

Introduction to Christian Counseling



Truman Scott, PhD.

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

Introduction to Christian Counseling

A Study in Comforting, Instructing, and
Healing People
Who Cry out for Help

Dr. Truman Scott

Published by
Sunset Institute Press
3710 34th Street ♦ Lubbock, Texas
806/687-2121 ♦ extschool@sibi.cc

“Introduction to Christian Counseling”
© Sunset Institute Press

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Most of the references in this writing are taken from three versions of the Bible:
The Holy Bible, The New King James Version (NKJV). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Pub. 1982.
The Holy Bible, The New American Standard (NAS). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Pub. 1977.
The Holy Bible, The New International Version (NIV). Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. 1996.

Cover Design by Richard Cravy

ISBN 978-0-9821375-3-6

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This book is dedicated to

The **Fairfield, California, church** where, as a young college graduate, I saw the immense value and felt the rich fulfillment of helping people come to know Jesus and drink more deeply of the **wholeness in Him.**

There, in that patient and loving environment, I began to gain the knowledge and skills to make a difference in the lives of people.

There, among God's people, I learned that the local church is always the best place for God's action to be experienced.



Special Acknowledgment

A special “*thank you*” to
The Rusty Russwurm family
and

The W.R. Collier family
for making the printing of this book possible.

A companion workbook for Introduction To Christian Counseling by Truman Scott is available for purchase through Sunset international Bible Institute External Studies: 1 (800) 687-2121

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Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders, and preparing preachers and missionaries for effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a world-wide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now, in printed form, that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff, and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a video taped course. The voice track of the video tape was first transcribed, then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of the Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, to Darlene Morris and the staff of

Sunset Translation/Editing Center who edited the manuscripts, and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

This book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible Study Library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders, and grow churches that plant other churches.

Volumes of the
SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY
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22. Spiritual Living for Ministers – Truman Scott
23. 1 & 2 Thessalonians – Doyle Gilliam
24. 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus – Tex Williams
25. The Case For Historic Christianity – Ed Wharton

Introduction

Christian counseling is as old as are the needs of men for direction. It is best called teaching, mentoring, comforting, encouraging, and correcting. The more biblically centered counseling is the more Christian based it becomes. The purpose of this book is to further enable you to be a better servant in comforting, healing, and instructing people who cry out for help.

This introductory book is divided into three parts of six chapters each. The first part focuses on the Basic Principles in Christian counseling that distinguish it from secular counseling. The second part focuses on Practical Guidelines that, when applied, will enhance the mission of Christian counseling. The third part presents Case Studies in Christian counseling gleaned over many years of experience in helping people.

People who effectively help people have given considerable attention to acquiring sufficient understanding and application of some basic principles. The first twelve chapters of this book define those principles.

Part One

Fundamentals of Christian Counseling

- **Chapter One** presents Guiding Principles in maximizing the course, helping people, and building a counseling approach.
- **Chapter Two** affirms the Distinctiveness of Christian Counseling.
- **Chapter Three** discusses the Nature of Christian Counseling by giving major attention to the five paradigms employed in Scripture.

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- **Chapter Four** discusses the Basic Needs of People in three parts:
 - ▶ An Overview of the Nature of Man
 - ▶ Basic Needs as a Growth Process
 - ▶ The Response of Christian Counseling to Basic Needs
- **Chapter Five** considers the Qualities of a Christian Counselor by clarifying who should dedicate his life in the ministry of counseling and by defining the biblical anatomy of a Christian counselor.
- **Chapter Six** outlines the Preparation of a Christian Counselor by looking at four specific areas of preparation, by defining seven stages of spiritual growth, and by looking at ten preparation choices available to those who have a passion to help people.

Part Two

Practical Guidelines in Christian Counseling

- **Chapter Seven** introduces the value of scheduling a Pre-Counseling Interview to better understand the counselee.
- **Chapter Eight** emphasizes the importance of developing a healthy Counselor and Counselee Relationship through establishing and maintaining integrity throughout the encounters.
- **Chapter Nine** proposes some ways by which Christian counselors can make the counseling enterprise one that is Productive and worthy of the choice of serious people.
- **Chapter Ten** affirms that counseling can be no more productive than the level of seriousness of the one being counseled. The Christian counselor must be prepared to teach and urge the counselee in accepting The Responsibilities of a Counselee.
- **Chapter Eleven** takes the reader on a visit of the varied approaches being used today to broaden and deepen the

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scope of helping people. A Christian counselor should stay on the edge of Advances in Christian Counseling.

- **Chapter Twelve** leads the reader through Questions That Counselors Ask in five areas of counseling concerns: personal, counseling, and family concerns, counseling logistics, and specific counseling situations.

Part Three

Case Studies in Christian Counseling

The third set of six chapters shares some case studies that teach valuable lessons in Christian counseling. At one point or another most counselors will have these or similar experiences.

- Case Studies in Premarital Counseling.
- Case Studies in Marital Counseling.
- Case Studies in Parental Counseling.
- Case Studies in Member-to-Member Counseling.
- Case Studies in Wholeness Counseling.
- Case Studies in Leadership Counseling.

My desire is that you will find the material in this book to be helpful, practical, biblically sound, and applicable to your own counseling commitment. Even further, my hope is that you will find in counseling the joy of knowing that you have made a notable difference in the lives of many people. Stay true to what is pure, right, and noble. Be guided only by the trustworthy instructions in the Scriptures. Yield yourself to be empowered by the presence, power, and purpose of God.

Truman Scott

Part One

Fundamentals of Christian Counseling

- Guiding Principles of Christian Counseling**
- The Distinctiveness of Christian Counseling**
- The Nature of Christian Counseling**
- The Basic Needs of People**
- The Qualities of a Christian Counselor**
- The Preparation of a Christian Counselor**

Guiding Principles of Christian Counseling

Introduction

This book is meant to be an introduction to Christian counseling. It contains hours of study time enabling students to learn many things necessary to understanding the principles and fundamentals of Christian counseling. Many of the introductory principles will be developed in subsequent chapters. These chapters will cover the guiding principles in three areas:

- ☒ Guiding principles in maximizing the book.
- ☒ Guiding principles in helping people.
- ☒ Guiding principles in building a counseling approach.

Basic Guiding Principles

This book is designed to make a contribution in helping students develop a ministry in counseling. In order for that to happen there are three distinct principles that must be honored by the student/reader:

Principle One is to focus on the material being presented, both in content and in attitude. It is important to honor this principle in the following ways:

Become of one mind by seeing the immense good that can be accomplished in helping people through effective counseling. **Be aware of the ever-present dangers** in the frightening damage that can be caused through incompetence and godless, philosophical approaches.

Clarify the different perceptions. Some people may read this book with a positive anticipation about counseling either because they have been helped by counseling or have seen good results in others involved in counseling. Others may be gifted helpers and able to see how much counseling can help others.

Some people may read this book beginning with a negative anticipation about counseling because they have personally been hurt by incompetent counseling or may have seen its negative results. Some may have equated counseling with humanistic psychology and have a negative attitude because of that. Others may simply be more gifted in other areas of ministry and see this reading as unnecessary for them. This book will attempt to present the good that competent and godly Christians can do through biblical counseling. Christian counseling provides one of the most opportune teaching situations with people who recognize and express a need by coming for help, acknowledging a desire to be helped, and displaying trust in the counselor.

Principle Two is to focus on a useful definition of Christian counseling. A definition sets the perimeters, describes the content, and can determine the desired results. The working definition of Christian counseling in this book emphasizes the teaching role of the counselor.

Christian counseling is teaching someone to think, feel, and act like Jesus.

This definition affirms that Christian counseling concerns itself with the mind, the will, and the emotions of people.

Christian counseling concerns itself with the **mind**. The counselor teaches people to think biblically, soundly, morally, and lovingly. Christian counseling also concerns itself with the **will**. The counselor teaches people to have a regard for truth, to submit their wills to the will of God, and to make Christ-minded decisions. Christian counseling concerns itself with the **emotions**. The counselor teaches people to understand and constructively express their feelings and to recover from damaged emotions.

Principle Three is to focus on personal growth. Commit to acquiring the basic skills and growing in spiritual maturity in order to meet the needs of the people being served. Some are specifically gifted in counseling and will desire to go far beyond this course. Anyone involved in ministry or helping others needs to know what to do, how to give positive help without hurting people, and when to refer a difficult situation to others when it is beyond their experience and skill.

Christians by definition and choice are teachers and helpers. They are Christian counselors. The issue is not, "Will they teach or help people in need?" The question is, "How competent and how involved will the Christian become in counseling?" Even this introduction to Christian counseling will raise each student above an excuse of ignorance, incompetency, or refusal to help at an appropriate level. The common ground for this particular book is that no one is self-sufficient, all need some instruction and guidance, perhaps some correction and healing, and some motivation and encouragement.

Guiding Principles in Helping People

Consider the following twenty principles about helping people. Each statement is a **counseling declaration** setting a vital principle in meeting the needs of people:

Principle One: People need help. Helping people through counseling has never been sought by as many people as in this twenty-first century. The reasons are clear: the stress, anxiety, hurts, bitterness, and resentments experienced by so many people have shaken marriages, families, and churches. More clearly, fewer people are being taught character values and life-management skills to confront the overwhelming demands of the cyber-space, valueless age.

Principle Two: Counselors must be competent. Helping people is urgent, but it is not easy. To counsel well, one must be competent. Competency results from a careful, soul searching of motives, finding an effective counseling approach, and developing the knowledge and skills to respond to the varied needs.

Principle Three: Christian counseling is not for everyone. Helping people through counseling may not be for everyone. Christian counseling is not for the person who resists change and growth in his own life. It is not for someone whose motives for helping are not overwhelmed by a genuine concern for the person to be helped and a settled hope for the resolution of the difficulty. Christian counseling is for the person who has the potential to become a very knowledgeable, sensitive, skilled, and correctly motivated counselor.

Principle Four: The Christian counselor must have a strong value system. Helping people can be damaging if the

values of the counselor are flawed. There must be some foundational, absolute values that can define the perimeters of right or wrong and can measure the substance as excellent or mediocre. The number of people being helped in a measurable way and equipped to cope in the future rests solidly on the counselor's values.

Principle Five: The Christian counselor seeks the highest good of the counselee. Helping people to maximize their human potential holds one of the surest promises of effecting life-lasting change and wholeness. Counseling that keeps a person dependent on the counselor with a never ending need for counseling, in most cases, violates the person and the purpose of counseling. Such control does not seek the highest good of the one to be helped.

Principle Six: The counselee must desire to be helped. Helping someone will never be accomplished without the correct desire of the one to be helped. A defensive and resistant person will make little commitment to change. A manipulated or coerced person sees the counselor as part of the unwanted plan. People can be helped if and when they want to be helped and have sufficient trust in the counselor.

Principle Seven: Helping people is not limited to highly trained specialists, though there are human needs that do require such professional assistance. For the most part, more people are helped by those who cared enough to gain the basic knowledge and counseling skills. Most people can identify more easily with a caring, non-professional who is a competent, people helper.

Principle Eight: Counseling is a choice to help effectively. Helping people is not simply a choice to help or not to help. Everyone can help some in most situations. The amount and quality of help depends on many factors such as sensitivity, motives, knowledge, and skill. There is a choice one does make, a choice to help as effectively as is possible or to offer mediocrity or indifference. Neither of these last two responses are Christian choices.

Principle Nine: Both counselor and counselee must trust in God. Helping people goes beyond what a counselor may bring to a situation. Helping people depends more directly on trust in a "Can-Do" God by both the helper and the one being helped. Offering help without God is offering help that is secular and vulnerable to damaging flaws. The counselee must

be led to believe in God and trust Him before the problem can be addressed.

Principle Ten: Christian counseling is redemptive. Helping people is redemptive because it knows that there is a dimension deeper than the difficulties in relationships, problems in financial mismanagement, feelings of fear, anger, loneliness, and guilt. There is the dimension of human sin and what it has done to the relationship with God. Helping people only to resolve their human problems and not their relationship with God is helping them but little, by comparison. People may become stable and productive and still finish their lives with the ultimate God/man problem unresolved. The deeper dimension is the eternal dimension.

