

The Use of Biblical Counseling in the Treatment of Irritable Bowel Syndrome

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## Abstract

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It brings on pain. Quality of life can be severely affected. Yet, the doctor cannot find anything wrong. This is Irritable Bowel Syndrome. IBS, as it is frequently called, is a functional bowel disorder affecting anywhere between 10 -20% of the U.S. population. It is characterized by abdominal pain associated with either diarrhea or constipation or a mixture of both. Though the cause of IBS is unknown, research and practice have shown emotional stress plays an active role in triggering symptoms or worsening them. Common secular answers that address the emotional component of IBS include psychotherapies such as hypnosis, cognitive behavior therapy, behavior modification, progressive relaxation techniques, and others. Tricyclic antidepressants are also sometimes used for both the pain and the depression that may accompany this condition. All these treatments focus on the relief of emotional symptoms without addressing the root cause of these emotions. Some of the emotions that trigger or worsen IBS include anxiety, fear, depression, and anger. The Bible explains that these emotions are often sinful. They may have a deeper cause stemming from the intentions of the heart (Mark 7:20-23). This paper encourages the biblical counselor to go beyond simply controlling the various emotions associated with IBS. It is important for the biblical counselor to recognize that the physical symptoms behind IBS may well be influenced by heart issues that can be addressed using the precepts and principles found in the Scriptures.

## I. Introduction

### A. Purpose Statement

1. The objective of this thesis is to encourage the biblical counselor to consider applying biblical principles and precepts in the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). IBS is a common condition in the general population of countries throughout many parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, it may be considered an issue affecting many believers within the church worldwide. Emotional stress is a major factor in triggering and worsening the physical symptoms of IBS.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, this thesis may be used by the church and biblical counselors to assist in identifying the spiritual components contributing to IBS in a counselee.
2. The secular world has identified IBS as having a strong psychosocial component that contributes to the clinical presentation.<sup>4</sup> There is frequent success at suppressing symptoms when supplementing treatment with psychotherapies.<sup>5</sup> Through the suppression of symptoms only, an opportunity may be missed in the Christian to address deeper heart issues manifesting themselves in emotional triggering the symptoms.

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<sup>1</sup> American Gastroenterological Association Clinical Practice Committee, "AGA Technical Review on Irritable Bowel Syndrome," *Gastroenterology* 123, no. 6 (December 2002): 2108-2131.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> American Gastroenterological Association Clinical Practice Committee, "American Gastroenterological Association Medical Position Statement: Irritable Bowel Syndrome," *Gastroenterology* 123, 6 (December 2002): 2105-2107.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> American Gastroenterological Association, 2002: 2108-2131.

3. In a similar way, the secular world can be pragmatic in its approach when treating IBS. The AGA, for instance, suggests using diet considerations, medication, and if these are not helping, proceeding to psychotherapy. According to secular leaders in the field of IBS, a “biopsychosocial model” is a superior way to address this syndrome.<sup>6</sup> The emphasis is on including the psychosocial component as well.
4. The knowledge that IBS is strongly associated with emotional stressors informs the biblical counselor to look closely for these stressors. Stressors may include anxiety, worry, anger, lust, coveting, and other deeds of the flesh. Behind these stressors lie idols of the heart (Mark 7:20-23, James 1:13-16, Matt. 5:33, 28, 6:1). Paul also equates the coveting attitude behind these deeds of the flesh to idolatry (Col 3:5). Idolatry is worship paid to created object. This creation could be physical or in the mind. It is an act of unfaithfulness to the true God of the Bible.
5. The secular research identifies other major life issues as putting people at a higher risk for IBS. Some of these issues include physical abuse, sexual abuse, death in the family, divorce, other psychiatric disorders, and maladaptive coping.<sup>7</sup> These are issues God desires His word to address and, through His word, to bring restoration to His child.
6. IBS is a condition that reminds the believer of the fact the spirit and body interact and affect one another. Unrepentant sin can affect the body. David describes this in Psalm 32:3-4. His body wasted away. He experienced the heaviness of God’s hand on him. His vitality was drained away. In Isaiah 13:7-8 in fear and terror: hearts

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<sup>6</sup> Drossman and Ruddy, *Gut Feelings*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> American Gastroenterological Association, 2002: 2105-2107.

melt, pains and anguish seize the sinner, and they writhe like a woman in labor.

The biblical counselor may need to exhort the counselee, who is in sin, of the possibility his discomforts are a fruit of sin in his life.

#### B. Intended Audience and Scope

1. The intended audiences are biblical counselors, Christian health care providers, and members of the church. Those in the church would include those who may know someone with IBS or have IBS themselves, and who are desiring to help manage it by using the precepts and principles found in the Scriptures. It will encourage the counselor and counselee to recognize that the triggering of IBS, or the worsening of IBS conditions, may be related to hidden heart issues that need addressed.
2. The biblical counselor is in a position to address the psychosocial stress. Nearly all authors who write literature on IBS concur that the component of psychosocial stress is a major trigger.

