



Grader Training Manual

**Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines
for Phase 2 Exam Graders**

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Spring 2024

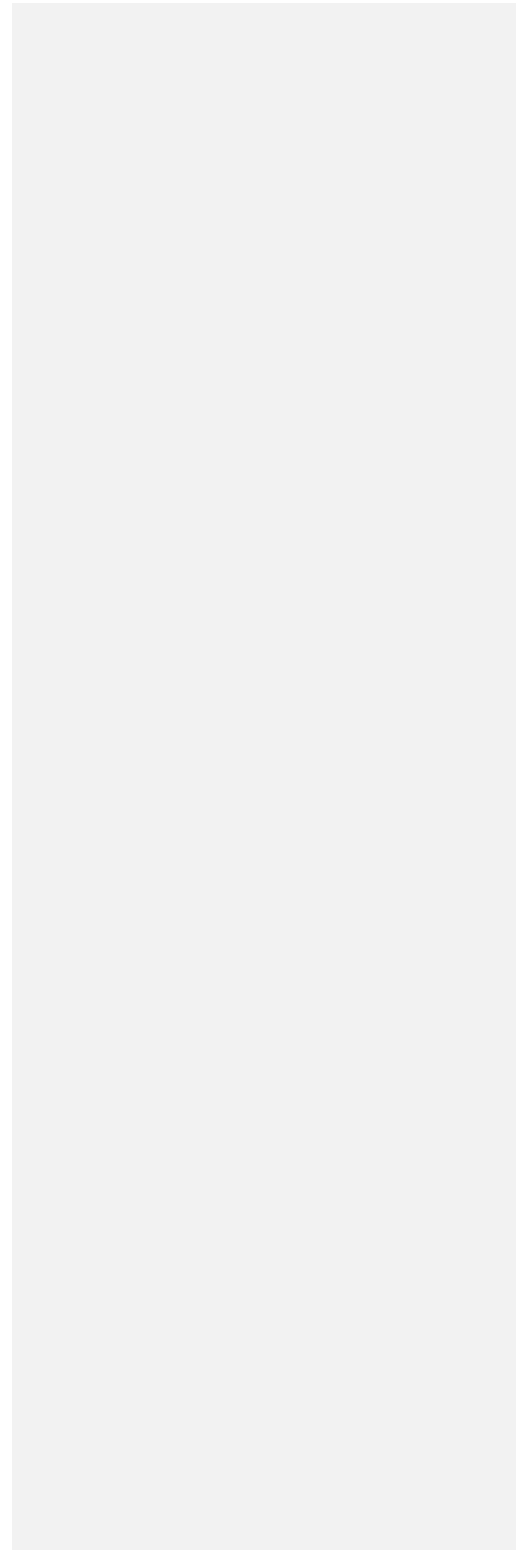


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Section 1 | General Comments¹

A crucial phase in the overall ACBC certification process involves the completion of two short-answer essay exams. This exam phase serves to bridge the gap between theory and practice by testing applicants on both their knowledge of theology as well as their application of that knowledge in counseling scenarios. In keeping with the rigorous ACBC certification process, ACBC graders help us to maintain the integrity of our process by not only providing additional vetting of applicants, but also by providing thorough feedback and evaluation of their answers.

Through this rigorous work, exam graders help provide an essential checkpoint in the process by ensuring that those who complete Phase 2 are adequately prepared for Phase 3 supervision. To summarize, exam grading offers both a rewarding experience and opportunity in developing competent and effective biblical counselors.

This work goes well beyond marking up a paper. Graders should be concerned about the applicant's development as a counselor. Our goal is not simply to assign a grade, but to encourage and disciple the applicant through your comments, feedback, and correspondence. Also, unlike in some settings, grading ACBC exams offers a cycle of interaction that will involve asking applicants to rewrite or revise their exams, re-grading their work looking for progress in their thinking, setting expectations for clarity in their explanation, and seeking growth in their articulation of biblical truths and principles.

I am grateful for your willingness to join us in this important effort. If there is anything our team can do to serve you, please don't hesitate to ask.

In Christ,



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¹ This manual was developed by Gabe Powell in 2021. Credit for this work goes to him and our staff is grateful for his initial work.

Section 2 | The Grader Training Process

All Phase 2 applicants must have their exams reviewed by official graders approved by ACBC. In order to become an approved grader, prospective graders must first read through this manual. Upon affirming that you've read this manual, ACBC will assign you a set of exams to grade under the review and oversight of an experienced grader.² You will be able to access those exams from the Grader Dashboard (which will be made available to you via your ACBC account on the website).

Once you have finished providing feedback and comments to the complete set of exams, your work will then be reviewed by the experienced grader who will, in turn, provide feedback to you. They might explain and suggest changes to how you graded questions, or give you feedback on the comments that you make, or even provide example comments—they will give whatever feedback they deem to be helpful. In the same way that your work on the exam is intended to help the counselor grow, the grader's comments on *your* grading is intended to sharpen *your* grading skills.

Once you receive their feedback, you will need to make changes to your grading as appropriate. **Be sure to delete the supervising grader's comments before finally submitting the graded exams to the applicant.** The applicant should only see comments from you. If you like a comment the supervising grader made, copy the content, and make a duplicate so that it will show your name, not the supervising grader's name.

In some cases, the supervising grader may ask to see the final version before having the exam returned to the applicant. If they suggest further changes, follow the same process in the previous paragraph. Because graders operate with significant autonomy after the training process is complete, it is imperative that each grader learns to follow the principles and guidelines laid out in this manual.

² You should contact our office at certification@biblicalcounseling.com to confirm that you have read through the manual and are ready to enter the process. There may be an initial interview with ACBC staff before being allowed to move through. Once approved, we will grant you access to the Grader Dashboard through your ACBC account.

Section 3 | The Applicant's Perspective

Grading exams is one of the first substantial engagements that we at ACBC have in interacting with an applicant. Up until this point they have taken a class, read books, and observed counseling. But now they are submitting themselves to a thorough theological and methodological evaluation.

