implement anything or conversing with your potential first-generation lay leaders. Don't be like me with a new piece of IKEA furniture. I buy it, get excited, start assembling pieces as soon as I open the box, and then, when I get to what I realize is step 7, I discover I misunderstood something. At that point I'm frustrated about the work I need to undo and redo. Please get the complete picture before you start. It is far easier to correct a mistake in assembling a piece of prefabricated furniture than it is to retrieve inaccurate information about your new counseling ministry that is spreading among excited church members because of a too-early, inaccurate conversation.

Second, when you introduce this book to your pastor(s)—ideally after you've finished reading it yourself—recommend that they read

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chapter 19 first. That chapter contains the information most pastors want to know when vetting the potential of launching a counseling ministry. A shared discussion of chapter 19 will demonstrate that you're familiar enough with the content of this book to merit the trust of your pastor and alleviate the most common apprehensions. As we'll discuss in chapters 7 and 8, many prospective counseling ministries have never emerged because of their proponents' inability to navigate concerns of liability, sustainability, and "fit" with other church ministries.

Third, realize that *Mobilizing* goes out of its way to give your church as much freedom as possible in how you implement the two lay counseling ministry models it introduces. This freedom is likely to be simultaneously refreshing and frustrating. If something is important, *Mobilizing* strives to be clear. If something can vary from church to church—based on size, denomination, church doctrine, church polity, leadership preferences, or other factors—it strives to be non-restrictive. As you move toward a launch plan in chapters 16 and 17, you'll learn how to forge a relationship with a local professional counselor to ensure you steward this freedom wisely.

Now, with that bit of guidance under your belt, let's begin!

An Introduction to Church-Based Counseling



Chapter 1

YOU WANT TO DO A GOOD THING: LET'S DO IT WELL!

The fact that you're reading this book means you want to do a very good thing! You want to help hurting people. You want to mobilize your church to be a source of care for its members and community. You want to point people to the hope of Christ amid their hardships.

You want to invite people into a community of care where everyone acknowledges their brokenness (Psalm 34:18) and seeks redemption together (Galatians 3:13). You want to break the stigma of counseling and cultivate a community where it's okay to be a work in process (Hebrews 4:15–16).

You want to make the church a more authentic place. You want to deepen surface-level prayer requests and head-knowledge Bible studies. You want to find out what would happen if we all quit “playing church” and opened ourselves up to the possibility of God changing our personal, emotional, and relational lives. You want your church to be a conduit through which people experience all that God wants to be and do in their lives (Acts 3:20).

These are all good things, and my prayer is that this book will help you bring them about through the ministry models we'll discuss.

You Want to Do a Good Thing: Let's Do It Well!

Because these are all such good things, we are left asking questions. *Why aren't there more church-based counseling models? Why aren't there a litany of ministries churches can adapt and implement to fulfill these good objectives? Why do church leaders often get nervous about starting a counseling ministry when we just want to help people?*

These are important questions, and there are important questions behind these questions. This book is about helping you understand all of them so that you can do the good thing you want to do *with excellence*.

That word *excellence* may move you from excitement to angst as you wonder, *What if I've never done anything like start a counseling ministry before?* That's a healthy concern—it reveals humility—and we'll take this concern seriously. This book assumes that you are a lay volunteer without advanced training in counseling. In the pages ahead, you'll learn how to secure experienced supervision, to honor the information disclosed in this new ministry, and to build a team so that you don't have to carry these responsibilities alone. Ironically, starting this ministry requires the same courage to face uncertainty that participants in your counseling ministry will show when they first reach out for help. Pay attention to the unsettledness you feel; navigating this experience will help you care for others.

With these things in mind, know the underlying premise of this book is this: *the more important something is, the more important it is to do it well and the more dangerous it is to do it sloppily*. Because a counseling ministry will invite people to be vulnerable with the most sensitive parts of their lives, it will—for better or worse—have immense influence. With great influence comes great responsibility.