Principle Eleven: Every person being helped is a person of value. Helping people gives value to the person being helped. Control of the person, using the person for one's distorted desires, drawing personal benefit at the unwarranted expense of the person is devaluing the person. Helping the person with a sense of regard and purpose opens the relationship to one of dignity.

Principle Twelve: The best of counselors has limitations. Helping people thrives when a counselor has an honest and realistic understanding of his limitations. It is not easy or soon that anyone can respond effectively to all kinds of people, in all kinds of situations. Playing an all-knowing God, or even playing doctor, blocks learning skills and the purifying of motives.

Principle Thirteen: Effective counselors are good communicators. Helping people takes flight on the wings of effective communication. The ultimate communicator is one who knows the value of significant, well-chosen words. He knows how to clothe the words in the tones that inspire growth and knows how to employ the power of language.

Principle Fourteen: A good counselor limits the duration of counseling. Helping people keep watch over the calendar. Good counseling helps people toward productive self-reliance. Good counseling is intentional in limiting the counseling relationship to a basic response to the needs of the one he has agreed to help.

Principle Fifteen: A Christian counselor honors the confidentiality of the counselee. Helping people is honoring the trust and protecting the vulnerabilities a person has shared in

confidence. In a world of distrust and abuse the one being helped needs to find a zone of security and a freedom to be open and honest with himself. Freedom to be open and honest with another caring person is the first step to self-awareness and an honest acknowledgment of the need to change.

Principle Sixteen: The counselor must be an authentic model of the principles he teaches. Helping people is living an open, convincing, and inspiring model of the changes that the one to be helped wants to experience. An accomplished model affirms that what is being discussed is real and can bring about positive changes. The inspiring model says that the results are worth the pain and discipline. It gives the assurance that the results are not necessarily a long time in coming.

Principle Seventeen: A counselor must remember other priorities. Helping people remember their own needs, one's family concerns, and one's concerns for others needing help. A counselor can get so consumed in helping a person that his own needs for rest, spiritual renewal, family companionship, and fulfilling other responsibilities can easily suffer.

Principle Eighteen: Effective counselors are good listeners. Helping people are those who listen well, who place a high priority on an exact understanding of what is being communicated. Both listening skills and a helping attitude make it possible for one to be a good helper. To be regularly and accurately understood encourages the one being helped to confront the necessary changes being indicated in the counseling.

Principle Nineteen: The counselor must be flexible. Helping people is not limited to a place or a schedule. The telephone, e-mail, letters, an unscheduled visit, all can be useful counseling means. Genuine concern thinks of the needs and the schedules of the one to be helped. Reaching out says that one is concerned and available to help.

Principle Twenty: Counseling is pointedly verbal instruction. Helping people, at its most helpful, is verbal instruction. It consists of a spoken message that brings about a thoughtful, purposeful change. Helping someone with hands and heart conditions a person to consider asking for help to make a needed change. However, a verbal message provokes and gives direction to the necessary change.

In thinking over the comments just shared, the student will note that twenty principles were stated about helping people.

Each principle is important if a helper of people is to be ready to answer **a call for help**. Sometimes it is wise to refer a person to someone else to get the necessary help. It is usually right to promise to pray for one needing help. Some professional help and all Divine help are prime sources to help one resolve problems. Yet, **a call for help**, most frequently, is directed to one who is perceived to be near, available, caring, and competent. Referrals to God in prayer and to professional helpers in scheduled counseling are appropriate. Who supplies the bridge, and perhaps, even the beginning of the solution leading to stability, productivity, and wholeness? **It will always be the one who anticipates the call for help and prepares to answer the call.**

Guiding Principles in Building a Counseling Approach

To conclude this first chapter, consider some guiding principles that must be evaluated to make any sense at all of the whole field of counseling. A quick survey of the modern counseling field will likely leave any person confused by the more than 250 differing and even vastly contrasting approaches to resolving the same human issues. How does one claim any confidence in counseling when published and internationally known therapists are so diverse and their counseling results are so contradictory? Is the diversity caused by the complexities of the human person? Perhaps, in part, but the real problem lies in determining the guiding principles one adopts in counseling.

Look at some proposed principles that will resolve the confusion in the counseling field and give direction to effective counseling.

Principle One: The whole universe, including man, is an ordered, structured system. Chance or random are not characteristics of the universe around us. When understood, there are reasons and predictable results for all parts of the universe. This principle affirms that the problems of man are understandable, predictable, and can be systematically resolved. It affirms that the potential of man can be identified and developed by goal setting and discipline. It affirms that man is responsible to discover the structure of the universe and develop responses that are in harmony with the order of the universe.

Particularly, the principle of an ordered, structured system renounces the thought that any person has no accountability for his disordered, random behavior. Order and structure demand responsible and accountable behavior. Responsibility and accountability presuppose that there is a standard for conduct, a measure for excellence.

Principle Two: There must be a singular, intelligent explanation for the origin of the ordered and structured universe. The continuing unity and ordered design of the universe and man himself argue for a singular, intelligent explanation for the origin of the material universe. The more detailed one's observation of the universe is the more it appears that personality, individuality, and unilateral choice was involved. When understood, this principle affirms diversity, definable purpose, and perimeters of acceptable and productive activity. Man, then, is not to be a moral law to himself or a "loose cannon" in his relationships and choices and unaccountable for his actions.

Principle Three: Man is unique in the material universe. The high level of human development affirms that man is unique in the material universe, bearing a singular and inseparable relation with the origin of the universe. This principle speaks to a specific purpose, value, and destiny of man.

It would seem, then, that man must know his origin, understand his purpose, and foresee his destiny. It would follow that any system of thought that denies the origin, the purpose, and the destiny of man ignores the realities that surround it. Out of that ignorance would come a diminished view of man, a less hopeful expectation of the potential of man, and a bleak view of an uncertain future.

Principle Four: Any counseling approach must be consistent with the realities that are self-evident in the universe.

Conclusion

The order, the unity, the origin of the universe, and the long, documented uniqueness of man demand a search for an adequate explanation. Wherever that search leads, it must end in agreement with the above principles. There will be an ordered beginning and continuance of the universe, a guiding standard, a meaningful and accountable purpose for man, and a unique relationship with the explanation of these realities.

Where the search ends has everything to do with the counseling definitions, purpose, approach, the regard and vision for the counselees, and the results of therapy. The major counseling battle is over identifying the adequate explanation of the above, proposed principles.

Christians have concluded what Paul affirmed to a group of scholarly philosophers in Athens in Acts 17:22–31:

. . . “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, ‘For we also are His offspring.’ Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead” (NAS).

God is the explanation for the origin, ordered structure, and uniqueness of man. Therefore, He has a standard to which He holds every person responsible and accountable. Every person has value, purpose, and destiny. A counseling approach must be in harmony with these principles to accomplish the purposes of God.

Thought Questions for Chapter One

1. Know the three guiding principles in maximizing this course.
2. Know the twenty guiding principles in helping people.
3. List the four guiding principles in building a counseling approach.
4. Christian counseling concerns itself with the mind. The counselor teaches people to think in what four ways?
5. Christian counseling concerns itself with what three things in the person's makeup?

The Distinctiveness of Christian Counseling

Introduction

It is clear to all caring people, whether secular or Christian, that many peoples of the world need help and at different levels of counseling. The levels are:

- ▣ Situational: “What do I do now?”
- ▣ Educational: “How do I do it?”
- ▣ Developmental: “What is hindering me?”
- ▣ Clinical: “Why can’t I overcome this problem?”
- ▣ Psychiatric Therapy (outpatient and institutional): “When will I ever feel good again?”

All counseling seeks to answer these questions and others. While all counseling is to be applauded for the concern in helping people, not all counseling is secure and risk free.

Christian counseling is sharply distinct from secular counseling. Some data, some methodology, and even, some principles may be common to both disciplines. However, the very nature, the purpose, the basis, the message, the counseling authority, the perspective, and the commitment of the counselor, all and more, make Christian counseling distinct from secular counseling. And resulting from the Christian distinctiveness are people reclaiming useful lives with fulfilling relationships, achieving the fullness of their creation potential, and being led to claiming their part in God’s redemptive design for all peoples, tribes, and languages. This chapter will examine the relationship between Christian counseling and all other types of counseling. Within this chapter, every student should learn the following lessons:

- ▶ A Christian counselor bases his counseling on the strong belief that there is an omni-capable God who has revealed Himself.
- ▶ The Christian counselor has unique views of himself which make him much more capable of helping people.
- ▶ The Christian counselor considers himself an authentic model of what the counselee needs to be.
- ▶ The Christian counselor refuses to follow at least six negative approaches to counseling.

Christian Counseling Is Distinct and Distinctly More Helpful to People in Need of Help

A Distinct Point of Reference

Most Christian counselors start and build their counseling on five different foundations. First, their counseling is based upon an omni-capable God who has revealed Himself. A Christian counselor, based on evidential reasons, believes there is an omni-capable God who has revealed Himself, defined His expectations of human people, and has demonstrated His history-long intent to save all peoples.¹

Second, a Christian counselor builds his counseling on the awesome potential of every person. A Christian counselor sees beyond social and cultural conditions that rank people to confirm the intrinsic and eternal value and awesome potential of every person.²

Third, a Christian counselor bases his counseling on the belief that the violation of divine law strains and corrupts a right relationship with God. A Christian counselor understands that individual violations of divine law strain or preclude a right and saving relationship with God the Creator and God the Redeemer.³

1. John 10:10, John 3:16; 1 Peter 2:4; Psalm 134

2. Acts 17:22–31; Psalm 8

3. Luke 13:3; Romans 3:21

Fourth, a Christian counselor builds his counseling session on helping people think, feel, and act like Jesus. A Christian counselor pursues a simply stated purpose and sees the greatest contribution that one can make to a person in need is helping people think, feel, and act like Jesus. The closer one comes to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of Jesus, the more one experiences healthy emotions, joyful relationships, and productive actions.⁴

Fifth, a Christian counselor bases his counseling on the knowledge that there is an inerrant, objective revelation: the Bible, the Word from an inerrant God. This revelation provides a history-tested standard for human wholeness in every aspect of life and every relationship. It provides healthy motivation and a clear vision of the kind of person one can become.⁵

A Distinct Self View

Much of secular counseling and some Christian counselors view their advanced training in psychology and counseling, their honed skills and methodology, and their years of experience as the major measures of their value and place in counseling. All of these conditions can be valuable, but the Christian counselor honors other conditions more highly. The honored conditions distinguish him from secular counselors and contribute directly to the efficiency of the counseling process.

First, the Christian counselor believes that God will partner with the counselor, providing essential resources beyond the counselor, intervening to bring comprehension, conviction, eagerness to change, and healing to the counseled. The Christian counselor does not feel alone but feels supervised and empowered by a Master Counselor.⁶

Second, the Christian counselor never forgets what he might have done or what kind of person he might have been had Christ not entered in his life. The active recognition of the power of temptation, the weakness of lustful flesh, and the

4. Colossians 1:28; 1 Peter 2:21; Ephesians 4:31

5. 2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 1:3

6. Matthew 28:20

regret and shame that follows seduction are daily reminders. This awareness is balanced and changed with the joy of one's salvation and the ever blossoming praises and gratitude to God for His saving and strengthening grace. This self-view prepares the Christian counselor to be understanding, patient, slow to judge, and eager to help those who have failed in life and relationships. The Christian counselor cannot look diminishingly at a person needing help, knowing that he would not be helping another person find sense or wholeness without the blessings of God.⁷

Third, the Christian counselor knows that there are other God approved resources that can help people that he must not ignore through his own pride or self-sufficiency. The Christian counselor works in the context or with rapport with the Body of Christ. Whether in a para-counseling program in a local church, involving trained members, or focusing the counseling on members in a congregation, the intent is the same: using all the resources provided by others to help those in need. The Christian counselor knows that he does not know everything. In the congregation there are people who may know more on many subjects: financial management, conflict resolution, crises management, marriage, parenting, and so forth. The Christian counselor is constantly researching the publication field to learn of newly published materials that can be used to aid in the counseling experience. There is a partial list of resources in the Appendix.