#### C. Definitions of Terminology

1. Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is a gastrointestinal (GI) disorder defined as recurrent abdominal pain. It occurs at least one day per week for the last three months with two or more of the following findings. It is related to defecation, and is associated with a change in frequency of the stool. Lastly, it can be associated with a change in form (appearance) of the stool.<sup>8</sup> Though the exact cause of IBS is unknown, experts in the field have identified 3 main factors that affect symptoms. First, there exists a gut reactivity that is responding to intestinal environmental

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<sup>8</sup> Arnold Wald, "Treatment of Irritable Bowel Syndrome in Adults," UpToDate (July 15, 2020), <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/treatment-of-irritable-bowel-syndrome-in-adults?>

changes (meals, gut distention, inflammation, bacterial factors). The brain sending signals to the gut may also be included. These can be triggered by what has been identified as psychosocial stress. This environment change results in constipation, diarrhea, or both. A second factor that affects the symptoms is the gut may have enhanced visceral perception and pain. This can be influenced by inflammation of intestines, problems with intestinal immune function, and gut flora, and various food.<sup>9</sup> Experts also suggest a dysregulation of the brain-gut axis. This is possibly associated with a greater stress reaction and an altered perception as well as change of the gut signals to the brain.<sup>10</sup>

2. Gastrointestinal tract (GI) tract is known as the digestive tract. This extends from the mouth through the end of the large intestine. There are also 3 solid organs. These include the liver, the pancreas, and the gallbladder.<sup>11</sup>
3. Peristalsis is a movement of organ walls in the GI tract. This moves food and liquid through the GI tract and mixes the contents from each organ.<sup>12</sup>
4. Functional gastrointestinal disorders: These occur as a result of *abnormal functioning* of the GI tract.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Douglas Drossman and Johannah Ruddy, J. *Gut Feelings, Disorders of the Gut-Brain Interaction and the Patient- Doctor Relationship: A guide for patients and doctors*. Chapel Hill, NC: DrossmanCare, 2021. 19.

<sup>10</sup>American Gastroenterological Association, 2002: 2105-2107.

<sup>11</sup> “Your Digestive System and How it Works,” National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, Health Information, Digestive Diseases accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/digestive-system-how-it-works>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Christine Dalton, “Ask the Expert, Question: What is a Functional GI Disorder?” UNC Center for functional GI and Motility Disorders, accessed February 10, 2022, <https://www.med.unc.edu/ibs/wp-content/uploads/sites/450/2017/10/What-Is-Functional-GI.pdf>.

5. Brain-gut axis refers to the nerve and hormone communication between the central nervous system and the gastrointestinal tract.<sup>14</sup> The brain sends signals to the gut and the gut sends signals to the brain. Drossman says, “Calm the brain, and you calm the gut, calm the gut, and you calm the brain.”<sup>15</sup>

#### D. Research Methodology

All the research was done through medical journals, books, internet searches, and personal communications.

#### E. Limitations and Scope

It is very important the counselee has had a thorough physical with his health care provider and an accompanying diagnosis of IBS. The biblical counselor is to search and care for the soul issues in the counselee, relating to this disorder. It would also be reasonable for the biblical counselor to consider encouraging good dietary habits which may have an additional positive influence on this disorder.

## II. Defining the Problem

IBS is a condition found throughout the world. A lack of writing on it in the biblical counseling field suggests the spiritual component related to the emotional triggers may not be well recognized in the church.

#### A. An unrecognized opportunity

1. Though the cause of IBS is unknown, there are three conditions associated with the syndrome which need to have been present for at least 3 months and to occur at

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<sup>14</sup> Sarah Ballou, Alyse Bedell, and Laurie Keefer, “Psychosocial Impact of Irritable Bowel Syndrome: A Brief Review,” *World Journal of Gastrointestinal Pathophysiology* 6, no. 4 (November 15, 2015): 120-123.

<sup>15</sup> Drossman and Ruddy, *Gut Feelings*, 18.

least weekly. The first condition deals with the motility of the bowels. Depending on the motility transit time, meaning a prolonged time or short time, the type of IBS will be constipation IBS, diarrhea IBS, or a combination. The second condition is hypersensitive sensory nerves in the GI tract.<sup>16</sup> The third component is the condition biblical counseling may be able to directly address. This is the emotional component that is associated with triggering or exacerbating symptoms.<sup>17</sup>

2. Managing emotions is an expectation of the Christian (Tit. 1:8, 2 Pet. 1:6). He is to put off the old self and put on the new self (Eph. 4:17-24). He is to walk in the peace of God by dwelling on those things that are honorable and true (Phil. 4:8-9). The issue of emotions is complex. Here it should be remembered there is an interaction of many of the elements of man's life which contribute to emotions.
3. A well demonstrated relationship exists between the brain and the GI system known as the brain-gut axis which is affected by the emotions. Conversely, what is happening in the gut may affect the emotions.
4. This is a condition that may be affecting the quality of life in several respects. IBS is associated with increased health care costs. It is also considered the second most popular cause for work absenteeism.<sup>18</sup> In addition, IBS symptoms can also be very embarrassing.

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<sup>16</sup> Arnold Wald, "Pathophysiology of Irritable Bowel Syndrome," UpToDate (September 3, 2020), <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/pathophysiology-of-irritable-bowel-syndrome?>

<sup>17</sup> Bolen, Barbara, *Breaking the Bonds of Irritable Bowel Syndrome: A Psychological Approach to Regaining Control of Your Life*, (Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2000), 24.

<sup>18</sup> Arnold Wald, "Clinical Manifestations and Diagnosis of Irritable Bowel Syndrome in Adults," UpToDate (February 24, 2021), <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/clinical-manifestations-and-diagnosis-of-irritable-bowel-syndrome-in>.

## B. The incidence of IBS in the church

1. There are no studies of IBS in the church. However, the percentage may well reflect that of IBS in the general population: 10-15%.<sup>19</sup> In addition, IBS occurs throughout the world in countries such as the US, Europe, Australia/ New Zealand, and Southeast Asian countries.<sup>20 21</sup>
2. This is a condition affecting woman more than men. The general age at first presentation is 30-50 years old.<sup>22</sup>
3. The medical treatment of IBS can affect a person's budget.