But doing a lay counseling ministry well doesn't necessarily mean mimicking professional models (i.e., intake forms, case notes, meeting by appointment, creating an individualized treatment plan, etc.). In a local church, it means creating a ministry that fits within a church context and which can be implemented by lay volunteers. In light of this understanding of "good," *Mobilizing* focuses on helping you launch two specific lay counseling ministries: a group-based model

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called G4 and a mentoring model called GCM. We'll define G4 and GCM in chapters 3 through 6, but for now, you need to understand these counseling ministries were designed to have three key features. These features are:

1. *Compatibility with the local church*: G4 and GCM are designed to be led effectively by laypeople in your church and to fit within the rhythms of a leader's schedule and a church's structures.
2. *Wisdom about issues of liability*: G4 and GCM are designed with the informed consent and the ethical consideration needed for a moderately formal, lay-based ministry.
3. *Sustainability for your volunteers*: G4 and GCM are designed with a recognition that the longevity of your mentors and group leaders is essential to an effective lay-based ministry.

In the pages ahead, the significance of these three features will become increasingly clear to you. You will see how these features are woven into almost every facet of G4 and GCM. Being able to highlight these features will bring comfort to your church leadership, potential volunteers, and growing list of community partners. These features reveal that you have more than good intentions; you have a solid plan that allows you to care well for people in difficult situations.

You will also realize that “creating a counseling ministry” is different from “training counselors.” Training helpers is only one part of the process and is *not* the first thing to be done. That's why we will take the following three-tiered approach:

- Section one clarifies *common points of confusion* about church-based counseling.
- Section two provides guidance on the neglected subject of *counseling ethics* in lay-based care models.
- Section three lays out a *launch plan* for G4 and GCM.

Until these things are well understood, it would be unwise to move toward vetting and training potential lay leaders for these

You Want to Do a Good Thing: Let's Do It Well!

ministries. To be ready to care for these leaders, you and your church leadership need to be clear about what you're inviting them to participate in.

If you are ready to take this journey in a way that values quality more than expediency (that is, doing things well more than doing things quickly), this book will be satisfying for you.

Chapter 2

WHO ARE YOU: WHO WAS *MOBILIZING* WRITTEN TO EQUIP?

Who are *you*? My name is Brad. I grew up in Kentucky, currently live in North Carolina, enjoy coaching Little League baseball, and don't take time to go fishing as often as I should. You may have guessed that is not the kind of "Who are you?" information my opening question is trying to elicit.

My question would better be written, Who is the "*you*" that *Mobilizing* is speaking to? What role, at your church, does this book presume you (the reader) are in? The "*you*" in this book is the person who will oversee G4 and/or GCM.

You are probably a layperson because most churches don't have a staff position to oversee these ministries—or at least don't start with one. You are the kind of person who takes the initiative of a first-generation leader; that is, someone who is willing to put in the sweat equity to start a ministry that doesn't currently exist at your church. However, if you are both the first person to read this book at your church and the pastor, the "*you*" is the kind of volunteer you are looking for to champion this ministry in your church.

But don't take this to mean you should be a lone ranger. The accompanying graphic portrays how you'll relate to the pastoral leaders in your church and those you recruit to lead in these ministries. While it conveys whom you report to and who reports to you,

Who Are You: Who Was *Mobilizing* Written to Equip?

it is more than an organizational chart. It visualizes *who* will be involved with you (building a team), *what* each person needs to read (training), and *why* they need to read that resource (each person's role).

As you are getting started, if possible, you want one or more of the pastoral staff at your church to read *Mobilizing* with you and become involved in the ministry development plans. It is important for church leadership to be aware of what kind of ministries G4 and GCM are so that they talk about these ministries accurately, even in the early stages of ministry planning.

To employ a flight metaphor, *Mobilizing* is the book that helps you build a “counseling airport” with the necessary runways, traffic control tower, and communication protocols. If you only have an airport, what's missing? Pilots and passengers. Who are they?