Keep in mind, for most applicants, these exams represent the most significant writing they've ever done. For some, their writing of the exams is separated by decades from the last time they wrote papers in school. That doesn't necessarily mean the quality of their writing will be less, but it likely means their *concern* about their writing ability will be higher. They may even be having anxious thoughts as they await the results of your grading. *Did I do enough? Were my answers clear? Did I say the right things? Will I measure up to their standard?*

Most applicants are not accustomed to being graded. They don't usually have people critique their writing or teaching. If you've worked with an editor, you are likely very comfortable with constructive criticism about your writing. Most people aren't. So, our feedback should recognize their sensitivity to critique. We should also recognize that applicants have spent many months, even years in some cases, working on their exams. They've put forth significant effort to produce the 60-90 pages you're about to grade. While grading typically takes between 3-5 hours (depending on the quality of the exams), we should handle their exams with commensurate effort.

In the section below, we will review essential qualities of effective grading. Our hope is that your grading will not only exemplify these qualities, but your personal character and approach to the applicant will as well.

Section 4 | Qualities of Effective Grading

It is vital to remember, that while the applicant is interacting with *you* through the exams, you are serving as the face of ACBC to that applicant. Think of yourself as an ACBC staff—because that is how the applicant sees you. How you interact with them will reflect either positively or poorly on ACBC. Not only that, how you grade can model, in a small but real way, good counseling practice in the way you write comments and interact with the applicant. Key attributes of grading include the following:

1. *Compassion* – While the application will tell you some things about the applicant, sometimes applicants will reveal more about themselves in their exam. Most often we don't know anything about the personal life of this individual, but we do know they have dedicated significant time, energy, and resources to get to this stage for well over a year (in most cases). Many people finish the exam exhausted, having made great sacrifices of time. Especially if an exam warrants significant rewrites, be compassionate toward the individual who has worked hard and potentially overcome various challenges to get here. Below is an example of a compassionate exchange:

Jane, thank you for sharing that example from your life. I can tell the Lord used that difficult trial to mature you in Christ, and I am grateful for how His grace has strengthened you. Always remember 2 Corinthians 1:3-4—the Lord will likely give you opportunities in the future to minister to others out of the lessons you've learned in this trial.

2. *Humility* – As an experienced counselor, you likely know *a lot* more than the applicant in terms of using Scripture and counseling. It is unreasonable to expect applicants to have the same level of competence, always select the right passage, or use your favorite counseling resources. When making corrections and recommendations, even if you need to discourage their use of a particular resource, be sure that your comments lovingly move them forward in their progress without pointing out their ignorance in a way that demeans them. Another key aspect of humility is recognizing that you may misunderstand what they mean by their words. This might be because they were not clear, or because your mind is tired or distracted and you're not analyzing it properly. Either way, when you come across statements that sound like they are affirming error or otherwise don't make sense, be sure to couch your comment with the possibility that you may not be understanding it properly. An example of a

humble exchange can be seen below:

It's possible that I'm not understanding your intended meaning, but this statement sounds like you're affirming something contrary to Scripture. When you revise your answer, please correct or clarify what you mean by this. When you say, "Jesus set His deity aside," do you mean that He was no longer God when He was on earth, or do you mean something else?

3. *Gentleness* – It's not unusual to come across unbiblical, unclear, or otherwise unhelpful statements. Our comments that address such statements should gently point out the issue without tearing down the applicant. Again, we're here to help them grow, not just point out deficiencies. An example of this can be seen below:

When you say that we need to validate Emily's desire to divorce, my understanding of that concept from how it's commonly used in psychology is that we need to effectively justify their emotions or actions, even if they aren't honoring to the Lord. Based on other statements in this answer I can tell that's not what you mean by that term, but that's why it's helpful to use biblical language that won't be confused with secular concepts. Biblically, it is good to acknowledge the difficulty of our counselee's experience and express compassion for their plight in a fallen world (like Jesus did in Matthew 14:14), but if their thoughts, emotions, or actions are dishonoring to the Lord, we need to gently move them toward biblical thinking.

4. *Patience* – It's not unusual for an applicant to have various kinds of problems on their exam (formatting, spelling, etc.). Because those can slow down the grading process, it can be easy to become impatient and make comments that reveal that impatience. It is critical that we bear up with the weaknesses of those who struggle with writing and properly formatting documents.³
5. *Grace* – When making comments, our words should reflect Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt . . ." When we salt our food, we don't just drop a few grains on there—we put enough so that we can taste it. In the same way, short comments—especially incomplete sentences—are to be avoided. Without being verbose, we should explain our

³ Please note that if the exams are not formatted correctly, based upon specifications provided to the applicant by ACBC, then you should return the exams back to the applicant and have them correct formatting before continuing.

thoughts in complete sentences, remembering that the applicant cannot read our minds. In some cases, it's been months since they wrote the words you're commenting on, so they may not understand their own words let alone yours. Be sure to write sufficiently so your words are understood. Good and bad examples are provided below:

Bad example: That's not accurate.

Good example: The way this is worded, this statement does not accurately reflect what this verse is teaching. Consider the words, "...” and how that reveals that . . .

6. *Discernment* – One of your responsibilities as a counselor is to discern what kind of counselee sits in front of you (1 Thess 5:14). While the categories are different, when grading exams, it is helpful to recognize what kind of applicant you are evaluating. Are they older, mature, but not formally educated? Are they a vocational pastor with a theological degree? Are they a younger person who is eager to serve the Lord but lacks life experience? There are many kinds of applicants you will encounter as a grader, and considering who this individual is should factor into your grading. Don't hold a worker-at-home mom to the same standard of writing and clarity as a pastor and hold Level 2 applicants to a higher standard than others. After all, pastors will likely be training future counselors. Their exams must be excellent.
7. *Dedication* – As noted earlier, exams can take as little as three hours (for both exams) or up to five hours, depending on the quality of the exam. Most graders say that the average exam takes three to four hours to grade. Some graders block out the time to grade an exam all at one time, while others devote smaller blocks of time to complete the exam over several days. Whatever approach fits your schedule, be sure that you're able to stick to it. The two factors that determine how many exams you grade are your availability and the number of exams that need to be graded. **Whatever exams you agree to grade, be sure you set aside the time to grade them within four weeks of receiving them.** Don't agree to take on more exams than you can handle.

Section 5 | Grading Overview and Guidelines

When you are ready to be assigned a set of exams, you will be given access to the Grader Dashboard via your account on the ACBC website. The entire back-and-forth of the grading process is housed within this dashboard (outside of any external emails that may be sent between grader and applicant).