## C. The symptoms of IBS

1. The symptoms that accompany IBS may sound strictly physical: constipation, diarrhea, bloating, and abdominal pain. Much of the time, these physical symptoms are either triggered or exacerbated by emotion upset. This upset of emotions causes signals to be sent to the gut from the brain which then activates the cramping and pain that often accompany IBS.
2. The symptoms of bloating, cramping, and pain in the gut may also increase the anxiety, fear, anger, or other emotions of the person with IBS. This worsening of emotions has the effect of sending signals to the gut which worsen the symptoms.

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<sup>19</sup> Wald, "Clinical Manifestations and Diagnosis of Irritable Bowel Syndrome in Adults," UpToDate.

<sup>20</sup> Mark Pimentel et al.. "Report From the Multinational Irritable Bowel Syndrome Initiative 2012," *Gastroenterology* 144, Issue 7 (June 1, 2013): e1-e5.

<sup>21</sup> American Gastroenterological Association Clinical Practice Committee. "AGA Technical Review on Irritable Bowel Syndrome," *Gastroenterology* 123, no. 6 (December 2002): 2108-2131.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

This can become a vicious cycle. Biblical counseling can work with the counselee to deal with these emotions to break this cycle.

3. There are many psychotherapies which are promoted because they may relax the mind or help control emotions such as anxiety, fear, and anger. These therapies are aimed at eliminating or reducing the symptoms. Some of these therapies include psychodynamic therapies, progressive relaxation, biofeedback, hypnosis, and cognitive-behavioral treatment.<sup>23</sup> Though there may be some positive results of symptom reduction of IBS, these therapies do not address the root cause of what may be, in actuality, sinful emotions. The Scriptures do have the answers. Through the power of the Spirit of God, these sinful desires can be put off and godly worship, followed by its good fruit, can be put on.
4. Sin can be manifested in conditions of the body. IBS is an example to consider when looking at heart issues associated with a physical malady.<sup>24</sup>

### III. Research on Irritable Bowel Syndrome

#### A. Research

1. In the 1800s, there was a collection of symptoms of abdominal pain, diarrhea, Nausea, and vomiting that appeared functional in nature. These symptoms developed into a general description called motility disorders. In 1978, a number of experts gathered together and came to a consensus on the group of symptoms used to diagnose IBS. It has continued to develop since then into what is described

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<sup>23</sup> Brenda Toner et al., *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Irritable Bowel Syndrome: The Brain-Gut Connection*, (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2000), 11-13.

<sup>24</sup> Rome Foundation, "Rome IV Diagnostic Criteria for FGIDs," Rome Criteria Appendix A, (January 16, 2016), <https://theromefoundation.org/rome-iv/rome-iv-criteria/>.

today.<sup>25</sup>

2. The Rome Foundation is one of the most well-known organizations studying and educating people today about IBS. Its mission is to, “improve the lives of people with disorders of gut brain interaction.”<sup>26</sup> They developed the Rome IV classification system used by many professionals to diagnose IBS.
3. The Rome foundation includes a group of professionals labelled the “Rome GastroPsych” group. It is a group, “dedicated to increasing the visibility of brain-gut psychotherapies and supporting professionals who provide them...”<sup>27</sup> This demonstrates the strong association between the physical and the mental connection of IBS.
4. The Rome IV diagnostic criteria for IBS:  
 Recurrent abdominal pain on the average of at least 1 day per week in the last 3 months, associated with two or more of the following criteria (Symptoms need to have started 6 months ago):
  - a. Related to defecation.
  - b. Associated with a change in frequency of stool
  - c. Associated with a change in form (appearance) of stool.<sup>28</sup>
5. There are 3 interrelated factors that affect the symptoms of IBS.

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<sup>25</sup> Douglas Drossman and Johannah Ruddy, J. *Gut Feelings, Disorders of the Gut-Brain Interaction and the Patient- Doctor Relationship: A guide for patients and doctors*, Chapel Hill, NC: DrossmanCare, 2021. 7-11.

<sup>26</sup> Rome Foundation, “Our mission is to improve the lives of people with Disorders of Gut-Brain Interaction”, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://theromefoundation.org/>.

<sup>27</sup> Purpose statement of the Rome Foundation GastroPsych, accessed March 5, 2022 <https://theromefoundation.org/rome-gi-psych-committee/>.

<sup>28</sup> Rome Foundation, “Rome IV Diagnostic”, (January 16, 2016).

- a. Altered gut reactivity (motility, secretions) in response to gut stimulation (food, gas, inflammation) or a provoking emotional stress.
  - b. Hypersensitive gut with increased perception of pain
  - c. A dysregulation of the brain-gut axis (connection) possibly associated with a greater stress-reaction and an altered perception of incoming nerve signals to the brain.<sup>29</sup>
6. The gate control theory of pain may help explain how the mind affects the gut. Pain signals are sent from the gut to the brain. The brain can send a signal to the “gate” instructing it to close, thus blocking the pain. It can send a signal also for the “gate” to open allowing pain signals to come through to the brain.<sup>30</sup> The “dysregulation” that may take place is when emotional factors influence this process. Emotional distress is thought to lower the pain threshold.<sup>31</sup>
7. A thorough medical history and physical examination should be done by the counselee’s medical provider or a gastroenterologist. Alarm features requiring further study include that describe something other than IBS:
- a. Onset after age 50 years old
  - b. Rectal bleeding or black stool
  - c. Nighttime diarrhea
  - d. Worsening abdominal pain

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<sup>29</sup> American Gastroenterological Association Clinical Practice Committee, “American Gastroenterological Association Medical Position Statement: Irritable Bowel Syndrome,” *Gastroenterology* 123, 6 (December 2002):2105-2107.