A Distinct Model

The Christian counselor knows three things about the power and authenticity of modeling. First, a Christian counselor must convince a needy person that the counseling being received will make a difference in his life. A counselor who models the thinking, feeling, and doing of Jesus best inspires another person to desire and commit to change.

Second, a Christian counselor has searched the world over and found that the best model for personal growth in wholeness and for helping others is the complete life of Jesus, lived in the earthly circumstances of life.

7. Matthew 15:14

Third, a Christian counselor is committed to transfer a needy person's dependence to Jesus so he may find what the Christian counselor has found and joyfully has depended on for survival, growth, and excellence.

A Distinct Counseling Approach

The preceding three distinctions impact one's counseling approach, but there are more. The Christian counselor rejects an unnumbered amount of approaches used by modern counselors. The Christian counselor may not have the time to examine closely the 1500 "schools of thought" each with its own perspective, self-view, and purpose, but he refuses to follow any of the following six negative approaches.

First, the Christian counselor refuses to follow an approach that scoffs at God, the Bible, the reality of human sin, and the responsibility and accountability of a person.

Second, the Christian counselor refuses to follow an approach that offers no hope in reversing one's past, no sense of one's value, purpose, or dignity. Third, he refuses to follow an approach that proposes a non-teaching role for the Christian counselor or that pictures the person in counseling as possessing all truth, just waiting to be discovered within. Fourth, he refuses to follow an approach that denies the reality of guilt that sets no perimeters or high expectations for human conduct, or that diminishes the distinct value and the lofty purpose of other humans.

Fifth, the Christian counselor refuses to follow an approach that intentionally lacks the eternal dimension of helping people, which counsels with the "now" view of time and the temporal realization of one's self-pronounced goals. Sixth, he refuses to follow an approach that does not strike a balance, rather it balances personal sin and circumstance. It acknowledges that there are dysfunctions caused by sin in one's life, but there are dysfunctions resulting from a lack of knowledge or skills and there are hurts and distortions caused by others in an unhealthy environment. Sin is not the only explanation for all the conditions of people needing help in counseling. The causes, defined or undefined, are not the focal point of the counseling process. The recognition and acknowledgment of a need to change and a personal, responsible commitment to conform to the model of Jesus and to His standard of conduct are the primary concerns of counseling.

A Distinct Result

The distinctiveness of Christian counseling is not as satisfactorily proven in writing as it is in the results of counseling. While we want for some thorough objective research to affirm or deny the distinctiveness of Christian counseling, there are five distinct considerations resulting from being helped in a Christian setting:

Hope characterizes the person. The past can be changed, the present can be purposeful and productive, and the future can be secured. **Confidence** blossoms in all endeavors. One discovers gifted resources, one associates with encouraging people, one gains and employs skills for selfless purposes, and one knows he is a part of a much bigger picture, protected and empowered by someone much bigger and desirous and able to help.

Freedom replaces the burden of guilt, exposes the falsities of fear, breaks the gripping hold of compulsive patterns, and conquers the designs of the evil one. **Gladness** sings again in the life of the person committed to a Christian change. Relationships stop being self-serving; valuing others bursts into praise, expressions of gratitude, and eagerness to serve.

Intimacy characterizes and purifies significant and healthy relationships. Intimacy is too often desired when its purposes are incorrectly motivated. When there is not, nor can there be, a covenant promise. The right expression of intimacy, made possible by the freedom in Christ and guided by Revelation of God, occurs in right and necessary covenant relationships. Such intimacy is seen in the spiritual intimacy with God, the domestic intimacy with a spouse, and the friendship intimacy with people of like values, with a commonality of interests and concern, and a mutual trust of sharing and serving.

Conclusion

Any process that can regularly and predominantly produce the results of hope, confidence, freedom, gladness, and intimacy is distinctive and distinctively more healthy and productive in meeting human need and fulfilling heavenly objectives.

Thought Questions For Chapter Two

1. Know the five areas that illustrate how Christian counseling is distinct and distinctly more helpful to people in need of help.
2. Think about the six approaches to counseling that the Christian counselor refuses to follow in his counseling approach.
3. Consider the five elements involved in the result of Christian counseling.

The Nature of Christian Counseling

Introduction

So many well intentioned and hard working people never achieve the maximum benefit of something they are using and feel strongly about because they do not understand the nature of the item. Christian counseling often falls short of its maximum potential to help because its nature is not fully or correctly understood. A correct understanding of the nature of Christian counseling starts with some basic considerations.

This chapter will look at several things which point out the nature of Christian counseling. The student should be prepared to learn four basic counseling considerations and examine five paradigms of Christian counseling with their various parts.

Basic Counseling Considerations

At the base of all counseling should be the desire to help people. Anything less than that desire will prove detrimental to those needing help to build healthy, whole lives. There should also be the desire to learn. All counseling, secular or Christian, can share in some common resources. It is possible to learn from both the secular and Christian materials available. Some will learn by research and observation of human behavior. There is much useful data to be gained to assist counselors in understanding and helping counselees.

Through much practice there are some counseling approaches, methods, and materials to address specific conditions that have proven effective. Counselors do not need to “reinvent the wheel” or reduplicate effective methods that are already being used effectively. Through shared information and careful scrutiny all counselors can enhance their effectiveness. This sharing, in the spirit of learning, can be

fostered through publications, seminars, electronic mail, and Internet. Since a Christian counselor is a custodian and a practitioner of truth, he looks for truth in every counseling proposal. If the information resources are true, he knows they can be useful regardless of the source.

There should also be the desire to have and to use a trustworthy standard. Christian counseling, by its very definition, makes everything pass the demands of the Scriptures. Every counseling proposal, every method, and every counseling idea is determined to be true and, therefore useful, if it is in harmony with any related part of Scripture. Such resources are considered to be true only if they correspond to biblical data. The very nature of Christian counseling calls for biblical verification of anything that might be used in the helping process.

There should also be the desire to have clearly stated objectives. The Christian counselor knows and fears what can happen if left to human purposes. He wants clearly defined purposes to guide his counseling practices and outcomes. Left without objectives at best, the counselor will suffer from imbalance in helping people. At worst, he may fail entirely to help and might even hurt needy people.

Paradigms of Christian Counseling

Take note of some paradigms that give direction to counseling, defining clearly some objectives to be accomplished. When these examples are accomplished, the nature of Christian counseling will be well defined.

Apostolic Paradigm

One paradigm for Christian counseling is well expressed by Paul, a model counselor, in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Look for the five objectives that are expressed in the following reading:

And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men (NAS).

The nature of Christian counseling requires a balance and an opportune use of the five qualities stated by Paul.

Exhortation: “*urge*”/*parakaleo* means to call along side of as a defense lawyer urging a certain result. There are times Christian counselors must “*urge*,” beg, and insist on certain behaviors. One acts contrary to the very nature of Christian counseling if he leads another to the truth but then fails to “*urge*” the person to act on the truth. One does not violate the autonomy or individual freedom of another by urging a specific response to truth. Only truth, clearly understood and responsibly and promptly followed, sets a person free.⁸ If a Christian counselor really wants one to be helped he must tell him in the most emphatic and clearly understood way possible. Directly urging and insisting on an appropriate response honors the nature of Christian counseling.

Instruction: “*admonish*”/*noutheteo* means to admonish, to confront, to warn. The Christian counselor is a teacher. He knows that truth is not resident in the human person and that man cannot be a self-sufficient guide.⁹ He does not assume that the counselee knows either what the problem is, how he should rightly act, or how to correctly resolve the issue. If he did he would not be asking for help. For however much the counselee thinks he knows or even insists he has been taught, the Christian counselor is, by nature, a teacher and a teacher must be sure the counselee has learned. A teacher cannot live with the thought that his student may not have learned the lesson. The Christian counselor can do no better than make sure the counselee has learned the truth and knows how to apply the truth to his problem. The teacher/counselor cannot assume he has helped the counselee until he is relatively sure that the counselee has identified and confronted the problem and has committed himself to a purposeful course of action. As a Christian counselor he will then stay near by to coach the counselee until the new and right course of action has become expected and personalized behavior.¹⁰

“Encourage”: *parmutheomai* means to encourage, to cheer up. When a counselee identifies the problem, sees the

8. John 8:32

9. Jeremiah 10:23

10. John 8:32; 1 Peter 2:21–25

obstacles that have to be confronted and removed, and pales before the task knowing his past defeats and weak resources, he could be easily broken by discouragement. The counselor becomes a cheerleader, a believing encourager. At that point he may be the only one who sees what the counselee can become. He, alone, may believe in the powerful transforming power of the Holy Spirit working through the truth of the Word. He, alone, may feel the urgency of setting the counselee free from the grasp of the evil one. He, alone, may understand that victory and wholeness will glorify the Creator God. Out of those clear views, the Christian counselor encourages the counselee, despite the struggle, to persevere, to try again if he falls, to accept and combat the pain of change, and to envision the joy in the end result. The nature of Christian counseling is honored when the counselee knows that the counselor deeply cares about what happens because he goes beyond diagnosis and prescription to encouragement.

Assistance: “*help*”/*indicium* means to take an interest in helping the weak. The nature of Christian counseling recognizes that knowing right behavior can be compromised or interrupted by human frailty. All people, at times in their lives, need help: someone to take personal, time consuming interest in their well-being, someone who, without diminishing them, helps them take a stronger hold on the things they know are right and good. The Christian counselor is that “someone.” Beyond words and acts of encouragement, he is not far away; he is easily found; he keeps himself ready to give a hand, an hour, a dollar. One who is counseled by a Christian counselor profits from the nature of Christian counseling. He never feels alone or fears being defenseless against surrounding, threatening circumstances. The Christian counselor watches from nearby and, like a shepherd, runs back to the threatened counselee until he can fight his own battles, using the provident resources of God to win his victories.

Patience: “*be patient*”/*makrothumeo* means to be or to have patience. The glue that holds together the nature of Christian counseling is the mature ability to keep one’s objectives clearly in view despite the reactive behavior of the counselee. That is patience.

From the beginning of the counseling process, the Christian counselor is urging change, teaching the content and process of change, encouraging change, and stepping in and

out of the person's life to offer help when weaknesses threaten the changes that are beginning to take place. Patience, the readiness to stay committed and engaged, will give the Christian counselor continuing strength, clear purpose, and unshakable belief in the value of person and in the will of God. The best beginnings in exhorting, instructing, encouraging, and assisting fail if the Christian counselor loses his patience with the person needing his interest, belief, and competence.

Shepherd Paradigm

An ancient, time proven paradigm for Christian counselors and for all spiritual leaders is defined by Ezekiel in his indictment of the shepherds of Israel:

" . . . Should not the shepherds feed the flock? . . . Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you sought for the lost; but with force and with severity you have dominated them" (Ezekiel 34: 2, 4, NAS).

Like shepherds, Christian counselors do well to be concerned for the fullest well-being of the counselee. "Feeding" looks to every, basic need the counselee has, both to survive as well as to prosper and be productive. Restating the indictments as objectives and reversing the negatives to positives is the nature of shepherding/counseling. There are four characteristics of being a shepherd seen in Ezekiel.

Bring healing to the sick is part of the nature of Christian counseling, promoting healing. There is no way for anyone to get through life without getting hurt. The less Jesus is at the center of one's life the more will be the hurts and the scarcer will be the resources for healing. The Christian counselor promotes healing by bringing Christ to the center of the counselee's life and pointing him to the resources of faith and wholeness. The Christian counselor is a capable diagnostician of sicknesses of the soul and an even greater therapist. He is dedicated to health. He finds no satisfaction in cursing the sickness or rejecting the sick.