Before diving into grading, it is critical to read through the individual's application.⁴ This will help you get to know the applicant in broad strokes. Some key elements that will be helpful to review will be their age, education, training, whether they are in ministry, and their salvation testimony. **If you see something in application that is of concern, please contact the Membership and Certification Coordinator before moving forward.**⁵

It is best practice to grade the Theology exam first. Since theology is the foundation of biblical counseling, knowing the counselor's biblical framework will be helpful to have in your mind as you grade their counseling exam. Also, many of those questions are more straightforward than some of the more subjective questions found in the Counseling exam.

Once you are finished going through the exams, you will upload both exams to the Grader Dashboard, indicating whether it is a "Pass" or "Rewrite." You will also notice a box is available to make general overview comments. Once submitted, the graded exam is sent back to the applicant, and they are notified immediately. While it is possible to submit the Theology exam before grading the Counseling exam (which might be days earlier, depending on your personal grading schedule), it is usually best to upload them together. However, if you personally see a benefit to sending their Theology exam first, that is acceptable.

When rewrites are required, applicants have up to three months to upload their revisions. If you grade consistently, you may have a queue of exams and rewrites to work on. Ensure that you only take on as much as enables you to complete exams and revisions within four weeks. Life circumstances may extend that on occasion, but four weeks is the goal.

⁴ The application will be provided in the same location where you will be able to download their exams and upload their marked exams.

⁵ While the ACBC office conducts an initial review of the applicant in Phase 1, from time to time, there may be something missed by ACBC staff, so your review here (while brief and not expected to be as thorough) could catch an item or two that may prevent an applicant from moving forward. Any questions about this can be sent to certification@biblicalcounseling.com.

Assigning Grades

It is good practice to mark each question with a grade (we have provided examples below in the side margin of this document). Doing this, for the sake of clarity, aids in making sure that the applicant is clear about whether they are supposed to make any changes to a particular question (especially if you've made comments on the answer). All grades, feedback, and comments should be designated by making a comment on the question itself as you see in examples below.⁶

1. Describe the inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture as well as the relationship of each one of these issues to one another.

Commented [GP1]: Pass

You may make additional comments as you deem appropriate and helpful. For example:

9. Explain, using biblical categories, your understanding of the image of God in man.

Commented [GP2]: Rewrite

10. Provide a biblical description of the dichotomist view of mankind. Explain the counseling implications of this doctrine with regard to the inner and outer man.

This is an excellent explanation of the elements you addressed. What is missing is a discussion of how the *imago dei* is affected by the Fall, redemption, and glorification. Please **expand** your answer to address that. This is where the doctrine connects directly to counseling because we are aiming at helping people grow in conformity to Christ's image.

There are only three grades individual questions/exams can receive. They are as follows:

Commented [GP3]: Pass

Pass – A passing grade means that the applicant sufficiently addressed the question(s), providing adequate biblical support. For questions that have multiple parts (such as #1 and #10 above), it is critical that every component is directly and sufficiently addressed. You are encouraged to make comments on their answer, ask questions for them to consider or study further, or even correct minor aspects of their answer. But a Pass means they do not need to make any changes before continuing on in the process.

One significant argument that is often missing in this discussion is how the Scripture prefers the word "heart" above "soul" and "spirit". Heart is equated (by parallelism and by function) to the soul, spirit, and mind, and it is used exponentially more times throughout the OT and NT. For me, that is the most significant argument against the trichotomist position.

Commented [GP4]: Pass

Rewrite – As noted earlier, graders have the opportunity to help counselors learn and grow through the grading process. An exam passes only when all questions on

The content and explanation here are good. One aspect of good teaching/counseling is using the best and clearest passages. Those who are well-taught and have a good grasp of Scripture can use more subtle or round-about explanations, but those who are less mature need simpler, clearer explanation. I say that to point out that you did not reference or cite 2 Timothy 3:16, which along with 2 Peter 1:21, is the clearest passage that teaches the inspiration of Scripture.

That may have been an unintentional oversight, but I'd recommend using it when teaching on this topic.

⁶ In certain circumstances, you may ask the applicant to answer specific questions that you may pose to them by replying to your comment in the thread. This, again, is another way to track progress. Avoid making your grading comments at either the top or bottom of the exam document. It may be convenient for you, but it is inconvenient for the applicant and your future rounds of grading.

that exam receive a passing grade. There is no question on the exam which is unimportant, and thus which can contain error or be inadequate. All answers must meet a minimum standard of accuracy and thoroughness. Therefore, counselors must rewrite each non-passing answer until it receives a passing grade. There are three possible types of rewrites that can be required: *expand*, *revise*, or *rewrite*.

Expand. Often there are answers that are mostly good but need some additional content to be sufficient. This could include adding biblical support for statements, or expanding upon a statement to provide clarity, or even answering a part of the question they forgot to address. In this scenario, the existing answer is being expanded, not replaced.

Revise. Some answers may need clarification and correction of existing content. They may have worded something in an inadequate or confusing way, or they stated something in error. Or perhaps one of the parts of the question was not properly or adequately answered. Revising an answer means they need to change a portion of the answer without writing an entirely new answer.

Rewrite. A rewrite grade means that the answer needs to be replaced with a new answer. The existing answer either does not answer the question, is formatted incorrectly, or is otherwise unable to be modified to a passing condition. For example, questions 13 and 18 of the counseling exam require that the applicant write the answer in the form of a monologue. If they write it in the third person like the rest of the questions, they need to rewrite the answer. Excessive quotations, using outline or bullet point format also requires a rewrite. Sometimes the explanation of an answer is either misguided or tangential to the answer to the degree that the whole answer needs to be rewritten. In some cases, a portion of the answer can be utilized, and you can indicate this to the applicant when possible. Otherwise, the applicant should not use their previous answer as part of the new answer.

Fatal Error – In very rare situations an answer will reveal such significant problems that the applicant cannot continue with the certification process. This may include theological error, inconsistency with ACBC’s doctrinal standards, or a consistent inability to interpret Scripture properly. Another reason may be if the applicant embraces psychological thinking and concepts and hasn’t learned to distinguish between psychology and biblical counseling. As well, the inability to clearly explain truth and concepts is a fatal error. Counselors are teachers, and so

Commented [GP5]: Rewrite

Everything you’ve written here is excellent. However, it was probably just an oversight, but you didn’t address the part of the question that asks about the inner and outer manifestations of anger. Please **expand** your answer by inserting a paragraph after the first paragraph that addresses part of the question.