<sup>30</sup> Ronald Melzack and Patrick Wall, “Pain Mechanisms: A New Theory,” *Science* 150, 3699 (November 19, 1965): 971-979.

<sup>31</sup> Dossman and Ruddy, *Gut Feeling*, 63-65.

- e. Abnormal lab findings
  - f. Family history of inflammatory bowel disease or colorectal cancer.<sup>32</sup>
8. IBS is one of many other GI disorders of the gut-brain interaction. These include esophageal disorders, gastroduodenal disorders, centrally mediated disorders of gastrointestinal pain, and gallbladder and sphincter of Oddi disorders.<sup>33</sup>
  9. This illness does not increase the risk for malignancy, it is a chronic disease.<sup>34</sup>
  10. Medical management of IBS may include medications aimed at moderating the gut. If a symptom includes constipation, fiber or laxatives may be prescribed. There are also other more advanced medications that target secretions. If the major symptom is diarrhea, anti-diarrhea agents may be prescribed. For abdominal pain and bloating antispasmodics may be used. Included with these are medications that decrease spasms.<sup>35</sup> With mild symptoms, this may be all that is needed.
  11. Medical management escalates as the symptoms worsen marked by increased frequency and the impact on quality of life. Antidepressants which affect mood but also have some analgesic effects are included in these. Tricyclic antidepressants are one class of medications included in these. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors have shown inconsistent results.<sup>36</sup>
  12. Psychological management of emotions includes several modalities. These approaches are aimed at the emotions that trigger or exacerbate the IBS. Some

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<sup>32</sup> Wald, "Clinical Manifestations and Diagnosis".

<sup>33</sup> Drossman, *Gut Feelings*, 24-27.

<sup>34</sup> Wald, "Treatment of Irritable Bowel Syndrome?"

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

authors believe stress to be the greatest of all IBS culprits.<sup>37</sup> In addition, they may also be employed when risk factors are present such as past abuse.<sup>38</sup>

13. Some of the various modes of managing the emotions include the following. The ancient practice of yoga has been shown to promote relaxation. Another ancient practice is tai chi which is used to promote relaxation and stress management.<sup>39</sup> There are also psychotherapies that are used. In addition, methods of relaxation have included such as strategies as biofeedback and progressive muscle relaxation.<sup>40</sup> There are psychodynamic therapies. Many providers have favored cognitive behavior therapy.
14. There has been some writing on irritable bowel syndrome in the biblical counseling field. Douglas Dickerson, MD understood the connection of IBS with stress and anxieties. In his 1980 article he specifically highlights biblical counseling as a mode of treatment to treat the anxieties and stresses of the Christian patient who is suffering with IBS.<sup>41</sup> Bob Smith, MD wrote in 1982 about IBS. He also identifies it by other names such as colonic neuritis and intestinal neurosis. The symptoms were those identified today with IBS. He observed that many normal problems, frustrations, and worries of daily life were triggers. Symptom control should not be

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<sup>37</sup> Laura O'Hara, *The Irritable Bowel Syndrome Source Book*, New York, NY: Contemporary Books, 2001, 39.

<sup>38</sup> Drossman, *Gut Feelings*, 129.

<sup>39</sup> O'hara, *The Irritable Bowel*, 89-90.

<sup>40</sup> Brenda Toner et al., *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment of Irritable Bowel Syndrome*: 9-10.

<sup>41</sup> Douglas Dickinson, "Chronic Diarrhea," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice*, 4, no. 2 (1980): 33-35.

the primary goal, he said. A Christian must respond to the triggers in a manner consistent with the Bible's teaching.<sup>42</sup>

## B. Biblical Exegesis

The Bible contains examples of mind-body interactions. The emotions are shown to have a direct effect upon parts of the body.

1. For instance, in Psalm 32:3, while wallowing in his guilt, David shares how his bones wasted away. His bones physically felt as if they were being consumed or worn out as he writhed in his great emotional upset. "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long." (ESV) This groaning was not a silent, passive moan. The word Hebrew word (*saga*) can mean roaring. The KJV translates it roaring. It is a human in great distress. And the noise went on all day long!<sup>43</sup>
2. General pain can be caused by dread or fear. Deut. 2:25 describes the physical reaction to the fear and dread Israel's enemies would experience. "...the people's everywhere under the heavens, who, when they hear the report of you, will tremble and be in anguish because of you." (NASB) The Hebrew word for anguish (*chiyl*) is associated with writhing in pain or to travail in pain, even to suffer torment.<sup>44</sup> It is especially associated with

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<sup>42</sup> Bob Smith, "Irritable Bowel Syndrome," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* Volume 5 Number 3 (1982): 47-56.

<sup>43</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 980.

<sup>44</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

the pain experienced while in childbirth.<sup>45</sup> Nahum 2:10 reveals men in Nineveh experiencing general body anguish as they look on in dread to the judgment that is befalling them. The Hebrew word (halhala) includes physical pain associated with trembling and fear. "... Hearts are melting and knees knocking! Also, anguish is in the whole body and all their faces are pale!" (NASB)

3. Emotional stress may cause direct gut pain and discomfort. And this pain is not outside a description that might fit into IBS. Job 15:20 uses the word in association with the practice of wickedness. The man who practices wickedness, "writhe in pain all his days." Here, there is the Hebrew word, chiyl, again. It is associated especially with the pain of childbirth. This pain is not a passing pain, the pain is present all his days. Isaiah 13:4 prophesies the physical pain resulting from the great terror the Babylonians will cause as they invade. "They will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor..." (NASB) The actual physical, gut pain from emotions is not new. It was observed and recorded even in the oldest book of the Bible, Job.