Binding the broken is a characteristic in the nature of Christian counseling which causes a counselor to recognize

brokenness in the lives of others and to develop the skills to promote mending and healthy growth. One who has been robbed of a loved one in death, rejected by a faithless mate or friend, abused by a selfish predator, or manipulated by a valueless rogue is broken. The bones of the body must be quickly treated to insure healthy growth and renewed strength and productivity. So it is with broken-ness in the human person. If neglected or treated poorly, inflaming resentments, bitterness, and revenge sets in to create worse problems. Alone, without competent and correctly motivated help, most people struggle with self-healing. The Christian counselor brings all the faith resources of prayer, study, and the application of healing principles by caring and helping.

Recalling the wandering calls for the Christian counselor to be alert to the human tendencies that slowly lead one further from the center of faith. With concern he is sensitive to those around him who are unaware of their movement to the outward margins of wholeness and healthy relations. People get over committed in work or play and lessen their disciplines in building relationships. People experiment with new attitudes, new behaviors, and new friends, not measuring how far they are traveling away from past moorings. The Christian counselor keeps watch, knowing where a healthy, productive person should be and calls the wandering person back to health and wholeness, back from senseless and dangerous wandering. A Christian counselor can call the counselee back from being so lost, helping him never to return to faithfulness and fruitfulness. The nature of Christian counseling lays a burden on the heart of a counselor to watch on behalf of those who become careless, exposing themselves to the dangers of hurt and lostness.

Pursuing the lost. Despite the best efforts of the whole church, shepherds, ministers, and members, people do lose their way in life. To do so they fail to regard the urging, the instruction, the encouragement, the assistance, and the patience of many.¹¹ They still become lost. Secular thinking believers might give up on them and regard them as deserving of whatever might happen to them or consider that all has been done for the lost that can be done. However, Christian counselors will still pursue them. The nature of Christian

counseling is to exhaust every possibility to save the lost, whatever the reasons for their lostness. The Christian counselor knows the defenselessness of the lost in the midst of danger. He knows the dangers surrounding the lost even if the lost one sees the pleasures in the hilltop as enjoyable. Putting himself at risk, at times, he pursues the lost. The nature of who the Christian counselor is and what he is all about will not permit him to do less. The concern for the lost is never far from his thoughts or actions.

The Father God Paradigm

The nature of Christian counseling is best seen in the focus that Jesus placed on one desiring to be like the Father. Nothing explains the nature of Christian counseling quite like the desire to be complete in the love for all men as the Father does. Jesus set impartial love for everyone as the hallmark of mature Christian love:

“But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous . . . Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:44–45, 48 NAS).

John described the **extent** of the love of God as the giving of His only begotten Son for every person. He described the **intent** of His love in that all who would believe would have eternal life: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life”* (John 3:16, NAS).

Paul described the **motivation** of God in 1 Timothy 2:3–4: “. . . God . . . who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” Peter restated God’s **motivation** as: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

The nature of Christian counseling is focused on doing for the counselee what the Father has done for all humanity: to love each one, impartially, sacrificially, absolutely. On the way to

the ultimate goal of saving the soul and enjoying eternal life, the Christian counselor wants the necessary sun and rain to bless the life of each counselee.

The Jesus Paradigm

From a composite study of the Bible, the ministry of Jesus is seen to be multi-fold. He is seen as a priest, a prophet, the Savior, the Messiah, a miracle worker, a teacher, and the King. He is unique, incomparable, and superlative in each of these roles. No one dare usurp His divinely appointed roles. Yet there is a sense in which Christians continue His ministry, with all of the limitations that our human nature places on us. A Christian counselor exercises the nature of Christian counseling when he participates in the continuing ministry of Jesus. Jesus served His people by becoming:

- **Priest:** leads one to God in worship and service.
- **Prophet:** confronts people in their sins, calling them to submission.
- **Savior:** guides people to the Savior, portraying what Jesus has done to save them.
- **Messiah:** puts on display the fulfilled, messianic promises of God and the singular leadership of Jesus, the Messiah.
- **Miracle Worker:** points people to the wonderful works of God, even in the ongoing work among the saints.
- **Teacher:** instructs people in the truth, in submitting to the will of God, and rejoicing in their salvation.
- **King:** speaks in the name of and with the authority of the King.

The Prayer Paradigm

The nature of Christian counseling can be clearly discovered in many of the prayers in the Bible. Take note of the following prayers.

In 1 Chronicles 4:10 Jabez prayed to God on his own behalf the same kind of prayer that a Christian counselor prays for every counselee. In this prayer the nature of Christian counseling is well accented:

Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” And God granted his request (NIV).

Notice the different accents in Jabez’s prayer:

- **Bless me:** The Christian counselor petitions God to give pointed attention to the counselee and to rain down an abundance of blessings that even goes beyond what is seen as being needed.
- **Enlarge my territory:** The Christian counselor petitions God to increase the opportunities for healing, growth, and service for the counselee, giving the needed resources for such progress.
- **Let your hand be with me:** The Christian counselor petitions God to lay His hand on the counselee in whatever way is needed: to comfort, to direct, to affirm, to correct, to discipline, or to assure the counselee of His presence.
- **Keep me from harm:** The Christian counselor petitions God to shield the counselee from any harm in this dangerous world. He wants the counselee to have every life opportunity to complete his efforts to grow to be like Jesus. The Christian counselor is determined to do nothing but good. He is aware of the fearful potential of hurting a counselee.

For further reflection consider the prayers below and others that accent the objectives of men who cared about people. These prayers express well the nature of Christian counseling.

Philippians 1:9–11:

And this I pray that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Colossians 1:9–12:

For this reason, also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

3 John 2–4:

Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers. For I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how your are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

Conclusion

There are many prayers like these. It seems that the concerns expressed in such prayers well reflect the nature and the objectives in Christian counseling. When a counselor honors the nature of Christian counseling, great good will result. People will receive the help that God wants them to receive and He will bless the counselee with healing and hope.

Thought Questions for Chapter Three

1. Know the four desires needed for effective counseling.
2. Know the five objectives expressed by the Apostle Paul in I Thessalonians 5:14.
3. Know the four things which reflect the nature of the Shepherd paradigm.
4. A Christian counselor exercises the nature of Christian counseling when he participates in the continuing ministry of Jesus reflected in what seven areas?
5. The prayer paradigm is revealed in the prayer of Jabez in I Chronicles 4:10. Know the four elements in his prayer which reveal this.

The Basic Needs of People

Introduction

The discussion on the basic needs of people begins with an accurate understanding of the nature of man. Too much of secular counseling sees man as merely physical or primarily physical. Many others see man as physical and psychological and base their counseling approaches on those two dimensions. A Christian counselor not only sees man as physical, emotional (psychological), and spiritual, but sees all these dimensions integrated into one nature created by God. As Christian counselors, when we speak of man's basic needs, we must speak of a holistic being who needs fulfillment at all three levels. A Christian counselor must be aware and know how to respond to unmet needs whether they may be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Perhaps, it is more important to know how interrelated they are.

- ◻ A person may be experiencing severe emotional or physical problems because of guilt from unrepentant sin.
- ◻ A person may be experiencing physical problems because of poor emotional response to stress or personal significance.
- ◻ A person may be collapsing spiritually because of deteriorating health problems or emotional dysfunctions.

All three of these results are well expressed as David described how he was affected physically, emotionally, and spiritually by unresolved guilt in Psalm 32:3:

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer (NIV).

How does the Christian counselor relate to human nature in meeting the holistic needs of man? It is important to know the nature of man, his basic needs, and to realize how a Christian counselor can supply those needs. There are three areas in a man's nature and four basic needs within man. A Christian counselor builds on the counselee's welfare through a Christian home, a church family, and a personal relationship with God.

An Overview of the Nature of Man

The Physical Nature of Man and Its Needs

The physical nature of man and his needs are well documented in many sources. Many physical needs are better treated by trained therapists in the vast medical field. The Christian counselor can well respond to hunger, clothing, and lodging needs along with helping people find employment, learn how to manage money, manage time, manage relationships, manage conflict, and gain additional life skills. Even in regard to health problems, the Christian counselor can encourage a person to seek the appropriate help, working to remove barriers of inadequate money, travel or lodging problems, care of dependent people, or helping cope with paralyzing fear.

All the while the Christian counselor must be alert to the impact that an unmet physical need may be having on the other two dimensions. He asks, "How is he handling the physical issue emotionally or spiritually?" Re-solving a physical problem may lessen the strain on a person at the emotional or spiritual level.

Spiritual Nature of Man and Its Needs

When it is recognized that man by his created nature is fundamentally spiritual much about him becomes clear. God created man to be in communion with his Creator.¹² Man's problems begin and escalate as he draws further away from God. Relationships more easily collapse, stabbing the person with bitter pain. Moral choices are made that hamper, hurt, and finally ruin the person in many ways. Weighty emotional and

12. Genesis 1–3; Acts 17:27

physical threats have no inner core to sustain them because of the steady approach of spiritual bankruptcy. The Bible calls this falling short of God's design and objectives – **SIN**. It is well described as a spiral in Titus 3:3:

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another (NAS).

The Christian counselor must teach a person to know God, seek God, and find the ever present God by means of Christ. Man is lost, needing a Savior. If a child is not known to be lost, no one begins a massive search effort. If a man is not considered to be spiritually lost, no one sees him in need of help – saving help. God saw him to be lost and mounted a long tortured effort to save him. The Christian counselor cannot help a counselee unless the counselor recognizes the counselee to be spiritually lost and needing Christ to save him. The counselor can help him solve his physical problems, even help him develop skills and values that will improve his emotional life and, in the end, fail to help him find the answer to his primary need.¹³

Man is incomplete, needing a source of guiding strength. Those people who have lived without Christ know the vast difference of living with Christ. The Christian counselor reading the Word with them can help them marvel at the incompleteness of their past efforts. They marvel more at the approaching beauty of wholeness.¹⁴ They have found a compelling standard for life and relationships. They open themselves to the transforming leadership of the Spirit. They smell the aroma of the victory over sin and death.¹⁵ They enjoy an inner calm and peace even if surrounded by their worst enemies.¹⁶ They see in the sovereignty of God their dependency

13. Romans 3:21

14. Colossians 1:28; John 8:32; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 3:16;
Romans 8:14

15. 1 Corinthians 15; Romans 8:2

16. Psalm 23:5; Romans 8:28 ff

needs being met. They drink deeply of the spiritual truth of His superlative greatness and find real meaning and connectivity in worshiping God.¹⁷

The saved cannot live independently of God. A bird leaves its birth nest, a man leaves his father and mother, but one never arrives at a level of spiritual independence or autonomy from God; the reason being because of His spiritual nature. Man cannot sustain himself long.¹⁸ He too easily forgets his standards.¹⁹ He cannot renew his strength. He is always vulnerable to the resurgent attacks of the evil one who is more formidable than any one saint. He must have someone to help him fight or flee and the wisdom to know the difference. He can be strong, productive, and unmoveable but he knows the source of his strength and avails himself of the spiritual strength from his dependent relationship on God.

It is not hard to see the impact of the spiritual core of man on the emotional and spiritual dimensions. No wonder secular counseling frequently fails to help the counseled. The emotionally dysfunctional especially find no lasting solutions if the spiritual problems remain unresolved.

The Emotional Nature of Man and Its Needs

Man has feelings that are frequently and clearly expressed. Feelings of love, warmth, and understanding can add so much to a relationship, communicating love, need, appreciation, esteem, and approval. Feelings of disapproval, diminishments, and disdain can demand change, threaten, or abuse. Try to imagine a person who does not express emotions of any kind. Emotions can be healthy or wounded. Wounded emotions can be healed to feel again and enrich relationships.

It seems that the solution to most of a person's emotional problems are met when three conditions prevail: if physical and spiritual needs are being regularly addressed, if the basic emotional needs are being identified and met, and if there is an absence of emotional defects at the clinical level.

17. Isaiah 6:1 ff

18. James 2; 1 Timothy 5:11–16

19. Philippines 4

The Christian counselor must understand the emotional nature of people, in order, then to help them find an answer to every emotional need.