Commented [GP6]: Rewrite

With the exception of Mark 1:15, your first section does not explain repentance from Scripture. Please **revise** your answer to add more biblical explanation in the first two paragraphs.

Commented [GP7]: Rewrite

You have many good concepts here. However, the format of the answer is to be a monologue—as though you are speaking directly to her (e.g., “Sarah, thank you for being willing talk with me about this...”)

In addition to *what* you would say, in this question we’re wanting to see *how* you would say it directly to her. I know that’s a challenge and writing to a screen likely won’t reflect how you might respond in the moment, but that’s what we’re aiming for.

You can include questions and assume her answers, but this is not a data-gathering question. We’re more interested in the kinds of counsel you would give in response to her question.

Commented [GP8]: Discontinue

John, as we discussed on the phone, your position on this issue is at odds with the ACBC Standards of Doctrine. We recognize that there are faithful believers who can be effective biblical counselors while holding different views on certain issues, but in order to be certified with ACBC you would need to be able to sign the Standards of Doctrine in good conscience. I would encourage you to keep learning and growing in your study of God’s word and faithfully serve him. It’s been a joy to talk with you and serve you in this process.

even if they know the correct truth and principles, if they cannot communicate them with clarity, they should not continue at this time.

A grade of Fatal Error must not be made lightly. The following considerations should be made:

- Ensure that you are judging the theology based on ACBC's Standards of Doctrine, not your own personal views. For example, while the majority of ACBC counselors are cessationist, some expressions of charismatic theology do not violate ACBC's standards.
- Ask yourself if the problems can be addressed by personal study and growth over a period of weeks or months. Does the applicant simply need to study an issue? That should not receive a Fatal Error. Is their needed growth a matter of life maturity and broader biblical understanding that will take many months or years? Or would a change of conviction, if they were willing, require leaving their ministry (e.g., a woman who is an elder)?
- Consider whether the applicant is ready for the supervision stage. Given your concerns, would you feel comfortable having this person counsel someone under supervision at this time? As soon as they pass their exams, they will. Don't pass them if you have legitimate concerns.

If you feel you need to assign this grade, **it is critical that you have a phone call with the applicant before returning the exam to ACBC**. Begin by asking them questions around the issue of your concern. Express your concern and see how they respond to it. Are they firm in their conviction? Do they humbly acknowledge their need to learn and grow? If you are convinced that they should not continue in the process, be prepared to give them action steps they can take if they would like to restart the process in the future. Recommend specific resources or classes they will benefit from. Encourage them to pursue discipleship with a pastor or leader. Remember—our goal is not simply to assign a grade; it is to help the applicant grow in Christ.

After you have spoken with the applicant and confirmed your conviction that a Fatal Error is warranted, write out your concerns on the exam. Then let the ACBC office know about the situation as these exams should not be uploaded to the website.

Receiving a Fatal Error grade will be difficult for the applicant. They may feel like all their effort to this point was wasted. Be sure to encourage them and build them up. Help them see how beneficial this process has been and encourage them toward growth. Thankfully, Fatal Errors are very rare—less than 1% of exams.

Grading the First Attempt

When grading an answer, here are the key elements to look for:

- Ensure each part of the question is answered clearly and directly.** Ideally, each part of the question will be answered in its own paragraph, but if the applicant’s writing skills are limited and they don’t use paragraphs properly, that is ok. However, if answers to the **various parts of the question are interwoven**, they usually aren’t answered as completely as necessary.
- Ensure answers are supported with Scripture.** They must show that they can identify the key passages that teach the things they are saying (especially on the Theology exam). This can be done by teaching from Scripture (e.g., “Ephesians 2:3 tells us that . . .”) or by putting references in parenthesis at the end of a sentence (e.g., “The penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23).”). **Long lists of Bible references at the end of an answer do not suffice.** They must include Scripture throughout the answer showing direct connections.
- Ensure their use of Scripture reflects proper hermeneutics.** Pay attention to the verses they use to ensure they are using Scripture accurately. If you’re not familiar with a reference they cite as support, look it up! **Improper Scriptures here and there can be corrected via comments**, but a consistent pattern of an **inaccurate use of Scripture should require a rewrite with a strong encouragement to be careful in their use of Scripture.** This may also lead to a Discontinue if the applicant is unable to correct this problem.
- Ensure that their answers are specific and clear.** If someone is not able to make ideas clear in writing, they will likely struggle to do it in a conversation. They must demonstrate a clear flow of thought. **Sometimes**

Commented [GP9]: One of the parts of this question asks you to explain the biblical factors that drive depression. You make statements here and there that address it, but there’s no clear paragraph where you address that issue directly and thoroughly. Please revise your answer by writing a paragraph addressing the various biblical factors that drive depression.

Commented [GP10]: This list of passages represents a lot of passages that are relevant, but we’re looking for how you are able to make direct connections between your teaching and Scripture, which means that it’s critical that your biblical support be integrated into your answer. Please revise your answer by inserting throughout your content the passages that support your statements.

Commented [GP11]: While the wording of this passage connects with what you’re saying, the context and meaning of this verse is making a different point than you are. This is a case of a right point from the wrong text. A more applicable passage for this idea is Romans 3:23.

Commented [GP12]: This verse does not seem to be related to this issue. It may be a typo, but if that’s the case, I’m not sure which verse you may have in mind.

answers read like a bullet list formatted into a paragraph—a list of disparate thoughts with no explanation. Look for cogent explanations that are easily understood.

Commented [GP13]: You include a lot of good truths in this paragraph, but you're really just stating them, not explaining them. In the course of your counseling, it's critical that we don't just state truths, but explain them from Scripture.

Common issues to watch out for:

- **Excessive quotations.** Answers should be in the applicant's own words as much as possible. If their answer is insufficient when removing the quotations, then the answer must be rewritten.
- **Short answers.** The exam instructions require answers to be minimum of one page long. There are some questions that could be briefly answered in a half page, but because we're aiming at discerning their ability to explain, all the questions can easily be expanded to at least one page. Very occasional short answers (3/4 pages) are acceptable, but any answer less than 3/4 page must be rewritten or expanded. If many answers are less than a page, they should all be expanded.
- **Long answers.** The exam instructions require answers to be a maximum of 1.5 pages long. While any question can occupy a chapter in a book (if not a whole book!), that is usually because there is a lot of extraneous content to the core issue. There are a couple questions that are difficult to sufficiently answer in 1.5 pages, so occasional answers that reach two pages are acceptable. But any answer more than two pages should be condensed down to about 1.5 pages. You will often be able to help them identify specific areas to condense.