#### IV. Biblical and Theological Considerations in Counseling Someone with IBS

##### A. A biblical anthropology

When speaking of man, the Bible uses at least five common parts: body, soul, spirit, heart, and conscience. Each of these terms are used in a variety of ways throughout the Scripture. There is the physical (body), yet it is unified frequently

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<sup>45</sup> James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary*, 37.

with the soul and spirit (Deut. 6:46). The heart is also included in this command of Moses as part of man. The heart is the seat where thoughts and deeds flow from (Is. 32:6, Mark 7:20-23). Christ in Mark 12:30 treats them also as being part of the one person. It is best to consider it as a complex unity. It is conditional however, since death causes the separation of the body and the spirit (soul) (Eccl. 12:6-7).<sup>46</sup>

#### B. Biblical answers to address emotions associated with IBS

The compassion of Christ is to be remembered when counseling these souls. Many times, they will have experienced an extended journey which has included rejection and frustration on both the counselee's part and the part of the provider. They may have been labelled. Perhaps the counselee was told their pains were all in the head. There may even be fear and anger related to the lack of progress and answers.

##### 1. Examples of the causes of emotional upset

- a. Many times, *anxiety* is a fear that perceived needs or desires will not be met. This is a result of not trusting God to meet these needs. In Matt. 6:25-34 Christ exhorts the crowd to consider God the Provider who cares for lowly sparrows and clothes lowly plants. He certainly cares for them. Man should be focus on seeking God and His ways, not on worrying about his needs. This anxiety or concern is not the measured anxiety which one Christian may have for another. An example of this is seen in Phil. 2:28 in Paul's concern for the Philippians.

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<sup>46</sup> John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 416-424.

- b. Anxiety can be a result of a prideful spirit. Peter teaches his reader in 1 Pet 5:6-9 that anxiety is related to pride. He exhorts his readers to humble themselves. Humble is the Greek word *tapeinoo*. It means to lower oneself, decrease in size, to abase oneself.<sup>47</sup> The Christian is to cast all their anxieties upon Him. The pride of a Christian lies and says, I am the master of my own destiny. The deceptive heart says it is up to the Christian themselves to meet their needs. But contrary to the deception, Peter teaches in v 7, it is God who cares, and He cares for *them*.
- c. Some heart idols that can lead to anxiety include fear of man, unwanted circumstances, losing something or someone dear, harm, desire for approval, ease of life, money, health, safety, and life without pain.<sup>48</sup>
- d. *Anger* may be the result of not having what another possesses. It may also result from the inability to obtain something that is coveted (James 4:1-2). Paul labels this as idolatry (Col 3:5). James goes on to describe anger as spiritual adultery. Robert Jones says in his definition of anger, that it includes a whole-person response of a negative moral judgment against a perceived evil.<sup>49</sup>
- e. Examples of heart idols leading to anger are freedom from pressure, privacy, hold and express personal opinions, be respected or appreciated, have friends,

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<sup>47</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1757.

<sup>48</sup> John Street, "Problems and Procedures: Counseling Fear and Anxiety" (lecture, The Master's University, Santa Clarita, July 23, 2020).

<sup>49</sup> Robert Jones, *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 15.

be loved, plan my future, raise children who obey, respect, and to be appreciated.<sup>50</sup>

2. Biblical guidance to change ungodly emotions
  - a. First recognize the anxiety, fear, anger, or depression are symptoms of idols of the heart. Ezekiel reveals idols of the heart cause a person to stumble into iniquity (Ezekiel 14:4). Paul teaches covetousness is the same as idolatry (Col. 3:5). Christ, in Mark, 7:20-23 instructs that all the evil things listed originate from the heart.
  - b. Paul exhorts the Christian to put off the deeds of the former life (Eph 4:22). Repentance is needed to get right with God. Ezekiel rebukes Israel in their idolatry telling them to repent and turn their faces away from their abominations (Ezekiel 14:6). James, further in 4:8-9, pleads with the sinner telling them to cleanse their hands and purify their hearts. They should weep and mourn on account of their sin. And John assures the repentant sinner of God's forgiveness in 1 John 1:9. The Lord is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse from all unrighteousness.
  - c. A Christian must then turn to true worship. This is the putting on of the new man created in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). It is the presenting of his body as a living and holy sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1).
  - d. The putting on of righteousness and holiness in place of the idols which promote *anxiety* are seen in Phil.4:6-9. A Christian rejoices in the Lord.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 271.

He puts off his anxiety and, instead, in everything he prays and supplicates God with a thankful heart. The peace of God in Christ is promised. Further, his mind is to be fixed on the many praiseworthy and true things of 4:8. In verse 4:11-13, Paul encourages them to do as he has done and to aim for the attitude of contentment. Peter says that pride is associated with anxiety also. In 1 Peter 5:6-7, putting on humility is an antidote for anxiety. Trusting God, instead of oneself, is righteousness.

- e. True worship in place of the idols of *anger* is described in James 4:6-10. There the sinner is admonished to turn in humility to God. Pride is to be put off. A single mindedness towards God is to replace the double-minded heart. The sinner is to submit to God. The Greek word for submit is *hypotasso*. It means to subordinate or arrange or place under another.<sup>51</sup> The Christian then is to line up beneath the Lord and trust Him to meet all his needs. In addition, Paul instructs the Christian to walk in the Spirit, displaying the fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22-26. To walk in the Spirit demands a submission to the Lord.