- Pilots—G4 group leaders and GCM mentors
- Passengers—Those being served in these ministries

Mobilizing is the book that helps you build the airport (because, without an airport, pilots, planes, and passengers never get off the ground). As such, *Mobilizing* contains the content you and church leadership need to discuss when launching or expanding G4 and GCM. *Facilitating Counseling Groups*¹ will help you train G4 “pilots,” as will the *Mentor Training Manual* for GCM.² These resources equip and orient lay leaders to their role in G4 or GCM. As you're beginning to see, *Mobilizing* provides a layered model of lay counseling. G4

Who? Church Leadership
What? *Mobilizing*
Why? Understand & Support



Who? *You*
What? *Mobilizing*
Why? Implement & Oversee



Who? G4 and GCM Leaders
What? *Facilitating* for G4 or GCM Mentor Training Manual
Why? Lead Groups & Mentor

1. *Facilitating Counseling Groups: A Leader's Guide for Group-Based Counseling Ministry* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2023).

2. The GCM *Mentor Training Manual* and accompanying mentor training video are available at bradhambrick.com/gcm.

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and GCM are more than friend, less than professional, and different from a pastor. Each of these roles is good—friends, professionals, and pastors—but a church-based counseling ministry differs from each. In the pages ahead, you'll learn why and how to communicate these differences.

While you will likely also lead a G4 group or be a GCM mentor (at least initially), as you read *Mobilizing*, think of yourself as being in the traffic control tower. At this phase of development, you are working with the airport overseers (church leadership) to understand the design and layout of this ministry.

When the preparatory work is done, you will begin vetting and equipping prospective pilots (lay leaders) for their work. As these ministries grow, you'll see G4 and GCM leaders emerge who are passionate about these ministries and can help share your oversight role. They will read *Mobilizing* and begin to help you ensure that G4 and GCM operate with excellence. This lessens the load you carry.

This chapter may feel daunting. In effect, chapter 2 narrated a marathon in the word count of a sprint. It overviewed the full journey of this book. Anytime you look at a whole journey, it has the tendency to feel overwhelming.

You are now ready (maybe past ready) to ask, What are these G4 and GCM ministries that *Mobilizing* is going to teach me to implement at my church? What do they look like? What's their core DNA? How would I tell people what I want to do with what I'm learning?

Chapter 3

WHAT IS G4?

In chapter one, I told you this book would equip your church to launch two specific lay counseling models, G4 and GCM. You know that G4 is a group-based model and GCM is a mentoring ministry. In the next four chapters, I will define and then illustrate each ministry.

WHAT IS G4?

G4 is a group-based counseling ministry that provides a context for participants to invest a season of their lives in overcoming a life-dominating struggle of sin or suffering. Most G4 groups utilize a subject specific curriculum (addiction, depression, eating disorders, grief, trauma, etc.) built around one of two nine-step models of sanctification.

The goal of G4 is to see participants graduate back into the general discipleship ministries of the church, freer from their struggle and with a clearer picture of what it means for believers to support one another as the gospel transforms the most difficult parts of our lives.

WHY THE NAME “G4”?

“G” is for gospel. Too often in counseling groups, our struggle becomes our identity. The longer someone is in a group, the more their identity becomes “addict,” “depressed,” or “divorced.” G4 provides

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the benefit of a place to be known without the detriment of cultivating a struggle-based identity.

We place the “G” at the front of G4 to serve as a reminder that our identity is found not in our struggle but in our Savior—Jesus Christ. Yes, we struggle. Yes, it is freeing to have a place to be honest about that. But, no, our struggles do not define us. Through the gospel God tells us who we are and makes us more and more into the people he created us to be.

The number “4” represents the four types of groups that can be housed within a G4 ministry. Not all counseling groups are the same. If you put one type of group at the forefront of your ministry, it inadvertently communicates a limited scope. For instance, if you label your ministry as a *recovery ministry*, it gives the perception that it only deals with addiction. The name G4 was chosen to prevent the ministry from being identified with any one niche of struggles.