Commented [GP14]: You use some really good resources in this answer. However, note that the exam instructions say that answers need to be in your own words. The purpose of this exam is not just to determine whether you know the truth, but also to discern your ability to explain the truth to a counselee. It's unlikely that you will quote other authors in a counseling session, so for the purpose of this exam, please rewrite this answer in your own words.

Commented [GP15]: There are many cases where brevity and much appreciated. You did a good job of answering this question in nugget form. However, as we're looking to discern a counselor's teaching skill, it's important that each answer is explained in more detail. Please rewrite this question to make it at least one page. If you're not sure what else to add to it, be sure to review some resources that can inform other elements. Of course, utilizing more Scripture will help also.

Commented [GP16]: Overall, you've answered this really well. You've covered a lot of ground and certainly hit the key elements. However, the maximum length for answers is 1.5 pages. Please rewrite this answer, condensing it down to that length. As part of that, keep in mind that this question does not ask you to argue against the trichotomist position, so that section can be removed. When you're explaining the way Scripture uses the different words for the heart, narrow the passages you use to just the key ones that prove the point.

Other considerations:

- Commenting on spelling and grammatical issues is not usually necessary. Occasional mistakes can be ignored. One exception is if there are certain key words that are consistently misspelled (especially words used often in counseling such as "psychology" or biblical/theological terms). If you need to comment on such issues, explain why you are doing so.

Commented [GP17]: The correct spelling is psychology. For the most part I've not been identifying spelling errors, but I wanted to point out this one because it's a term you'll likely be using many times in the future, and you've misspelled it multiple times. Please take note of the correctly spelling.

- Excessive spelling and grammatical mistakes that are a distraction need to be addressed. While the ACBC exams and process are not designed to help people become better writers, we want to make sure that ACBC certified counselors can communicate effectively. Because biblical counseling is a teaching function, good communication is essential. Sometimes the Spelling and Grammar feature is turned off, in which case you can turn it on. When assigning the Rewrite grade for other reasons, have them correct all the spelling and grammatical issues on those questions.
- If the applicant expresses strong convictions that would exclude others within ACBC, remind them about the need to be both charitable and accepting of those with different convictions.
- When the counselor **misrepresents opposing views**, or is **ungracious in their words**, address those issues as appropriate.
- It is always appropriate to suggest resources that will help the applicant grow. This can include **resources that will help them answer the question**, as well as resources they can use for **personal growth later**. Many applicants have read only the minimum pages required, and thus have very limited awareness of the wealth of resources available.

Using/Citing External Sources

On occasion you will encounter those who do not use external resources properly. You may discover that they **include quotations without citing the source**. You may even discover that they **quote sources without indicating they are using a source** (which is effectively plagiarism). Before concluding the applicant has sinful motives, contact the applicant to discuss the issue and identify their mindset. In past situations, those pursuing ACBC certification are not intentionally plagiarizing—they are just unaware of how to properly use and cite sources. When this is the case, provide instruction on quoting and citing, and have them rewrite any and all questions where this issue is suspected.

How will you know if the applicant is quoting sources if they don't use quotation marks? Often you will be able to discern a difference in writing style between the

Commented [GP18]: When writing about opposing views, it's important that we represent them accurately such that they would agree with our summation of their view. In this case, Christian egalitarians would not go as far as secular egalitarians in their rejection of gender.

Commented [GP19]: While I agree with your overall rejection of the egalitarian viewpoint, it's still important for us to be gracious in our words. When you say that pride is driving their interpretation, that is making a judgment about heart motivations that we cannot make without speaking to a specific person and drawing out their heart. We can disagree with the positions other people hold, but let's be gracious in our speech and not make improper judgments (John 7:24).

Commented [GP20]: As you work on rewriting this answer, I would suggest listening to this seminar on homework. It may be similar to what you had in your Fundamentals class, but it will help shape the assignments you give to Erik: <https://www.thebcd.org/resources/providing-instruction-and-giving-homework>.

Commented [GP21]: I always recommend that counselors listen to this series of messages on forgiveness by Milton Vincent. It won't really alter your answer here, but it will be a great encouragement to you, and aid you in your counseling: <https://www.graceky.org/sermons/series/milton-vincent-evangelizing-those-who-wrong-you/>.

Commented [GP22]: I see that you're quoting a source here. Which resources does this quote come from? It's important in any writing to cite one's source for quotations. For example, Jay Adam's says, ". . .". Or, ". . ." (Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, p. 5)

Commented [GP23]: This definition is a direct quote from Wayne Grudem. I'm glad you're familiar with his definition, but it is critically important to identify when you are using someone else's words verbatim. Be sure to put any quotes from sources within quotation marks.

applicant's normal way of writing and particularly well-worded sentences. One way to validate your suspicion is to copy a portion of the sentence into Google and search it with quotation marks (so Google searches for the quote, not just the individual words). If you're not already familiar with popular definitions and quotations, over time you will learn to recognize common sources such as Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology*.

Providing Overall/Final Comments

When you're done grading an exam, you may want to make a comment at the top of the exam providing an overview of your thoughts, suggestions, and listing the specific questions you want them to work on. [Here is an example](#). Regardless of whether you do this or not, you must upload the exam to the Grader Dashboard and include an overview comment to the Comments section which is provided in the Dashboard for you.

Grading Revisions

When the application uploads their revisions, you will receive an email notifying you it is available for download. When grading the revisions and rewrites, be sure that they sufficiently address your concerns. Do not allow them to pass with insufficient answers just because you may feel bad that the process is taking longer. If they express discouragement, encourage them!

If you come across a new concern in an answer that you didn't pick up on before (on a question that is being revised/rewritten), it's ok to ask them to address it. When assigning the grade for the second and subsequent attempts, don't delete your existing comments, but [reply to the original comment](#) to maintain the trail of grading.

Receiving Payment

Applicants pay an exam fee which is reserved for paying the grader. ACBC sends graders one check per month based on the number of exam sets completed during each calendar month. Because the revision cycle usually takes several months, ACBC pays graders after they have completed the first round.