#### V. Counseling the Person with Irritable Bowel Syndrome

This section contains a modus operandi for the biblical counselor to consider when counseling a person who suffers from IBS. The steps will follow two biblical counseling suggested outlines. One is Dr. Stuart Scott's General Counseling Suggestions.<sup>52</sup> The second outline used is The Big Picture from Stuart and Zondra Scott.<sup>53</sup> The counseling session

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<sup>51</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 1159.

<sup>52</sup> Stuart W. Scott's, Counseling Observation and Practicum: General Counseling Suggestions (lecture, The Master's University, Santa Clarita, July 23, 2020).

<sup>53</sup> Stuart Scott and Zondra Scott, *The Big Picture* (adapted from Powlison's Three Trees), 2016.

will progress in a general step by step fashion with guidance on where to start and how to progress. It will then lead into how to conclude. Examples of homework and follow up will be included.

#### A. Early sessions

1. A thorough physical history and exam should have been done by the counselee's medical provider. There are several dangerous conditions that share some of the same symptoms as IBS. These need to have been ruled out. It is beneficial if the counselee comes with the diagnosis of IBS.
2. In the first or second session, the spiritual life of the counselee needs to be explored. What is the counselee's relationship to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? What is the counselee's view of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? How has this truth impacted the counselee both in the past and present? The answer to these and other questions will lead the counselor into more revealing questions and answers to ascertain the counselee's spiritual life.
3. A thorough review of the PDI is essential before and during the early sessions. Extensive and focused questions should be asked about pertinent areas.
4. Review basics of IBS. Biblical counseling uses principles from God's word to address the emotional component that is associated with triggering or exacerbating IBS.
5. Homework should include the following.
  - a. A 2-week symptom diary for the counselee. The diary will include symptom manifestation, day and time, and the situation (person, place, activity) briefly described before, during, and afterwards. What were the

person's thoughts at the time? Did the person respond to the situation in any certain way? See appendix for an example.

- b. Biblical truths including the sufficiency of God's word (i.e.: 2 Time 3:16-17 2 Pet 1:2-4), the believer's position in Christ, God's purposes for trials, other exceedingly great and precious promises.
- c. Hope verses might include Romans 8:28-29, James 1:2-6 and 1 Cor 10:13.
- d. Consider memorizing some of these verses.

#### B. Early middle sessions

- 1. Closely review the diary to interpret what situation seems to be triggering emotions. Examples of emotions may be fear, anxiety, anger, fear of man and others. Look carefully.
- 2. These emotional manifestations are likely ungodly reflecting a lack of trust in God (Phil. 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:5-7). This manifestation reveals heart attitudes associated with idols of the heart (Eze. 14:1-5, Mark 7:20-23, James 4:1-10).
  - c. Interpret that data and work with counselee to determine the idol of the heart behind the unfaithfulness. Discuss with counselee regarding the correctness of the interpretation of the data.
  - d. Discuss God's instructions for the idolator to repent (Eze 14:6-7, James 4:7-10). God is faithful to forgive the repentant sinner of all his sin (1 John 1:9).
  - e. Homework may include the following.
    - i. Counselee will write down a prayer of repentance including the specifics of the emotions and idols.

- ii. Counselee will look up idolatry verses and the prescribed action God desires for him to take.
- iii. Read Matt 5-7. There may be specific sections also pertaining to the sin that has been discovered. Have counselee identify this and write it down with Christ's admonition.
- f. Hope verses from the previous sessions. Also, Matt. 7:24-27.
- g. Consider memorizing Ps. 51:1-2 or other verses on repentance and forgiveness.

C. Late middle sessions

1. True worship needs to be pursued. Discuss true worship of God. This includes the giving of oneself to God to be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:1-2).
2. It includes walking in manner worthy of the calling of Christ (Eph 4:1-3).
3. It includes putting off the former conduct, the old man and putting on the new man which is created in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:17-24).
4. The purpose of trials should be reviewed. How does this relate to true worship (James 1:2-6, 1 Pet 1:6-9)?
5. Aim at manifesting the fruit of true worship. Examples of true worship include the following examples.
  - a. It pleases God (2 Cor 5:6-9).
  - b. It glorifies God (1 Cor 10:31).
  - c. It trusts God as Christ trusted God (1 Pet 2:21-25).

- d. It manifests the fruit of the Spirit of God because the one who is worshipping truly is no longer walking in the flesh but in the Spirit (Gal 5:16-26).
6. Homework might include the following:
    - a. Write a prayer of thanksgiving to God for IBS. It has helped reveal false worship in the heart of the counselee.
    - b. Read Matt 5-7. Write down any additional insights from what was has recently been studied in the counseling sessions.
    - c. Memorize Galatians 5:22-23.
- C. Later sessions
1. Look specifically at an area to put off and put on related to manifesting the fruit of the Spirit.
  2. Consider how to pre-plan to deal with the trial identified as leading to the ungodly emotion.
  3. Counselee is to develop a habit of prayer for wisdom and putting on of godly actions before entering into the trial (Phil 4:6-7). The counselee is to meditate on those things which lead to God's peace before trial. Whatever is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, and so forth (Phil 4:8).
  4. Homework might include the following.
    - a. Reassign the symptoms diary to check symptoms but also to discuss the difference true worship is making in the counselees approach to trials.
    - b. Challenge counselee to face more difficult situations to assess worship.
    - c. Journal what right thinking is being chosen and what thinking has been put off.

Also, what fruit of the Spirit is now being manifested as a result of right thinking.

- d. Memorize Phil 4:8. Write down how this verse impacts the approach to the trials that triggered IBS symptoms.