A Review of Basic Needs

Aside from cultural, generational, group, and personally defined needs, there are some basic observable needs common to all people. A person's happiness, fulfillment, and ultimate productivity is inseparable from the reasonable supply of these needs. Most of a person's problems in life grow out of a lack of these needs being supplied or one trying to supply these needs in a counter-productive way. With help a person can identify basic needs and distinguish between needs and desires. He can learn to correctly appropriate the supply of needs and learn the mistakes he made in a pursuit of needs. Or he can learn how to accept the level on which needs can be supplied and be free of resentments and unfair expectations.

The Christian counselor provides a valuable service when he helps a counselee identify valued needs, learn to correctly pursue them, and develop fair expectations of self and others. With this growth a person learns how to serenely accept the level at which needs can be supplied.

Basic Needs as a Growth Process

For decades counseling researchers and writers have patterned the basic needs discussion on the secular but reasonable conclusions of Maslow. He saw people progressing from primal survival needs through secondary levels to fulfilling realization needs. In one form or another writers have described these basic, human needs as follows:

Level One: Physical, survival needs are supplied by breathing, eating, drinking, and sleeping. Many intense human problems result when the supply of these needs is threatened. Desperation fills the void.

Level Two: Relationship needs are supplied by companionship, acceptance, affection, and sexual response. Man's deepest hurts occur at this level of frustrated or unmet needs.

Level Three: Developmental needs are supplied by recognized achievements, peer acknowledgment of

competency, and measured progress. Common mistakes of hurting, using, and disregarding others in a rush to the top are frequently seen in this area.

Level Four: Completion needs are supplied by realizing one's life-long dreams, seeing the fruition of deeply held purposes, having the satisfaction that life has been worthwhile. Many people push toward this level, doing all the wrong things to survive, and spend their last years in resentment and bitter accusations.

Many counseling opportunities result from people not being free to progress as people, frustrated by obstacles, skipping a level to go forward, and leaving a gap in their development. The Christian counselor has something significant to offer to help people at every level but, increasingly so, as one is released to progress from level to level. Paul, the Rabbi turned Christian, portrayed his arrival at level four in 2 Timothy 4:7:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day.

Perhaps there is rooted in the statement of Jesus in John 10:10 the call to the Christian counselor to help people meet their basic, created needs: "... *I came that they might have life and might have it more abundantly.*"

Basic Needs as a Composite of Wholeness

People either hurt or rejoice at four levels of wholeness, depending if or how basic needs are met. Every person must have a growing **sense of value**. He must be honestly and richly affirmed by the significant people in his life, especially by his father. When the basic sense of value is not created in a child, growth is blocked, problems of passivity, anger, and resentment crowd into the un-affirmed areas of a person's emotional life. An incredible number of problems are consequent to failed parenting affirmation.

Every person must have a realistic **sense of competency**. He must feel that he has the ability to make measurable and appreciated differences in his area of activity. Learning new

skills, applying his knowledge, and repeating successes help, but the affirmation of others confirms that he is regarded as one who can make an impact on others. In the vacuum of perceived failures there seeps in all the destructive forces of self-doubt.

Every person must have a **sense of belonging, a sense of family**. Loneliness, the sense of separation, the sense of not being needed, not being missed, not being loved, and not being able to love someone breaks people in pieces. Family unity, family loyalty, family purpose, and family togetherness give strength to every endeavor.

Every person must have a **sense of purpose**, a valid, reasonable explanation of his direction and activities. The purpose must have the motivation to get a person up and going and pursuing his objectives all day long. The pursuit of a well-defined purpose, most often, ends in fulfilling results.

How does the Christian counselor exceed what a secular counselor can do or say to address these needs?

The Response of Christian Counseling to Basic Needs

Christian Homes

The development of a strong, healthy family responds to all four of these basic needs. In such an environment a child is affirmed as a worthwhile person, given training and encouragement to grow with a sense of competency, is made to feel he belongs in the family, and is motivated in choices of disciplined purposes. Some secular parents can raise such children. However, most secular parents have such unresolved issues that they only pass their dysfunctions on to the next generation. To the extent that a set of Christian parents can find freedom from any crippling experiences in their own development and can gain parental skills, then they can enhance their children's fulfillment of needs. The Christian counselor can help parents gain wholeness and train them in identifying and meeting every child at the point of need.

The place that a Christian counselor begins in strengthening a home is with the personal growth of the husband and the wife. Several choices of personality or trait profiles can be made to help each person identify where he is in need of growth. One profile measures how well one handles stress or confronts anxiety. Another measures how open and

transparent one is and able to comfortably communicate. Still another profile measures how sensitive or self-confident one is in relationships. Another measures how well one manages anger and is able to forgive. Another measures how disciplined one is in planning and getting things done.

It is easy to see how each of these traits would contribute strongly to a marriage or threaten a marriage if deficient. Once the area of growth is identified, the Christian counselor can teach a ready person how to remove any condition that blocks growth and teach the person the life management skills to accelerate growth. Sometimes it may be important to go even deeper to free one from personality dysfunctions.

The husband and wife may need instruction and encouragement in developing their marriage covenant. The foundations of marriage as taught in Genesis 1–2, the qualities of a marriage covenant as taught in Hosea 2:19–20, the instructions in Ephesians 5: 21–33, and 1 Peter 3:1–7 will need to be at the center of teaching by the Christian counselor. This material will be developed later in another lesson of this introductory series.

As early as possible a Christian counselor must provide instructions to help couples become effective parents. Those instructions must begin with the five biblical foundations of parenting found in the Old and New Testaments and continue in a study of the six pillars of parenting and the life management skills with which children need to grow to maturity and to adult productivity. One of the richest and most needed works of Christian counselors is encouraging the development of homes that provide a healthy environment for parents and children to grow to their designed potential.

Just imagine experiencing the joy of making a difference in more and more families' lives as a Christian counselor. Imagine the glory brought to God when a counselor is able to help parents gain wholeness and train them in identifying every child at the point of need. Just imagine the growing strength of a church with more and more families in which the couples and maturing children can be whole and free to grow. Marriages built on biblical foundations and guided by biblical principles honor God. Parents who honor the clear teachings of Scripture experience the results promised by God.

With purpose, preparation, and patience a Christian counselor can be used by God to transform lives, churches, and

communities. The prospect is worth the commitment and the careful preparation.

Church Family

The Church was designed as a Family where the needs of each member are met. Loving each other as Jesus loved each one gives one a **sense of belonging**,²⁰ encouraging each other in every effort gives one a **sense of value**, helping each other discover, develop, and employ ministry gifts gives one a **sense of competency**,²¹ and learning together the purpose of the Church of God gives one a **sense of purposeful direction**.

The Christian counselor has a vital ministry in the Church to lead in the development of an environment in the local church where the needs of every member are fulfilled. In a broader application, the Christian counselor works so that what was said about physical needs being met in the Jerusalem church can be said about his congregation — “*For there was not a needy person among them . . .*” (Acts 4:34).

Relationship with God

Both healthy homes and mature churches are outgrowths of a deeper level of meeting human needs. In a relationship with God the basic human needs are met at their deepest level. There are Gospel facts that responds to man’s basic needs:

God created an incredible universe and honored man as its crown jewel. Creating man in His own image emphasizes the value, place, competency, and purpose of man. God redeemed man by the sacrificial mission of His dear Son. The price of the mission underscores God’s assigned value to man. God called man to Himself and to the Family of believers by an awesome message of grace, faith, and loving obedience that emphasizes a sense of belonging. God sets believers as lights in the world to call all men to Christ, giving the Church a lifelong purpose. God has enhanced the abilities of every believer with gifts to be used in church ministries, affirming a member’s purpose, place, value, and competency.

20. John 13:34

21. 1 Peter 4:10

Conclusion

With all of these divine provisions, God has given man promises and a destiny that are beyond human superlatives. In healthy families, in mature churches, and in a right relationship with God all of the basic needs of man are fully met. The Christian counselor is uniquely placed to help people receive the fullest in all three areas of a complete life.

Thought Questions for Chapter Four

1. Reflect on the fundamental importance of accurately understanding the basic needs of people.
2. Reflect on the dangers of having only a partial view or a distorted view of the basic needs of people.
3. Reflect on an assertion that any one of the three basic aspects of man (physical, spiritual, emotional) is the most important.
4. Reflect on how one's secular family, one's spiritual family, and one's personal relation with God relates to the fulfillment of basic needs.

The Qualities of a Christian Counselor

Introduction

Like a teacher in a classroom or a preacher in a pulpit, the qualities of a counselor/teacher are of vital importance to the positive outcome in a counseling situation. This chapter will consider two major points: who should focus on counseling? And what is the biblical anatomy of a Christian counselor? This study will help determine where the student is in his development, both to measure growth and to set goals for the development of needed growth areas. This chapter will also attempt to discover the nature and character of a competent Christian counselor.

Who Should Focus on Counseling?

Who should focus on counseling? There are five guidelines in determining who will be a competent counselor. Notice the anatomy of a Christian counselor as seen in the qualities and actions evident in those who want to be Christian counselors.

One of the guiding principles considered earlier was that counseling is not for everyone. Everyone can help at some level of counseling, but not everyone needs to focus on counseling as one of his major areas of service. What major questions should one ask to determine, “Who should focus on Christian counseling?”

“Are You Becoming More Whole in Christian Virtues?”

The counselor, prior to any other concern, is a model of what he teaches. Everything that is taught is either enhanced or diminished by what the counselor is becoming. A fuller study of the necessary virtues will explore the following biblical texts.

First, consider the temple experience of Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1–13. The prophet was overwhelmed by the majesty of Jehovah, “*... seated on a throne, high and exalted ...*” Out of his awe of the holiness of God, Isaiah was convicted of his own sinfulness and those around him. He confessed his lostness and was cleansed of his iniquity by an act of God. Fully free, he urged God to use him in God’s redemptive mission to mankind. A person who becomes a good Christian counselor has gone to the Temple and has come out free and compelled to become a part of God’s redemptive mission to lost people.

Second, remember the mountain experience of the early disciples in Matthew 5:1–12. Jesus proclaimed the constitution of the Kingdom, beginning with eight promises of fulfillment to people growing in spiritual maturity. His promises were made to those who were:

- Lovers of simple life styles (“*poor in spirit*”).
- Sensitive to the needs around him (“*those who mourn*”).
- Committed with a sweet, uncomplaining spirit (“*meek*”).
- Highest priority on being right before God (“*those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*”).
- Builder of caring relations (“*merciful*”).
- An open relation with God (“*pure in heart*”).
- Committed to bringing harmony and completeness to others (“*peacemakers*”).
- Courageous and convinced in faith (“*those who are persecuted because of righteousness*”).

People growing in these “mountain top” virtues will become increasingly more effective in helping people.

Third, it is important to possess the qualities listed in Galatians 5:22–26; Ephesians 6:1–20; Colossians 4:1–6; and 2 Peter 1:5–11. These qualities will characterize a person who wants to focus on helping others in counseling.

Fourth, a person who focuses on Christian counseling must specifically focus on his own personal growth in the following virtues:

- **Forgiveness** – up to 60% of the people who are helped by a counselor will struggle with resentments coming from unresolved hurts. The issues remain unresolved because

people do not know how to manage their anger leading to forgiveness.

- **Reconciliation** – building positive relationships begins with knowing how to manage conflict, leading to resolution and reconciliation. Communication skills must be strong.
- **Affirmation** – building people to reach their fullest potential depends heavily on the ability to perceive worth and possibilities in counselees and to affirm them honestly and frequently.
- **Discipline** – Few virtues result where there is a poverty of personal discipline. A person must be able to determine what is most important, commit to effective plans, and complete what he starts.

The Christian counselor must be well on his way to mastering these virtues to enhance what he will teach in the crucial areas of anger management, conflict resolution, affirmation, and discipline.

“Have You Discovered, Developed, and Employed Your Ministry Gifts?”