Commented [GP24]: Greetings,

Thank you for the significant effort you've put forth in completing such a monumental task. I trust that the process was edifying, instructive, and sanctifying.

I was greatly encouraged reading through your exams. You have a good understanding of theology and biblical counseling principles and practice.

Throughout your exams I made comments of various kinds, but perhaps the ones you'll wonder about the most are the questions I ask. If an answer receives a Pass, consider the questions as opportunities to consider the matter in your own mind. If an answer receives a Rewrite grade, consider my questions as guides for what to address.

Each question has received a grade, and there are a few questions I'd like you to revisit before moving on the phase 3. I've made detailed comments on these questions that will guide in your revisions, so please take careful note of those comments. If you have any questions along the way, please don't hesitate to contact me and I'll be glad to walk you through what I'm expecting.

On questions that receive a Rewrite grade, pay careful attention to what I'm asking. If I ask you to **expand** or **revise** a question, you can simply make any necessary changes to the existing answer. But if I ask you to rewrite an answer, please write a new answer starting at the end of the current answer (some portions of the first answer may be reused if appropriate).

Questions that received a Rewrite grade: 2, 5, 7, 17.

Grace and peace,
Gabriel

Commented [GP25]: Revise

Please revise this answer following the instructions in the comments below.

Commented [GP26R25]: Revise

While your revisions have certainly improved your answer, some of my comments did not get addressed. Please review those below and revise your answer further.

Commented [GP27R25]: Pass

Thank you! These revisions fully addressed my comments and have strengthened the answer, making it much clearer.

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ACBC keeps track of completed exams through the Grader Portal. At the beginning of each month, the Member and Certification Coordinator reviews which exam sets were completed the previous month and calculates your payment. If you finish the theology exam on March 31st, and then complete the counseling exam on April 1st, that exam will be considered part of your April sets to be paid in May.

To process the payment, the Member and Certification Coordinator will send an email to you with the amount to be paid and the names of the applicants who are included in the payment. You can verify that with your records.

While ACBC keeps track of the exams you grade, it is important for you to keep your own records for verification. On rare occasions an exam may be missed one month or double-counted between two months. One simple way of keeping your own record is to have an Excel document with columns for Name and Date Uploaded (and any additional information you desire to keep).

Section 6 | Exam Formatting and Instructions

The formatting instructions below are available to every applicant. They are reproduced below for your convenience. Please become familiar with them.

- The exam must be written in the ACBC applicant's own words. They are *not* permitted to copy and paste from counseling and theological sources. Sources may be quoted sparingly, but ALL sources must be cited. If an exam is found to quote sources without citing them, this will be considered plagiarism, and the exams will be returned, and they will need to be completely rewritten before ACBC will consider receiving them.
- The exams should be in two separate Word documents: One for the theology exam and one for the counselor's exam. The exams are open-book essay style. ACBC Applicants name is to be on each exam.
- You should use 1.5 spacing (paragraphs should be indented. Do not insert extra lines before and after paragraphs), 12 point, Times Roman font, and standard 1 inch margins. Please start each question on a new page.
- The exam questions should be numbered and the questions written out exactly as they are on the exams. This would include the headings on the theology exam.⁷
- Each answer should be 1 to 1 ½ pages per numbered question. Please write your answers as though you are explaining them to a counselee (when applicable), defining all terms clearly and precisely, with scriptural support for your answer. Exams with answers consistently shorter than requested will be returned with an email asking you to review your work. Please start each question on a new page.
- Footnotes—You should document the sources used when answering your questions. Formal numbered footnotes are not required. Items that are not documented after a quotation should be noted at the end of the question. You

⁷ Applicants are prompted and expected to use the ACBC Exam templates provided to them in their certification dashboard once they are approved to enter Phase 2.

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can start your footnote one space after the end of your answer. You should include the author, name of book, and pages used. Example: Jay Adams, Competent to Counsel, pages 125-135.

- Exams are graded on a pass, rewrite, or fatal error basis. If you are required to submit a rewrite, your grader will give input to help you deepen your understanding of the topic. He will be available for further discussion, when necessary. You will have three months to submit your rewrites from the date your graded exams are emailed to you.
- Exams requiring significant revisions have the potential to postpone the certification process until further study and growth can be demonstrated. This will be at the discretion of the ACBC office.

Section 7 | Grading Guidance on Common Issues

Answers to exam questions must accomplish two separate, yet compatible, efforts. First, they must represent the actual beliefs and understanding of the applicant. We do not want applicants to just tell us what we want to hear, we want to be able to gauge their own theological commitments and depths of knowledge and competency to determine if they meet the requirements set forth by ACBC to move forward to the next phase of the process.

Secondly, answers must meet ACBC doctrinal and methodological standards. As an accrediting organization, it is our organization's prerogative and mission to set forth standards for meeting core competencies and to ensure doctrinal agreement across the board for all of our certified members. This is not an easy task as ACBC membership is represented by a wide variety of Christian churches, denominations, and theological commitments.

In most of the exam questions, determining if an answer meets the doctrinal or methodological standard is quite straightforward; however, for a select few, discernment and good follow-up questions must be applied to determine if the standard has been met. Below is a list of topics from both exams that often required this type of concentrated engagement from graders. Each of these is accompanied with what ACBC is looking for in a passable answer.⁸

Grading Guidelines on Revelation, Guidance, and Miraculous Gifts

This answer is typically associated with Questions #3, #4, and #22 of the Theology Exam. The Board of Trustees has approved a statement on [Revelation, Guidance, and Miraculous Gifts](#) and has provided the following guidelines for grading this issue:

- Because approaches that encourage guidance or revelation from sources other than, or in addition to, the Bible cannot be objectively verified by Scripture, applicants who hold to them are to be rejected.

⁸ What is provided here should be considered guidelines. Graders should ultimately utilize the Standards of Doctrine and Conduct as the rubric for determining if answers are passable or not.