A benign name like G4 also destigmatizes a ministry that might otherwise be hard to talk about. Participants can say, “I’ve got a G4 meeting tonight,” without disclosing more than they intend. A pastor preaching on purity can talk about the G4 groups at church without trying to define sexual addiction. A ministry that depends on word of mouth needs to be easy to talk about, and “G4” is short, simple, and neutral.

Here is a basic definition for each of the four types of groups that can exist within G4:

1. *Recovery Groups* are for addressing destructive, habituated life patterns, such as substance abuse, chemical addiction, or behavioral addictions (e.g., pornography or gambling).
2. *Process Groups* are for decreasing the disruption caused by difficult experiences or “sticky” emotions. They might address trauma or the aftermath of destructive relationships.
3. *Support Groups* are for mutual encouragement as participants persevere through difficult experiences that endure for an indefinite period of time, such as divorce, depression, or grief.
4. *Therapeutic Educational Groups* provide a better understanding of challenges that are often misunderstood and might provide

What Is G4?

a holistic Christian perspective on mental health or identify common challenges for blended families.

A G4 ministry does not need to have a group of each type to be called G4. For instance, if a church only has recovery groups and process groups in its offerings, it would still be called G4.

The types of groups are not as distinct as they initially appear. All groups, to some degree, offer therapeutic education. Every type of group involves processing difficult experiences together. It is not important that every group fit neatly into one of the four types. It is important, however, to be clear about what distinguishes G4 groups from general discipleship ministries of your church.

TWO NINE-STEP MODELS

The gospel offers hope for both sin and suffering—the bad things we do and the painful things we experience. But the gospel speaks to sin and suffering differently; it offers forgiveness and freedom for sin and comfort and hope for suffering. That is why G4 has two nine-step models.

Because every person is both a sinner and a sufferer, we all need both. But our struggles usually fall more into one category than the other. Anger and addiction are predominantly, though not exclusively, responsibility-based struggles (sin). They emanate from our choices and values. You will notice that the phrases “responsibility-based” and “sin-based” are used interchangeably. When G4 uses a sin-based curriculum, it is because the participant bears responsibility for having caused the life struggle. By contrast, grief and trauma are things that happen to us (suffering). In using G4, a leader becomes ambidextrous in discerning and applying the best fit gospel-care for an individual’s most pressing need.

We do not believe there is any magic in these nine-step models of G4. We *do* believe these steps capture the major movements of the gospel, in slow motion, as they are applied with a concentrated focus toward a particular life struggle such as anxiety, purity, or betrayal.

G4's Nine Steps for Sin-Based Struggles¹

Step 1: ADMIT I have a struggle I cannot overcome without God (John 15:5). We should not assume that everyone who comes to group and is frustrated by the consequences of their choices is ready to change. In step 1, G4 seeks to garner a commitment to change and introduces God as central to the work ahead.

Step 2: ACKNOWLEDGE the breadth and impact of my sin. We should not assume that everyone who wants to change is being honest with themselves about how much change is needed (Psalm 36:1–3; James 1:8). In step 2, G4 walks the participant through the process of identifying the pervasiveness and severity of their struggle (Luke 14:28–29).

Step 3: UNDERSTAND the origin, motive, and history of my sin. We are often confused by the question, Why do I keep doing this if I know it's disrupting my life? In step 3, G4 helps participants identify the motives undergirding their sin patterns (Luke 6:45) and introduces a more holistic understanding of what it means to have a fallen human nature (Romans 3:10–18).

Step 4: REPENT TO GOD for how my sin replaced and misrepresented him. Repentance is more than a sense of remorse (2 Corinthians 7:10–11). In step 4, G4 introduces the idea that substantive change begins with embracing the gospel and submitting our lives to the Lordship of Christ (Luke 9:23–26). This step undermines the pride that leads us to resist help and the belief that just trying harder will work this time (Matthew 23:26–28).