From 1 Peter 4:10, the Bible student learns that every member is a gifted member. Studies will help one determine the extensiveness and depth of that giftedness. Consider the following giftedness facts:

- God has given to every believer the power to become a Christ like, whole person.²²
- God has determined what kind of people and in which kind of circumstance each person can best serve.²³
- God has determined the ministry priority of each member by the specific potentials He has given.²⁴
- God has given differently to each member a way that he can effectively approach a ministry assignment.
- God has raised up models of dedicated servants who inspire others according to their giftedness.

22. Colossians 1:28

23. Romans 12:4–8: “according to the grace given us” from God

24. Romans 12:4–8; Ephesians 4:11–12

Incumbent on each member is the responsibility to discover all of the five areas of giftedness, develop each area, and employ them in the growth of the Church. All members are gifted and God-assigned to work in the Church. Some are especially gifted to be superb counselors. The Church is particularly blessed when their counseling gifts are developed and employed.

“Are You Becoming Adequate in Your Biblical Knowledge?”

An effective Christians counselor must have a sound and comprehensive knowledge of Scripture. Every value decision, every point of instruction, and every thought that is rejected must be guided by the mind of God as revealed in the Scriptures. There are four specific areas to consider in biblical studies. **Exegetical studies** are developing the skills and acquiring the tools to determine accurately the intended message in the biblical text. **Expositional studies** are bringing the biblical truths across the bridge of the centuries and applying them to meet the needs of modern man. **Devotional studies** involve plumbing the depths of Scripture to grow closer and more intimate with God through worship, piety, and service. **Biographical studies** mean meeting the people of the Bible and learning the intended messages from their lives.

Each of these areas of study is enhanced with a growing knowledge of the original languages (Hebrew and Greek), of biblical geography, world history, ethnic culture, and knowing the different kinds of literature found in the Scriptures.

“Are You Progressing in the Development of Counseling Skills?”

While most people will not become professional counselors, deriving their livelihood in the helping profession, many can become well trained counselors or para-counselors. The pressing needs of people who want to be helped and the great good that can be done in counseling demand that Christians welcome training opportunities. Willingness to read and build a growing, Christian library of counseling material, readiness to take courses in counseling, and developing a supply of counseling tools indicate the desire to progress in the development of counseling skills.

“Are People Coming to You for Help to Cope with Their Problems?”

One of the best indications that one should focus on counseling as a ministry is the number of people who ask for help. People ask help from those whom they regard as understanding, caring, capable, and available. Take note over the next three months how many come to you for help and what problems they present. Thus, you can measure how much you are seen as one who can help and in which areas of need you are recognized as being able to help.

The Anatomy of a Christian Counselor

The Apostle Paul expressed his view of teaching to the brethren in Rome expressing what must be true for all those who will teach today in a counseling ministry. He emphasized three areas that must characterize an effective counselor. Consider the individual qualities of a Christian counselor as outlined in Romans 15:14:

*Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of **goodness**, filled with all **knowledge**, able also to **admonish** one another (NKJV).*

Advancing Qualities of “Goodness”

The word “goodness” can embrace so many of the great virtues advanced in Scripture and exemplified by the heroes of the faith. Consider these qualities of “goodness” that particularly strengthen the Christian counselor in his work of helping others:

- **Compassion** – the Christian counselor must be able to feel what another feels, understand through the eyes of another, and see oneself where the other person is with all of the perceived pain, frustration, and fear.
- **Belief** – the Christian counselor must believe in the human potential to change, especially as it is strengthened by faith. Man can be regenerated by the power of God. Man was created with a purpose and a destiny. What is seen is not always what must be. People can and will change to think, feel, and act like Jesus.

- **Hope** – the Christian counselor works with a vision of the person being changed, becoming all that God designed him to be. He patiently prays, teaches, and serves in hope of a positive result, a joyful change.
- **Love** – the Christian counselor focuses on what will be best for the counselee, works to that end result, and rejoices as good begins to emerge.

These qualities of “*goodness*,” so necessary for the counselor, really are results of other conditions. They grow out of a healthy recognition of one’s own needs, limitations, and vulnerability to sin. They grow out of one’s sense and belief in one’s worth as determined by God. They grow out of one’s confident reliance on God’s power, purpose, and presence in his life.

Advancing Knowledge

Good men and women are the strength of any congregation or nation. “*Goodness*” is the beginning of humble service and towering greatness. However, increasing “*knowledge*” gives direction, purpose, and stability to every good work. There are so many fields of knowledge, but the specific areas of “*knowledge*” that the Christian counselor must master are as follows:

- **“Knowledge” of God in Scripture.** Through a study of the nouns (names) and verbs (action) used in Scriptures one can best know God as He has revealed Himself. Knowing God is a key to making Him known and loved by the counselees. This knowledge of God can be the beginning of the desired change in the counselees. The nouns or **names of God** reveal His qualities and identify His nature.
 - ▶ **He is One.** He does not permit any rival or peer. He is without equal, unique among imitators. He is united in Himself without contradiction, entirely intact, and integral.
 - ▶ **He is Holy.** He is unique, set apart from any others, incomparable, superlatively above all.
 - ▶ **He is Spirit.** He is independent of the material world, above time, space and circumstance, not controlled,

limited, or even influenced by any force; He is autonomous and sovereign.

- ▶ **He is Light.** He is absolute in all of His qualities: knowledge, power, virtues.
- ▶ **He is Love.** He is committed to good, wanting what is best for everyone.

The **verbs** that describe **God's actions** grow out of who He is: His unity, His holiness, His sovereignty, His absoluteness, and His love. These characteristics give strength to all His actions. As a counselor one can give direction, comfort, and assurance based on who God is and what He has done across the ages.

- **“Knowledge” of People.** Jesus knew what was in man. To the extent a counselor can understand the nature, the needs, the purpose, and the destiny of man, then he can become more like Jesus, the Great Helper. Knowing people helps the counselor to see them realistically as they are, understanding the environment they live in, and valuing them as individuals.
- **“Knowledge” of Self.** To get in contact with another, one must be in contact with oneself, in contact with one's feelings, needs, limits, and possibilities. This self-awareness requires honest self-disclosure, resulting in commitment to excel through discipline and change.

Advancing Skills

Good and very knowledgeable men and women are few but valuable to the progress of any activity. These qualities are given an outlet to accomplish much good through advancing development of skills. Differing skills are required to respond to the many kinds of people and conditions.

Different needs (marriage preparation, marriage development, grief and loss issues, depression, compulsive behaviors, and so forth) require different skills. The use of the many methods or developing new methods requires advancing skills.

The value and urgency of counseling demands that a counselor study and adapt the best counseling methods to the circumstances of the counselee and to his own personality. He

must keep current with the rapid development in the counseling field.

Conclusion

These matters will be treated more fully in the following chapter. This chapter has introduced the qualities of the counselor looking first at the kinds of people who should focus on counseling as one of their major contributions to the growth of the Church. Second, the chapter looked at the qualities outlined in Romans 15:14. The reader should take some time to look at himself.

Thought Questions for Chapter Five

1. Reflect on each of the five questions each person must ask in order to pursue the ministry of counseling.
2. Reflect on the critical importance of advancing in goodness, knowledge, and skill in becoming a competent counselor.
3. Based on the response to Question One, conduct a self-evaluation in each of the five areas of focus.
4. Determine which of the three parts of the counselor's anatomy are most vulnerable and design a growth plan.
5. Set aside a block of time to lay before the Lord the areas in which He has freely empowered and the areas that show less evidence that He has intervened. Praise Him for the former; beg Him intervene should there be any attitude or practice that resists His Grace.

The Preparation of a Christian Counselor

Introduction

The immense good that can be accomplished in helping people through effective, Christian counseling urges every counselor to be as well prepared as is possible. The immense hurt that results from poor preparation should sober each one with the necessity and urgency of adequate readiness to help people.

Christian counseling has been seen as “teaching people to think, feel, and do like Jesus.” **Counseling is teaching.** Thus, the admonition of James 3:1 speaks forcefully to anyone who counsels another: *“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly”* (NIV). The consequences of misguided instruction, the influence of unhealthy suggestions, and the damage of unchristian conduct are often irreparable.

Begin this chapter with the mutual and settled conviction that the Christian counselor must lay a solid foundation and spend the rest of his life building on it with sound principles, effective methods, and adequate tools. The preceding chapters have summarized some of the vital aspects of the solid foundation. This chapter will address the continuing preparation one must make to become an effective counselor.

There are some very important aspects of training necessary in becoming a Christian counselor. It is important to learn various methods of preparation and training for becoming a competent counselor. This chapter will help the student discover seven stages of spiritual development necessary in the life-growth of the counselor. This chapter will also investigate ten elements involved in continued preparation through counseling.

Systematic Training for the Counselor

There is a wealth of books and training programs readily available today. With discipline, one can pursue a self-help plan of preparation, but it will be far better to enter a systematic program with stated goals, measurable evaluations, and accountability.

Formal Training Counseling Programs

There is a wide selection of on-campus and distance learning programs in Christian counseling from which to choose. There is wisdom in choosing a Christian oriented program to avoid the secular and damaging influences of most of the available counseling programs. It would be best to choose a program of a school or counseling group that is well known and reputable. What are some of the questions that need to be asked before entering any program? It is important to be well informed on the following areas:

- Does this program begin with the primary fact that a God exists who created the universe, overrules with sovereign authority, and holds its destiny unilaterally?
- Does this program affirm and insist on the Bible being the most trustworthy standard and guide in counseling? Do the leaders in the program submit all of their teachings to the Bible messages as the inspired and inerrant revelation of God's will for man?
- Does this program understand the purposeful creation of humanity, the intentional relationship between God and man, and the personal responsibility that man must assume for his conduct, for which he is personally accountable?
- Does this program set a priority on man's spiritual relationship with God over his temporal happiness and the fulfillment of his human potential?
- Does this program see the Church as the intended context for redemption, rehabilitation, and renewal and the counselor as a yielded servant, an exemplary model, and a prepared guide to those who want to grow to be like Jesus?

A program that is deficient in any one of these areas will be compromised in helping the future Christian counselor to be prepared to teach others to think, feel, and act like Jesus.

Focused Studies

One needs to determine very early what kind of needs touch him most deeply and for which kind of people he feels the most passion to serve. A servant profile will reveal these concerns. See the appendix for a discussion on Sunset's Servant Profile. Knowing these answers reveals where God has assigned the person in building the Church by equipping believers for greater service. Once one knows the assigned places of ministry, he can focus more study efforts in those areas. Counseling in those specific areas will be more helpful to the counselee, resulting in building a more fruitful life, and will be more fulfilling to the counselor who sees how God is blessing the counseling. Likewise, knowing one's ministry assignment saves trying to counsel in lesser areas of giftedness, resulting in diminished effectiveness and fulfillment. Some are drawn to work with children, youth, families, or the elderly. Each person is particularly passionate about serving people in a given situation of need: the emarginated, the lost, the spiritually hungry, the dysfunctional, the distressed, the unchallenged, or the uninformed, to name a few. Happy is the person who knows who he can best serve and what needs are most inviting. Happier is the person who prepares specifically to be available and skilled to help such people in a timely and competent way. Few counselors are so gifted and trained that they can be competent in all counseling needs of all kinds of people. By God's design each person can serve doing great good and enjoying every minute of his counseling, knowing that God is being glorified by the growth in the counselee.

With the knowledge of one's giftedness, the formation of a bibliography can begin in the specific areas of counseling. A growing library of books, audio and video tapes can be developed. Subscription to periodicals that are focused in the areas of giftedness will further counseling competence. Exploration on the Internet will expand one's horizon of available resources in the key areas of one's giftedness. Time and selectivity are major concerns in the focus on specific areas of counseling. A person can be overwhelmed in this information age and distracted from a passionate study of the prime source for counseling knowledge: the Scriptures.

Congregational Para-counseling Programs

Some congregations may have prepared counselors available to develop a congregational training program. This is called para (along side of) counseling or a lay counseling program. Its intent is not to prepare counselors on a professional or employed basis. It prepares people to help in specific areas, along side the more experienced and trained counselors. Most counseling can be effectively done by gifted people focusing their counseling in specific areas. With training the para-counselor can achieve a high degree of competency and can know the areas which need to be referred to others. All trainees are instructed in the foundation principles, general methods, and the desired outcomes of Christian counseling. Then each one is guided in a focused study to gain expertise in the gifted areas. Purposely, in time, most counseling opportunities can be skillfully met by a trained member of the congregation with limited referrals in cases of clinical or critical care.