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- One such erroneous approach has to do with receiving additional revelation from God that elucidates, or in some cases even transcends, the guidance that we receive from the Bible.
- Another approach that denies that the Christian is receiving additional revelation from God but suggests that believers can be assisted in their understanding and application of the Bible through prophetic utterances and impressions from the Lord, is also unacceptable.
- Moreover, teaching that guidance may be obtained through hunches, inner sensations, and spiritual experiences or by any means other than through objective, biblical revelation may hinder or disqualify applicants from pursuing certification.
- Because claims to forms of revelation outside the completed canon of the Bible invite confusion and breed a growing distrust of the truth of God's divinely revealed written Word, ACBC cannot approve those who espouse them for certification.
- ACBC, as an organization, does not hold to an official cessationist position as it relates to miraculous gifts; however, any support of a continuationist position that allows for ongoing revelation (even if it is articulated as allowed only if it agrees with Scripture) should be rejected.

Grading Guidelines on Dichotomy vs. Trichotomy

This answer is associated with Question #10 of the Theology Exam. While the question intends to set up a biblical support for a dichotomist position, this may not be as obvious to the applicant and, at times, some have provided support for either a trichotomist position (and in rare occasions) even a monist position. While Phase 1 reviews are intended to filter out applicants who hold to errant positions, at times, these might be missed, so it is important for graders to pay close attention to this answer and keep the following in mind:

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- Claims in support for a monist position are incompatible with scriptural teachings on the clear differentiation between the outer man and the inner man and contradict ACBC standards that appeal to the scriptural distinction between the physical and spiritual in man. ACBC cannot approve those who espouse this position for certification.
- Additionally, answers that appeal to trichotomy, while not as evidently denied as a monist position is in Scripture, should also be rejected as it is the accepted integrationist perspective and has implications for soul care that are not consistent with ACBC standards. Responses to such answers should be winsome and seek to expose to the applicant the many historical and methodological issues with trichotomy as well as clear biblical support for dichotomy.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 | Sample Answers

4. Define general revelation and special revelation and describe the nature of their authority as well as their relationship to one another.

General revelation is God's disclosure of Himself to the entire human race in the things God has made. (Psalm 19:1-6) It is revelation about God, His character NOT general truth about science for example or what a neurologist knows about the brain or a psychologist knows about how humanGrads' function.

Special revelation is God's disclosure of Himself, who He is, to His people in the pages of the Bible; not to everyone, just to His chosen people. It shows us details about God's character and teaches us how we are to live a life that glorifies and honors Him. (2 Tim 3:16, 2 Peter 1:3-4)

General revelation shows us God's amazing power and beauty in creation which is evidence to all people that there is a God. The world displays an obvious existence of a good God therefore we are without excuse if we reject Him. (Romans 1:18-23) Secondly, God has made humans in His image (Genesis 1:26) and inside of us we have a sense of right and wrong, a conscience, an awareness of guilt. (Romans 2:15, 13:5) The unsaved suppress the truth about God in general revelation because they do not want to be accountable to Him. Because of this rejection, God's wrath is upon them by giving them over to their sin, who sin more and more (Romans 1:24-32) and eventually face forever wrath and judgment in hell. (Romans 2:5)

General revelation helps us to understand that there is a God and we all have fallen short of His standard and therefore we are in great need.

Both general and special revelation are from God, His revelation. General revelation tells us we have a saving need but special revelation tells us how to come to Christ and to grow in Him. Though both are authoritative, we need the superior authority of the Scriptures to teach us who we are, who God is, what

Commented [GP28]: Pass

[Observations: While this answer is short and could be expanded, there are distinct paragraphs that directly address each part of the question. Both general and special revelation are clearly defined. Because of the thoroughness of most of the other answers by this individual, I did not ask them to expand this one.

You might also note the incorrect placement of Scripture references (after the period, not before). Since this was the pattern in their entire exam, I made a comment about it on the first question to explain where to properly place parenthetical references).

Christ has done through the work of the cross and how we can live in a reconciled relationship with God. “General revelation requires special revelation to be properly understood and applied.”⁹ They are equal in authority but different in content.

8. Explain each of the following attributes of God describing the practical implications of each attribute for life and counseling: wrath, mercy, holiness, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence.

The attributes of God are all those distinct characteristics or qualities of God that are not separated from God’s very essence.

The attribute of wrath is defined as His anger toward and punishment of wickedness. (Romans 1:18, 2:5) Most people are not fond of this attribute of God but God’s desire to punish evil is a very good thing. God’s love and devotion to Himself motivates His wrath upon sin and He is the only One who knows how to avenge perfectly. His wrath is right and necessary. Romans 12:17-19 speaks of God’s wrath and his vengeance upon sin; He says it is His to do and He will do it. **This is very comforting to a counselee who has been repeatedly sexually assaulted as a child.** They are set free knowing the promise that God will punish the wrong done to him (Nahum 1:2-3) and they no longer need to carry bitterness or anger towards the abuser but can live peaceably.

The attribute of mercy is God’s goodness and kindness to people who need His help, those in distress. (2 Samuel 24:14) In time of need, we can draw near to God’s throne to receive His mercy (Hebrews 4:16) People do not come to a biblical counselor unless they need help (Matthew 9:27) therefore how comforting to share with the counselee how God loves to help His people and show His mercy

Commented [GP29]: Pass

Outstanding answer! One of the best I’ve seen.

[Observations: While this answer is longer than the maximum, this particular question is difficult to properly answer in 1.5 pages. Sometimes counselors will combine omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence in one condensed paragraph. Do not allow that as that inevitably leads to an insufficient answer.]

Commented [GP30]: Good application.

⁹ Lambert, Heath “A Theology of Biblical Counseling” Page 334.

to us in our time of need. (Psalm 103:8) His mercy and comfort are rich in abundance through our unity with Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Every counselee will be encouraged by the mercy of God as He comforts them in serious hardships.

The attribute of holiness says that God is completely separated from sin, devoted to seeking His own honor. (Isaiah 6:1-5) This is good news and necessary because if God was more devoted to something else, He would be an idolater. God must be devoted to Himself, the only and highest object of worship. We see this characteristic of God in the tabernacle where God dwelled in the most holy place, separated from evil and sin and in a place of full devotion to His service. (Exodus 26:33) God teaches us that our love and devotion must be to Him firstly before we can rightly love others. Our greatest need is to be holy, to be set apart from sin and devoted to God. My counsel should help people grow in their devotion to God, to become like Jesus Christ. A mother who is more devoted to her children, making them idols in her life therefore causing stress in her marriage needs to be counseled to place God as center, to glorify and please Him first, rightly aligning herself in God's will for her holiness as He is holy. (Leviticus 19:2)

The attribute of omnipotence declares that God is able to do anything that is consistent with His character. (Ephesians 1:11) God has infinite power. (Job 26:14) His power cannot go against His desires as God; He always does what is best (for example, God cannot lie Titus 1:2) God does what He pleases, and never grows weary and all things are possible with God. (Psalm 115:3, Isaiah 40:28, Revelation 3:7, Matthew 19:26) God's power is a work in us His people therefore we are strengthened by His power. (Ephesians 3:16-17) Isaiah 40: 29-31 continues to speak about the Lord giving power to the faint, increasing and renewing their strength, giving them a supernatural ability to run and not be weary. For a counselee struggling in a loveless, broken marriage, this attribute gives great hope

Commented [GP31]: Good insight!

that with God all things are possible and to persevere in His power as they work towards reconciliation.