Step 5: CONFESS TO THOSE AFFECTED for harm done and seek to make amends. Privacy fuels sin and kills change (Proverbs 28:13). Transparency fuels change and kills sin (James 5:16). In step 5, G4 introduces the idea that God created us to live in community and our sin tempts us to withdraw. Change means we become more honest and authentic, not better at hiding.

1. A video-based teaching of these nine steps is available as a small group study at bradhambrick.com/G4SinModel. This video-based teaching is designed for two purposes. First, it orients new G4 participants to the big picture of their journey. Secondly, it can be used as a small group study in your church after your pastor preaches on an emotionally weighty subject like addiction, sexual purity, or anger to raise awareness for your G4 ministry.

What Is G4?

Step 6: RESTRUCTURE MY LIFE to rely on God's grace and Word to transform my life. Substantive change doesn't happen by accident. It happens with intentionality. In step 6, G4 provides a variety of strategies for change tailored to each curriculum's life struggle (Ephesians 4:20–31). This step provides the practical guidance most people want when they seek counseling.

Step 7: IMPLEMENT the new structure pervasively with humility and flexibility. A famous boxer once said, "Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth." Life never goes according to our plans. Step 7 invites participants to review and revise how they are implementing the strategies from step 6, based on what is and is not effective (Luke 4:13).

Step 8: PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me. Change is like wet cement; it becomes solid over time (Philippians 1:6). Step 8 calls the participant to allow their newfound change to solidify as they begin to make plans to graduate from their G4 group into the discipleship ministries of their church.

Step 9: STEWARD all of my life for God's glory. The Christian life is about more than the absence of particular sins; it is about fulfilling a purpose (Matthew 22:37–40). In step 9, participants are invited to ask, "What does God have for me next?" so that their G4 graduation is an opportunity for the group to commission their friend toward that calling.

Each G4 series curriculum takes one life struggle (e.g., substance abuse, sexual addiction, disordered eating) and goes into detail on each step for that struggle. The curriculum provides assessments, Bible studies, strategies for change, and educational content to help the participant successfully accomplish that step.

Perhaps you've had the opportunity to talk with someone for whom the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous were central in their overcoming addiction. You probably noticed how naturally they began to use the twelve steps as a grid for navigating life. They couldn't help but share the twelve steps as they told their story. Similarly, the goal of the nine gospel-centered steps of G4 is for a clear understanding of the gospel to become the natural grid

Mobilizing Church-Based Counseling

participants use to navigate life and talk about the major changes in their lives.

Before we walk through the nine steps for sufferers, let's admit that, historically, the church has been better at applying the gospel to sin-based struggles than suffering-based struggles. There is a reason for this. We get saved from sin; we don't get saved from suffering (at least not on this side of heaven). So, while it's understandable that we apply the gospel more effectively to sin-based struggles, we should be equally effective in applying it to suffering. With that in mind, let's explore what the gospel offers those who suffer.

G4's Nine Steps for Suffering-Based Struggles²

Step 1: PREPARE yourself physically, emotionally, and spiritually to face your suffering. People reach out for help amid suffering when they are hope-depleted. They are weary and the journey is long (Matthew 11:28, 2 Corinthians 4:16). In step 1, G4 helps the participant identify the pivotal choices that will enable them to persevere through the work ahead.

Step 2: ACKNOWLEDGE the specific history and realness of my suffering. We often minimize and misname our suffering, thinking that will help us overcome it. We tell ourselves, "The abuse wasn't that bad," or, "The car wreck wasn't really traumatic." In step 2, G4 walks the participant through the process of rightly naming their experiences of suffering (Ezekiel 34:1–10).

Step 3: UNDERSTAND the impact of my suffering. Suffering is not just "then and there." It doesn't stay in the past; suffering has an impact on the here and now (Isaiah 42:3). In step 3, G4 helps the participant articulate and gauge the current impact of their suffering.