## VI. Conclusion

- A. IBS is a very common condition seen through much of the world. Being found through much of the world means this condition may be found through many of the church throughout the world.
  1. Three interrelated factors have been identified as affecting symptoms of IBS. These are altered gut reactivity, hypersensitive gut, and dysregulation of the brain-gut interaction.
  2. The third factor, dysregulation of the brain-gut axis is triggered or worsened by emotional reactions stress.
  3. This strong emotional reaction is many times related to anxiety, depression, and anger.<sup>54</sup>
- B. The church has an opportunity to minister to individuals with IBS through the Word of God.
  1. The Word of God certainly supports the notion of the soul and the physical body interacting as mentioned in many Old Testament Scriptures in particular. A soul caught in sin can cause pain and destruction in the body.
  2. The very emotions that trigger or worsen IBS are addressed in the Scriptures.

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<sup>54</sup> Drossman and Ruddy, *Gut Feelings*, 65.

3. This is an opportunity for a Christian who suffers from IBS to identify and overcome a sin in his life (James 1:2-5).
  4. The biblical counselor is able to assist the person suffering from IBS by aiding them in first identifying the sinful actions and further exploring the heart for idols behind those sinful actions (Gal. 6:1-3).
  5. In addition, the biblical counselor will aid them in putting off the corrupt practice and in putting on the new practice created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph 4:22-24).
- C. A Christian with IBS can be encouraged that there are answers for their affliction in the Bible. Searching out the triggers in their lives, and the issues behind those triggers, can bring peace to their soul and likely to their painful bowels (Proverbs 28:13).

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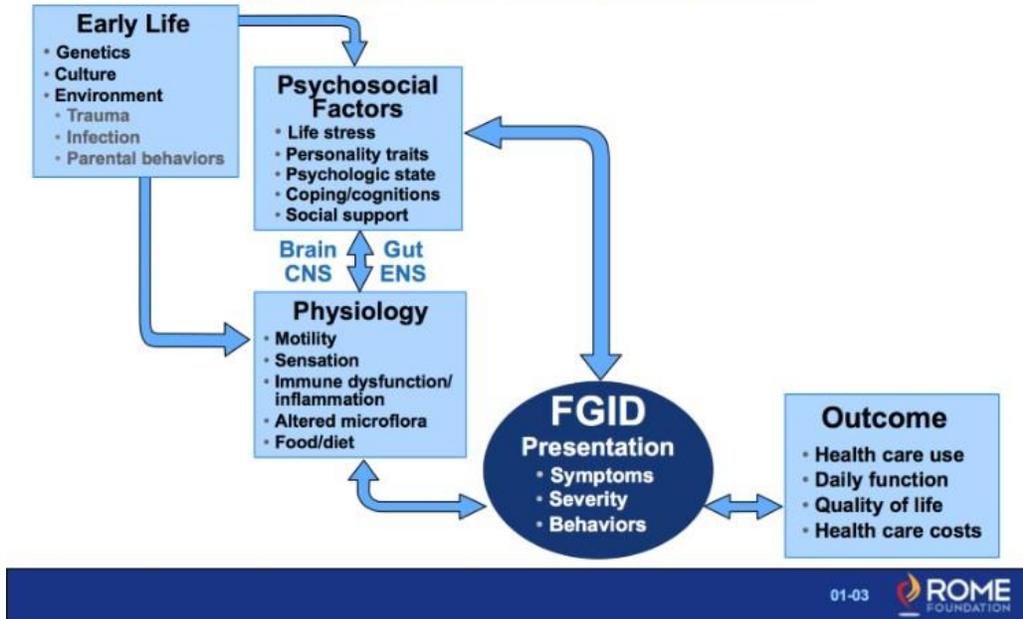
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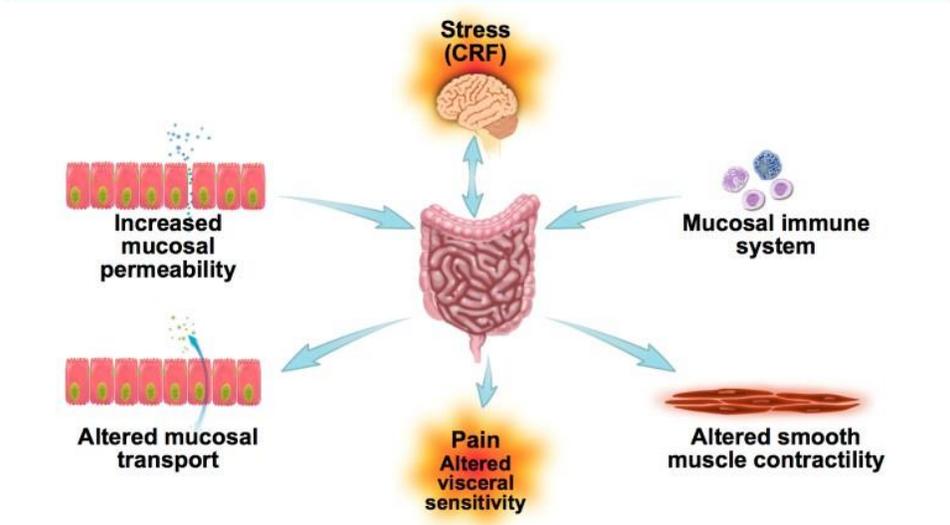
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ADDITIONAL USEFUL MATERIALS