Shared Preparation

Whether in Christian counseling, in any systematic program, or in continued studies, one can profit from a study partnership with like-minded persons. Regular meetings for mutual encouragement, accountability, shared advice, and exploration can provide motivation, raise new horizons, and correct errant tendencies. If openness permits, help can be sought for the threats Satan will plant along the way: manipulation, self serving approaches, sexual attractions, lax regard for the needs of people, signs of counselor burn out. Such encounters should be contributed to on a regular basis out of the growth of every member and pointedly dedicated to the highest intents toward the people being helped. Confidentiality of cases should be scrupulously guarded so that nothing said or done in the sessions violate the sacred trust of the counselee. Each session is valuable to the extent that it helps each participant grow in motivation, competency, and commitment to serve people.

Stages of Spiritual Development

Growth in Knowledge, Attitudes, Methods, and Counseling Skills

The qualities that characterize a Christian counselor are important, however, continuing preparation to counsel effectively is inseparable from what is happening in the personal life of the person in his quest of intimacy with God. More important than all the tools of counseling is the progression in the spiritual stages of development. It is out of one's spiritual wholeness that the best instruction, the best modeling, the best caring, and the best healing comes to the benefit of the counselee.

Stages of Spiritual Growth

Christian counseling will blossom if a counselor can identify the stage of spiritual growth that he has achieved and discover the stages that remain and take advantage of the known resources to reach the highest potential of spiritual development. The successive stages leading to intimacy with God are:

- **Knowledge** – the foundation for all growth is adequate and healthy knowledge. The beginning of Christian counseling is knowing the essential truths of Scripture, the needs of humanity, and the God-given assignments of the servant.
- **Obedience** – knowledge, to be worth anything, must lead to submission to God's will, purposes, and means. Little good comes until one desires to obey God and begins doing what is right because it is right. A disobedient person is of little help to people needing help. Contradictions in a counselor's life only confuse a counselee.
- **Conscience** – doing what is right must become a personal value, pursued with personal passion. Doing what is right with a personal passion is more than knowing what is right and doing what is right. It is wanting to do what is right because of personal commitment. The counselee needs to know that what the counselor urges is deeply felt and personally experienced. His values are internalized.

- **Discipline** – the acts of faith that grow out of knowledge, obedience, and conscience must be sharpened by discipline. The counselee must see that the counselor is a disciplined person in all aspects of his life, bringing all parts of his life into control to the principles of Christ and is increasingly exemplary. Bible study is among the first steps of the Christian. Prayer begins early. The necessity of forgiveness emerges in the first stages of faith. Christian thinking must characterize the Christian, but all must be disciplined to become real, effective, and fruitful.
- **Devotional** – as one grows the hunger for intimacy with God increases. It is seen in the fervency of his study of Scriptures, in the eagerness to pray, and in the evidence of joy, peace, and love. The counselee who is in such need for meaning, purpose, direction, and substance in daily living and in relationships finds hope and motivation to confront the limiting problems in life by seeing the evidence of devotion in the life and practices of the counselor.
- **Surrender** – in the crucial quest for intimacy with God, one must come to grips with the necessity of a final surrender of every thought, action, and resource. A search must be made to the depth and width of one's soul to see if any part remains resistant to God. A counselor's loving but radical determination to belong only and fully to God is the best authentication of the guidance he gives.
- **Intimacy** – to be one with the Creator of the universe, to be joyfully transparent and comfortable in His presence, to long for what concerns Him, to rejoice when He is glorified, to be saddened by anything that is less than His beauty, and to yearn to be like Him in every way is intimacy that every Christian must deeply desire. A counselor who has achieved this level of spiritual development can have the most incisive influence in the lives of those who, too, are searching for such a relationship with God.

One who progressively grows through and builds on each successive level of spiritual development enjoys the freedom for which God has created each person. This commitment to freedom growth is the essence of the Christian life and among the greatest dynamics in Christian counseling.

Preparation Through Counseling

There are so many possibilities to do harm in counseling before one is ready. There is so much to learn about any area of counseling that one must invest carefully and adequately in preparation. A person must start counseling because counseling is best learned through counseling. Instruction in any form only aims at pushing a student into the main stream of counseling. The following paragraphs contain some suggestions about continuing one's preparation through counseling.

Choose counseling opportunities carefully. The needs are many and often complex, requiring training and experience beyond early levels of counseling. In the early stages of preparation, one should say no, confidently and without shame, to areas that are uncharted by personal experience or training.

One can say yes to areas in which he has had some personal experience and learned results and can more easily identify with the feelings and needs of the counselee. One cannot counsel everyone who needs or asks for help. Neither time or expertise permit one to give indiscriminate help. While selective counseling is always true, it is especially wise as one prepares for effective years of counseling.

Choose to always be a student. One would do well to determine to read ten select books a year on counseling or related subjects and subscribe to several periodicals in Christian counseling. One must avail himself of cassettes, video materials, Internet entries, published counseling programs, and seminars on Christian counseling.

Choose to judiciously select a mentor(s). There is no necessity to meander aimlessly through a counseling situation, running the risk of damaging and not helping a person or discouraging the person to ever seek counsel again, especially when there may be some trained and experienced mentor a telephone call or visit away. While respect for the mentor's time must be considered and the confidentiality of the counselee must be guarded, counseling suggestions can be of immense value as one moves forward in learning to counsel effectively in a widening range of needs.

Choose to record and evaluate each counseling opportunity. One needs to take note of any difficulty in a session, anything that was learned or that was reconfirmed, and any new horizon or idea to be developed. One needs to be

attuned to feelings, especially to any negative or distractive feelings about the person, the course of the counseling, and the desired results. Accumulating a backlog of unprocessed or unevaluated feelings can impede the positive or healthy preparation one is making through counseling.

Choose to cautiously pace oneself in counseling involvement. With experience and progressive preparation one can increasingly help a larger number of persons. However, it is wise to work with only one or two in the early stages of preparation. One must guard against running ahead of his level of preparation. Early counseling successes can often deceive one to throw caution to the wind and make too many commitments.

Choose to avoid counseling contradictions. One's life situation must not leave him vulnerable in dealing with the needs of the counselee. A counselor having marital trouble needs to refer marital counseling to others. One struggling with sexual desires needs to be careful or even avoid counseling with the opposite sex until sexual values mature. Counseling with close relatives, some friends, close acquaintances, employers, or employees can place one in a compromised or ineffective counseling relationship.

Choose to keep all counseling centered in God. Counseling preparation must hold such a focus on the central role of God that it becomes normative and natural to the counselor in every counseling situation. The context of all guidance must be in Scripture. The references for all suggested actions must be centered in the authority of God. The expressed needs of the counselee must be viewed by what is right. External wisdom gained by observation must be measured by biblical standards. Prayer for the counselee, self, the counseling process, and the outcome must accent the relationship. God must be applauded for all help given, all solutions experienced, and all healing gained.

Choose to be persistent in doing good in counseling. Not all counseling sessions or counseling cases will end well. No counselor knows every thing or how to do every thing well. Counselees do not always rush to do what they should. Some are not able, at the point of counseling, to do what they know or want to do. Despite partial successes or even failures, the Christian counselor must persist in his preparation, learning to

do better each time in teaching, motivating, and confirming the counselee in the quest of human intimacy with God.

Choose to prepare as a model for those who follow. Time passes fast. Soon one will be watched by others who are in the beginning steps of helping people through counseling. Careful, purposeful, and wise preparation gives one the joy to help others who have just recently discovered their giftedness to help people. One of the most meaningful contributions to the ministry of counseling is to pass on the torch of mercy and healing to others.

Choose to prepare with the vision of making a difference. Seeing people change directions in life, rebuild relations, become a loving servant, and grow to spiritual freedom can be a full reward for every effort to prepare to be at one's best in counseling. Looking back over years of serving people is a joyful foretaste of God's final invitation to sit with the Great Physician and the healed of all ages.

Thought Questions for Chapter Six

1. Other than the four, systematic opportunities for counseling training, think of other opportunities.
2. Reflect on the ten suggestions to learn through counseling experiences.
3. Evaluate which of the seven stages of spiritual growth seem to take the most time. If not yet at the seventh level of intimacy, note what seems to be the most evident need to promote growth.
4. Write a short essay on one of the ten suggestions to assure that counseling experiences serve you well. Show this to the Test Administrator and then save it in a notebook.

Summary of Part One

Part One of the Introduction to Christian Counseling has considered the Guiding Principles, the Distinctiveness, and the Nature of Christian Counseling. This portion of the book has covered the Basic Needs of People and looked at the Qualities and Preparation of the Christian Counselor. There are many other topics that could fit well into such an introductory section:

1. The Tools and Methods of a Christian Counselor
2. Counselor Approaches — Secular and Christian
3. Ethics in Christian Counseling
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Part Two

Practical Guidelines in Christian Counseling

- Pre-Counseling Interviews
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- Productive Counseling
- Responsibilities of Counselees
- Advances in Christian Counseling
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Pre-counseling Interviews

Introduction

The Value of Pre-counseling Interviews

Pre-counseling sessions give time and context to gaining invaluable insights that will give accurate direction and will accelerate the good done in later sessions with the counselee. There are five important goals that can be accomplished in the pre-counseling interviews.

Discover and Describe the Needs of the Counselee

After a prayer together and reading of Scripture, the session could begin with this sample opening statement, “I am honored that you have come to me, asking me to enter your life to encourage your growth. I really want to be of any help I can. To get us quickly and most directly to the areas of needed growth, can you describe your need?” Even though some counselees may not be able to accurately express or, at this point, want to focus on the major issue, asking them to open the interview expressing their need serves both of you well. Be careful to hold the stated need for further confirmation before reaching a conclusion about the direction of the counseling.

Obtain Background Information

There is a great benefit to learning about the counselee, either through printed forms that are available from various sources or through a prepared informal format, by asking questions about the family, education, employment, relationships, values, and life experiences. This step may not be necessary if the counselor already knows the counselee very well.

Believing that each person is impacted by his history, knowing one’s history can be extremely helpful in understanding much about the person. It can be helpful to give

the counselee the assignment to write a brief life story, emphasizing meaningful experiences, significant relationships, deepest disappointments, and highest joys and dreams, both fulfilled and unfulfilled. Against the backdrop of one's life story, a counselor can be more understanding both of the person and the best way to offer help.

Possible Testing to Verify Areas of Needed Growth

Using a testing tool, a select test or battery of tests, sharpens a counselor's understanding, saves a great deal of time, and even saves reaching some wrong conclusions. The value of the tests, especially if the results are shared with the counselee, is best seen in the evaluation that the counselee has given on himself. The test removes the counselor from having to judge the counselee and leaves him as an objective interpreter of the text results.

There is a wide diversity of views and counseling approaches within the different testing tools. It is important when choosing tests to become knowledgeable in as many testing programs as possible and certified in those that seem most useful in specific levels or the most frequently used areas of counseling. Learn well the strengths and weaknesses of each program and verify the stated purposes of each program. Be aware that some tests meet more counseling opportunities, while other tests are not as useful or not as enjoyable to administer and to report to the counselee. See the Appendix for a listing and comments on frequently used testing programs.

It will be time well spent to ask the counselee to complete an entry test in the first pre-counseling interview and if possible, give him the results in the second session. This activity alone can help set growth goals and determine much of the content in later sessions.

Determine the Willingness of the Counselee

By the end of the pre-counseling sessions, the counselor should be able to both commit to helping the prospective counselee and to project the number of sessions, effort, and time that will be required by the counselee. Obtain a verbal commitment from the counselee to proceed. The counselee must want growth enough to make an investment of time and effort. Counseling that is one-sided in commitment and in investment of time usually does not result in much growth.

