

CrossTalk

✖ By Michael R. Emlet | New Growth Press | softcover | 212 pages | \$

After working as a family physician for 12 years, Dr. Michael Emlet sensed God calling him into full-time ministry. His desire to offer spiritual counseling and pastoral care to people compelled him to pursue a Master of Divinity degree, and he is now a counselor and faculty member of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation.

Emlet understands Christians encounter real problems and that there isn't always a specific verse for every modern-day hardship. His first book, CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet, offers Christians a guide for applying Scripture to everyday life.

He recently answered questions and shared more about his new book.

CrossTalk focuses on the intersection between Scripture and real life. Why did you write it?

Michael Emlet: I wrote this book because I need it! As a biblical counselor who also trains other counselors, my daily challenge is to bring the good news of God's redemption to my counselees' lives—and to help others do the same. We need to keep asking how the Bible addresses the complexities of our personal lives (or another's life), but there aren't many places to turn for help. I need a resource to help me bridge the gap between then (when Scripture was written) and now (when I or others are struggling with life issues).

So was *CrossTalk* written just for professional counselors?

Emlet: No, this book is for all people actively engaged in personal ministry—counselor, pastor, discipler, spiritual mentor, small-group leader, campus-ministry worker, youth leader, crisis-pregnancy worker or intentional friend. For those involved in a more public ministry of the Word, such as preaching or teaching, I believe the book will sharpen their approach to Scripture and to people. For those in one-on-one ministry, this book will help them meaningfully connect Scripture with a particular person's life. But whatever the sphere of influence, *CrossTalk* helps readers grow in ministry wisdom and in the ability to apply the Bible meaningfully to their own lives.

You use the word “story” quite often to describe both Scripture and your approach to counseling. Why?

Emlet: Any attempts at ministering God's Word that do not fundamentally connect the good news of the Redeemer Jesus Christ with the details, themes and plotlines of people's lives will miss the mark. I take the narrative nature of the Bible seriously in order to make wise connections with the narratives of our lives. Understanding both the story of God and the stories of the people we serve is necessary to help others embrace the transformation the Bible envisions for God's people

What do you mean by the phrase, “Take two verses and call me in the morning”?

Emlet: This is the approach we *don't* want to take when using the Bible in ministry to others. Such an approach trivializes both Scripture and people. We need to guard against “cutting” a few familiar verses from the Bible and “pasting” them onto the complexities of people's lives.

Where in Scripture do you turn to address anorexia and bulimia? Or the challenge of infertility? What about a person

diagnosed with bipolar disorder or obsessive-compulsive disorder? If you think you know a passage that quickly captures any one of these issues fully, I would almost guarantee that your hearer will find it superficial or irrelevant. And if the Bible becomes functionally irrelevant to the hearer, he or she will turn elsewhere for guidance on thorny questions and issues.

CrossTalk helps people avoid superficial biblical “prescriptions.” Instead, it helps anyone engaged in personal, “one-anothering” ministry to connect the realities of life with the rich details of God’s unfolding story of redemption.

Some readers may be eager to jump ahead in *CrossTalk* to review the case studies you provide in the second half. Is that a practical plan?

Emlet: Without the foundation of the first half of the book (learning to read Scripture and read people), understanding the second half of the book may be a bit confounding. The case studies are provided to show how Scripture’s overarching story can be applied to individual lives and situations. It’s important to apply the full story of the gospel to the full story of the individual.

So how do you apply ancient Scripture to the full breadth of modern-life issues?

Emlet: Although the Bible does not give an exhaustive, step-by-step approach to modern problems unforeseen by the biblical writers, it does provide a comprehensive view of people and problems. It treats sin and suffering in such profound and multifaceted ways that no struggle, no matter how complex, stands outside the gospel light it sheds. It is wisdom that unravels the knots of 21st century living.

The first few chapters of *CrossTalk* focus on what the Bible is

and is not. Why?

Emlet: We need to understand that the Bible is not a list of do's and don'ts, not a list of timeless principles for the problems of life, and not a casebook of characters to avoid or imitate; nor is it a system of doctrines. It is primarily the story of God, who pursues the restoration of His creation at the cost of His own life. I spend several chapters addressing this fundamental concept so that we can have richer ministry by applying Scriptures widely and deeply—and we can avoid slapping a “tried and true” verse onto a complex life situation.

You state that reading and understanding the Bible is only half the equation. What's the other half?

Emlet: We also need to learn to “read” people wisely. We need to carefully listen for the patterns that emerge from the details of their lives. They will give clues about how to bring the life-giving gospel to them. Listening to how people make sense of the details of their lives gives a sense of the overarching story or stories that guide their daily existence. I advocate that we listen to their stories to understand their experiences as saints, sufferers and sinners.

So, once we've become familiar with God's story and the individual's story, what is the end goal?

Emlet: The goal of reading Scripture and reading people together is to help others increasingly reflect the character and kingdom priorities of Jesus Christ. The goal of connecting Scripture with life is nothing less than changed lives, a changed community and a changed world.

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