The attribute of omniscience states that God has full knowledge of everything. (Psalm 139:1-6, Hebrews 4:13, 1 John 3:20) He knows every event, piece of information, complete knowledge past present and future. God knows us perfectly, more than we even know ourselves. Because God has no limitations in knowledge about a counselee, it gives me great comfort that God is able to help and care for the counselee through His Word and the power and presence of His Holy Spirit. He knows them intimately and with perfect knowledge. (Isaiah 49:15-16, Job 37:16) As a counselor who has limited knowledge, this is a wonderful truth for me as I trust the One who knows all things about my counselee and will be able to direct my counsel in God's Word to bring the hope and help they need. It gives me confidence in God's ability to care for the counselee. It humbles me and quiets my soul to hope in God in the counseling room. (Psalm 131)

The attribute of omnipresence says that there is no place that we cannot go that God is not present. (Psalm 139:7-12) God cannot be contained, He is fully present in all places, in past, present and future whether we sense or feel His presence or not. (Jeremiah 23:23-24) We can't trust our perceptions of God's nearness because even though we cannot see Him, He is just as real and present as the person standing next to us. This produces a serious and wonderful truth. God witnesses all, including our sin. (Psalm 51:4) Because of this, every sin we commit is first a sin against God. This knowledge that God sees all and is present with us reminds the counselee struggling with sin that he cannot hide his actions from God. This can become a helpful deterrent to the counselee when they are tempted to sin, for example tempted to view pornography or cheat on his taxes. On the other hand, a counselee struggling with fear or loneliness can be assured and comforted that a strong, perfectly good God will always be with us. (Psalm 23: 4)

5. Provide a biblical definition of depression. Describe manifestations of depression in both the inner and outer man. Explain the biblical factors that drive depression. Detail several biblical strategies to respond to depression.

Depression can be a physical problem that is able to be determined objectively through medical treatment, but people also use the term to refer to negative feelings that are subjectively experienced. In the latter sense of the term, depression can be defined as a emotions-based response to situations often leading to a downward spiral of more intense emotions and responses. In Scripture, we see Cain and Elijah demonstrating a depressed mindset. Genesis 4:1-14 tells us how Cain's disobedience to God's instructions about offerings, and his subsequent willful rejection of God's warning about sin, led to a defiant, angry, and depressed mindset. 1 Kings 19 records how quickly Elijah forgot God's power and providence and how he became afraid, even to the point of despairing. These individuals allowed their emotions to control their actions, which in both cases led to more willful sin.

Like anger, depression first shows up in the inner man before the outer man. First, a person experiences strong feelings that they perceive to be indications of reality. These feelings are real to the person and we must not skip over that if we are counseling them. Second, because the person believes what they are feeling is real, they make choices according to those feelings, even allowing their feelings to dictate what they do and believing it ought to be that way. In the biblical worldview, what we feel is subjective but what we do is objective. That is, our actions can be observed and measured. These actions often demonstrate that the person who feels depressed values these feelings more than what God says is true and real.

Multiple factors both lead to and intensify depression in people. The first factor is using depressing feelings to justify certain types of behavior regardless of what

Commented [GP32]: Rewrite

Please see my comments below for what specifically needs to be rewritten.

Commented [GP33]: In this section you didn't state any specific manifestations in the inner and outer man. Please rewrite this section to provide lists of common manifestations of depression in the inner and outer man.

God says about those types of behavior because again, someone who is depressed often thinks their feelings should determine how they act and they can't escape those feelings. Then the intensifying nature of always doing things according to what you feel becomes a factor. For example, if a person focuses on how depressed they feel and fails to carry out every day responsibilities, they are likely to feel even more depressed. This downward spiral will only get worse if the depressed feelings are given total sway over decision making, and the person will feel trapped in their sin because they think they have to change how they feel before they can change their actions.

Like anger or other issues, the first and primary biblical strategy when responding to depression is to change how one thinks, starting with confession as needed (1 John 1:9). The counselor must encourage the counselee to consider Romans 12:1-2, Ephesians 4:22-24, and other similar passages because of how they describe God's goal to transform us first through renewing our minds so that we think the way God does about all of reality, including, but not limited to, the relationship between feelings and actions. Counselees must come to believe that certain feelings often reflect lies that have taken hold of their thinking and that these lies must be replaced with truth. Counselors must help counselees see and encourage them to believe the truth about their thoughts and feelings. And, because in the case of depression so many of the feelings that are dealt with are negative, counselors should help counselees find things to be thankful for (Hebrews 13:15-16).

As a counselee learns to replace lies with truth in their thinking, they must also learn to change their actions so that they obey regardless of their feelings at any particular time (James 1:22). In other words, they must learn that oftentimes faith looks like doing what's right despite how we feel. This could look like making and following a schedule with accountability for daily household and family tasks,

Commented [GP34]: Note that the first factor begins with depressing feelings. What we're looking for in this answer is what gives rise to those depressing feelings to begin with, and then what exacerbates them. So we're looking for what is going on in the heart that causes one to interpret life in such a way that depression is the result.

Be sure to use Scripture as you rewrite this paragraph.

Commented [GP35]: While everything here is true, we're looking for content that is specific to depression. It's not necessary to explain the process of change in this answer, except when applying it very specifically to the driving factors of depression.

After rewriting the biblical factors that drive depression, rewrite this paragraph to explain strategies to address those heart issues.

Commented [GP36]: This last paragraph is good and important.

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showing up to work on time, showing up to church, etc. Pleasing God by doing what they know is right must become the primary goal as opposed to feeling better before embarking on obedience (2 Corinthians 5:9; 1 Corinthians 10:31).