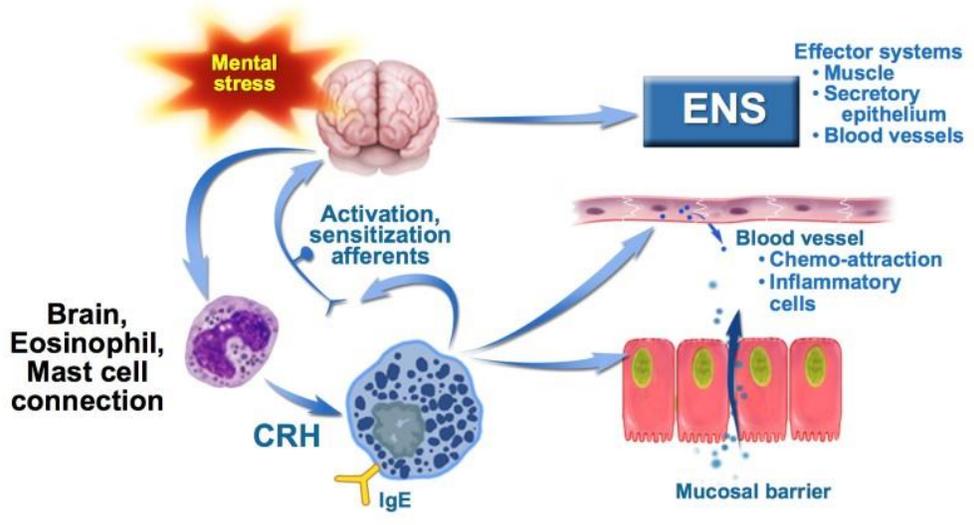
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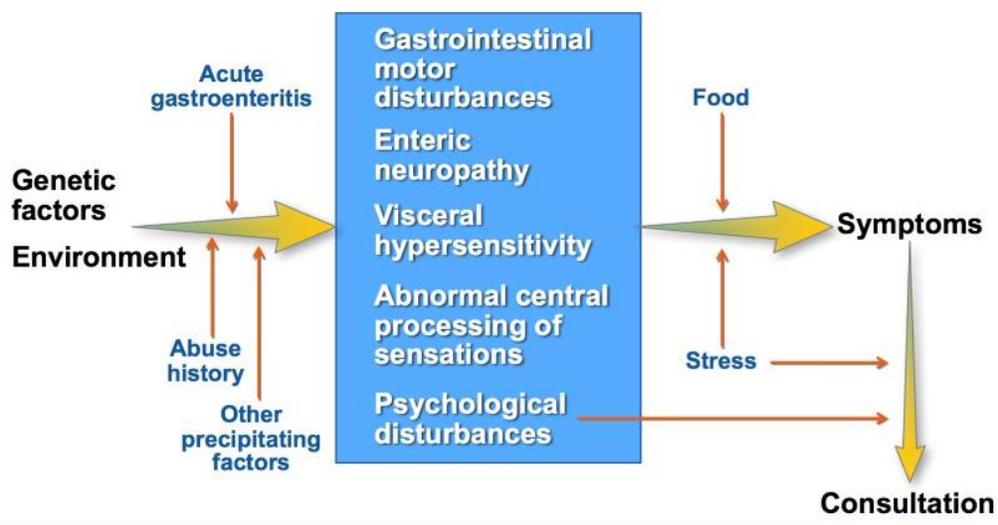
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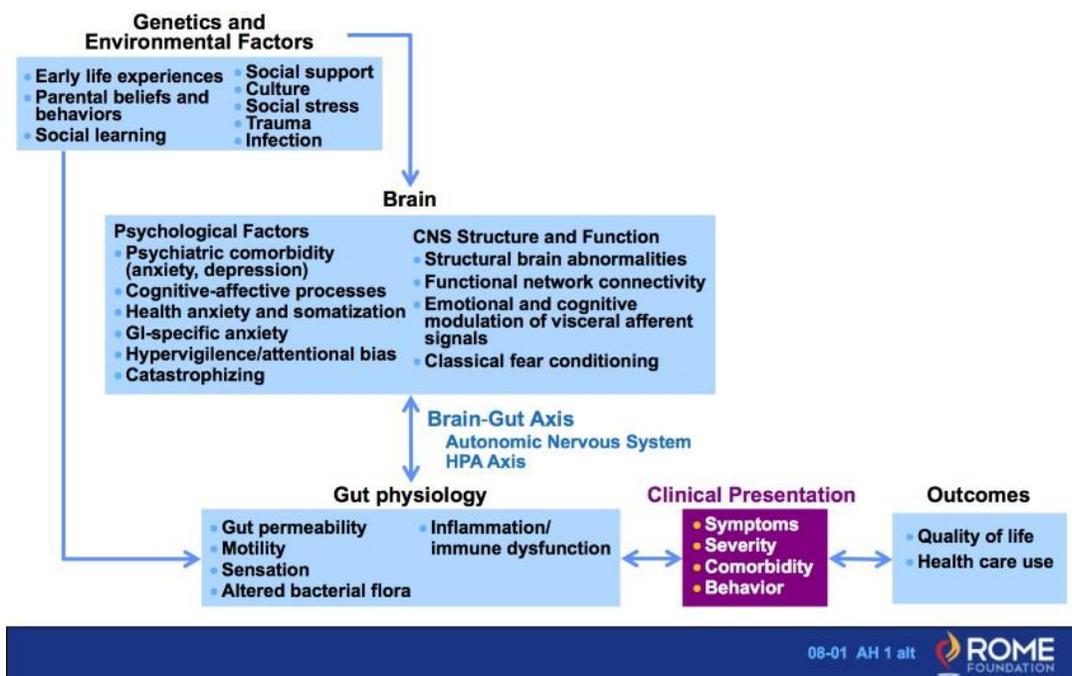


### Brain-Gut Interactions as a Consequence of Psychological Stress



### Proposed Pathophysiology of IBS





## Visceral Anxiety: When Normal Becomes Threatening