Step 4: LEARN MY SUFFERING STORY, which I use to make sense of my experience. Yesterday is the preface to today. Past events

2. A video-based teaching of these nine steps is available as a small group study at bradhambrick.com/G4SufferingModel. This video-based teaching is designed for two purposes. First, it orients new G4 participants to the big picture of their step work journey. Second, it can be used as a small group study for your church after your pastor preaches on an emotionally weighty subject like trauma, betrayal, or grief to raise awareness for your G4 ministry.

What Is G4?

shape our present identity. Suffering affects how we tell our stories and understand our lives (Psalm 44:22–26). In step 4, G4 helps participants recognize and articulate the destructive scripts they've taken from their suffering—scripts that often disrupt their lives as much as the original experience of suffering did.

Step 5: MOURN the wrongness of what happened and receive God's comfort. Suffering isn't just hard; it reveals that the world is not as God intended. Suffering is a reason to mourn (Romans 8:22–23). In step 5, G4 invites participants to mourn the hardness of what they learned in steps 2 and 3, without the shame they felt from the false messages revealed in step 4.

Step 6: LEARN MY GOSPEL STORY by which God gives meaning to my experience. Truth doesn't make hard times easy (John 16:33). Truth *does* give meaning to struggles that seem futile (Hebrews 12:2–3). In step 6, G4 helps participants reinterpret the destructive scripts from step 4 in ways that show God's care for them and give meaning to their hardship.

Step 7: IDENTIFY GOALS that allow me to combat the impact of my suffering. Even when we reduce the sense of meaninglessness suffering brings, suffering is still hard (2 Corinthians 1:8–9); it affects other aspects of our lives (Psalm 102:3–11). In step 7, G4 helps participants identify ways to reduce the impacts identified in step 3.

Step 8: PERSEVERE in the new life and identity to which God has called me. This step closely mirrors step 8 in the sin-based curriculum. It is a time for the participant to solidify the change they've experienced and prepare to wisely graduate from G4.

Step 9: STEWARD all of my life for God's glory. This step also mirrors step 9 in the sin-based curriculum. We always want people to graduate from G4 with a sense of anticipation for what God has in store for them in the next season of their lives.

After reading through these two nine-step models, you should be able to see more clearly how the gospel speaks to sin and suffering differently. The Bible is our guide for both, and Jesus's work on the cross to counter the effects of the fall is central. But when someone's struggle is rooted in their beliefs, values, and choices, their curriculum will

be sin-based. When their struggle is rooted in things that have happened to them, they will participate in a suffering-based curriculum.

Although these nine-step models were created to be used in G4 groups, the G4 ministry was also designed to house groups that do not use our standard nine-step curriculums. Many excellent counseling group curriculums have been written by faithful Christian authors. Unfortunately, while churches may have appreciated the content, they often weren't sure where or how these resources fit within their existing ministry offerings. G4 was intentionally designed so that churches would have an intuitive home for these curriculums. How this works is answered in detail in chapter 15 of *Facilitating Counseling Groups*, the sequel to this book.

SEVEN CORE VALUES OF G4

In a large G4 ministry, there are multiple groups, each focused on a different life struggle—yet a unity of purpose runs through all the groups. A consistent culture among G4 groups is maintained by adhering to seven core values. These values undergird all that happens in the counseling ministry and are implemented by leaders of each group. These values are described in greater detail in chapter 4 of *Facilitating*. These values are simply listed here so that you and your church leadership are reminded of the values that guide a G4 ministry:

1. G4 curriculums are Bible-based and gospel-centered.
2. G4 recognizes the difference between sin and suffering.
3. G4 groups are built on honesty and transparency.
4. G4 upholds confidentiality.
5. G4 avoids creating struggle-based identity.
6. G4 blends discipleship, accountability, and a guided process.
7. G4 transitions into the church's discipleship ministries.

Now that we've defined G4, the natural follow-up question is, What does G4 look like? That's what we'll describe in the next chapter. We'll provide this picture in the form of a story, which will help flesh out the framework of G4 that we've outlined in this chapter.