Time is often the essence of life decisions. Often the counselor must make a choice to help based on the likelihood that the investment of his time will make the most difference. Do not throw away people or opportunities to help, but while trying to help someone who is not interested or committed to growth, it is possible to miss helping someone else who better understands the value of the time spent in counseling.

There is a relationship between desire and outcome. Sometimes counselors must become involved in people's lives to help promote desire and commitment. Seeing the possible outcome may motivate the counselor to work with people who start with limited desire. The pre-counseling sessions are intended to help determine as accurately as possible if there is any present hope that the counselee will make some good use of the counseling experience. Sometimes a counselor must conclude that for the present the would-be counselee lacks the commitment to get any value from the time spent in counseling. Even with such unwilling persons a counselor can urge them to consider a future commitment to counseling and assure them that the door will remain open for help.

Determining the Right Counselor

Not every need can be met by one person. There are some needs that can best be met by other people. Regardless of greater preparation and experience, availability of time, previously established relation of trust, or because of the existing relation a counselor may have with the needy person, personal ego needs must not interfere with the decision to refer a prospective counselee to another care giver. What is best for the person is the first and last consideration.

Some decisions to refer a prospective counselee can be made even without the pre-counseling interviews. Counseling with employees or employers, close relatives and some close friends, or particularly intimate work colleagues often introduces distractions that either compromises the counseling outcome or burdens the other relationships. Some circumstances may commend counseling with those in close relationships, but serious consideration should be given to a counseling involvement in such cases. The better help might be to become one who encourages, provides resources, and refers someone else who is both skilled and concerned.

In all counseling commitments, the crucial question is “Am I the one who can best help this person?” A specific counselor may not be the best, but he may be helpful because he is the most available, has the best skills, is eager to help, and has the trust of the person.

See the Appendix for a series of questions that can be asked to help a counselor determine if a prospective counselee might be ready to make a commitment to his growth.

If a counselor can come out of the first two pre-counseling interviews with the following results, he will have spent his time well and will have been a blessing to the counselee. It is important to understand the needs for the growth of the counselee through the self-expressions in specific need statements, testing, and a life story. Determine that the prospective counselee will be committed to growth or can be motivated by counseling. Determine the counselor’s own commitment and clear statements of his eagerness to help. Obtain a mutual agreement of the anticipated counseling approach and schedule.

Even if the pre-counseling sessions conclude without future meetings, much good can be done. The person should have a clearer view of his growth needs, should be affirmed that someone really cares, and should have hope that someone will provide help.

Preparing for the First Pre-counseling Interview

Preparedness is the context for competency. A well-prepared counselor inspires trust in the counselee and shows that the counselor regards the person as valued. The counselor is more relaxed knowing that adequate preparation has been made. The counselor’s attitude puts the counselee at greater ease and openness. Being prepared makes the best use of time in the counseling hour where it counts most for results.

Spiritual Preparations

The counselor must continually pursue greater intimacy with God and be concerned about personal spiritual growth. However, beyond the personal dimension there should be specific preparation for the upcoming counseling sessions and

the individual to be counseled. Consider the following spiritual preparations.

Prayer makes God the Senior Counselor. Going into a session without consulting God is relying on human resources, deficient wisdom, and faulty insights. Just as Jesus would not begin His days, make His decisions, or confront His challenges without prayer, a Christian counselor would not dare to approach the teaching opportunity that a counseling session provides without spending some time before God. Just as Samuel knew that he would sin against Israel in failing to pray for them,²⁵ so a counselor falls short in failing to pray for God's guidance before entering the life of a counselee. The counselor needs to be able to confirm to a counselee what Jesus confirmed to His disciples, ". . . *I have prayed for you . . .*"²⁶

Scriptures make the Holy Spirit a counseling colleague. The Holy Spirit is a powerful presence in the lives of people.²⁷ The Spirit convicts people of sin, righteousness, and judgment through the sharply penetrating Word of God. The counselor must be a "person of the Book" at all times, but especially before going into the life of another person presuming to teach the right ways to live like Jesus. The counselee needs to see how important the Scriptures are to the counselor so as to find hope and guidance. There is no more immediate way to bring the Spirit into the session than having the Word fresh on one's mind. Being quick and accurate to give voice to the Word in a counseling session requires some purposeful time with the Spirit, being instructed and empowered by the Spirit for the approaching counseling assignment.

Meditation makes Jesus the Trusted Model. Before going before another person, a counselor needs first to go before Jesus to be found adequate for the assignment. The counselor needs to enter the counseling session unburdened of sin, refreshed in his vision of excellence, renewed in purpose to help the counselee be like Jesus and have a passion for accountability. Paul often prayed that he would be ready before

25. 1 Samuel 12:23

26. Luke 22:32

27. Romans 8:1–27

preaching to others.²⁸ An unexamined counselor is an ineffective counselor.

Reflection makes the counselee the focus of the hour. Before each session, some time must be spent reflecting on what is known about the counselee, what has been learned through interviewing and testing, evaluating how he reacted, looking behind the words and gestures, and considering the possible meanings of what was not said. Insights are not often “flashes of the moment” as much as they are the fruit of much reflection on all the discernible facts and circumstances. Purposeful reflection before each session opens frequent doors of understanding on how best to help the counselee.

Material Preparation

To be a good custodian of time and do something of value in the life of the counselee, the Christian counselor must give adequate time to getting select materials collected and readily at hand. Have a **Bible** ready and the Scripture to be read already selected and freshly read. Having to get up and search for a Bible, thumbing through its pages for the text, and reading it “sloppily” gives very little impression that the Scriptures are important. This is something that the counselee must take seriously as a major part of the desired solution.

Give thought to the content and format of the **prayers** to be led beginning or concluding the session. Preparation gives spontaneity its direction and richness. Prayer formats could include a silent prayer, a counselee led prayer, reading a biblical prayer, singing a prayer, or having the counselee write out a prayer. Some time can be well spent in every session teaching and sharing a period of devotion. One of the richest gifts to some counselees could be stirring in them the joy of worship. Be prepared to give that gift.

Have the **session plan** clearly in mind and write it down to tie each session together. The counselor should have his session goal clearly stated and each step noted to lead to the desired result. Having a well-defined plan will help getting back on track when the inevitable distractions occur. A well-prepared plan permits the flexibility to deal with the desired counselee responses without losing sight of what is best for the session.

Have **counseling materials** ready precisely when needed. The counselor may want to make a counseling assignment. If reading assignments are involved, have the book, article, or Scripture citations at hand. Have tests or test results at hand.

Have any **equipment** tested and ready for immediate use. Fumbling with out-of-focus overheads, discovering that projection bulbs are burned out, having to search for an extension cord, and such things distract from the serious purpose of the session.

Have the **test or questionnaire results** carefully reviewed to be fully familiar with the contents. Few things erode a counselees' confidence in the competency of a counselor than to see him "muddling" through or misreading the test results. Incompetency is not tolerated in the medical field and neither should it be tolerated in the counseling field.

The counselor needs to give some attention to the appearance of the **counseling setting** and even to his own appearance. Unkempt surroundings and appearances do have a negative impact on most people, suggesting that the counselor may not be in charge of his own life.

Have a **clock** in clear view and make every effort to keep the session within the hour. Most of what will be accomplished will be done in the middle of the session. Devotion, introduction, summary, and assignments will richly fill the rest of the session.

Have the **date and hour** clearly in mind to be able to meet again with the counselee, along with a possible optional schedule. Leaving it to be decided at the end of the session by the counselee is not only time consuming, but can be frustrating. Be sure to write down the scheduled appointment for quick reference.

These guidelines surely prove that getting ready to counsel is **time consuming**. An effective counselor, like a successful student or teacher, spends at least two hours of preparation for every hour of counseling. Going into a counseling session without prayer, Bible study, meditation, reflection, and making material preparations reduces the good that a counselor can do in helping a counselee think, feel, and act like Jesus.

Securing a Commitment

Earlier the desire of the counselee for help was stressed. It is important at this point to return to that theme. In the first

sessions, a major objective was to secure the commitment of the counselee to invest in his own growth in future efforts. The counselor faces an impossible task if the counselee is not interested in being helped. During the pre-counseling sessions a counselor needs to feel that the counselee has answered or has grown in making a credible commitment. The following inquiries can help to discover or promote this commitment, as each may apply to the counselee.

Before coming to counseling has the counselee had any painful feelings from hurts he has experienced? This question, if asked sincerely and with sensitivity, places the counselor on the side of the counselee, showing genuine concern about the emotional health of the counselee. Future sessions will provide the opportunity to understand these hurts better and to guide the counselee toward needed healing.

Has the counselee struggled with any problems in his attitudes, values, conduct, or relationships? The major needs of any counselees are integrity, openness, acceptance, and accountability. From the beginning, the counselor should be guiding the counselee in expressing these qualities. Difficulty in self-disclosure may be a major part of the counselee's problem.

Have others expressed to the counselee that he struggles in any such problems? Every person's self-view is greatly formed by the input of others. Many take their clue about conduct from what others express. This question can help the counselor to understand much about one's value system, how much he is open to input from others (even the counselor), and how much he might be ready to invest in his own growth.

What has the counselee done to resolve these struggles and with what results? Most growth occurs directly in proportion to the well-guided efforts of the counselee. If the counselee has known he has problems but has done nothing, the counselor knows that the counselee is in need of greater understanding and motivation. His sense of any results can give the counselor a barometer to measure expectations.

What other things has the counselee thought about to resolve any struggle? The counselee may have some good ideas that he has not yet attempted for fear of failure, for not knowing how best to proceed, or for need of encouragement which the counselor can provide. The question is to stimulate thoughts of how he can get more engaged in his own growth.

What has the counselee learned about himself in the counseling sessions to improve his life or relationships? From the tests the counselor has administered and reported to the counselee, new areas of needed growth will most likely have emerged. Because of the profiles and the counselor's evaluations, the counselee may have the clearest and most accurate view of his life he has ever had. If the profiles have been properly relayed to him, he will have hope that he has never felt before.

The counselor may also want to ask for permission to make some additional observations that could improve the counselee's life? Very likely, with the counselor's experience and training, he will be able to help the counselee complete a picture of the areas of needed growth or help him understand the relation between these areas and other traits or their impact in relationships. Once these issues are seen it will be important to ask the counselee how badly he wants to confront these issues? What price is he willing to pay? The knowledge the counselee may have gained of his areas of needed growth can motivate him with greater desire to get started in counseling, especially if he has gained confidence in the counselor as a concerned and competent teacher. The Christian counselor needs to be clear and specific about the costs of time, assigned work, and painful changes.

It can be beneficial to ask the counselee how he would describe himself if these issues were resolved? The purpose of this question is to help the counselee set some goals to keep him inspired through the course of the counseling and beyond. The counselor may need to help him set specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and tangible goals. During the course of the counseling, these goals will need to be kept before the counselee.

The final question to ask in these pre-counseling interviews is when will the counselee be ready to start? Starting is often the hardest part. Starting makes a statement that a change is required, a new direction has been accepted, and new results of one's efforts will be expected. A lot of emotions, old habits, values, sacrifice of pleasures, and sometimes loss of relationships must be consistently made. This will be the counselor's most decisive moment to start encouraging a direction to be maintained until a new mind set and lifestyle

have become fully owned by the counselee. The counselor's job will be complete as he turns to teach others to grow like Jesus.

Conclusion

Getting started correctly by understanding the counselee's needs, understanding the counselor's own contribution to the counselee's growth, and securing a serious commitment will make the rest of the teaching effort more fruitful and enjoyable. The more effective the counseling is the more long lasting the results will be, therefore, the end results will demand thoughtful preparations.

Thought Questions for Chapter Seven

1. Reflect on the five stated values of planning for pre-counseling interviews.
2. Reflect on how the pre-counseling interviews can enhance the efforts to help people.
3. Reflect on the spiritual and material preparations that one would need to make before beginning each pre-counseling session.
4. Reflect on the questions to ask a counselee to help determine the depth and sincerity of a commitment.
5. Be aware of any possible reasons why pre-counseling sessions might be counterproductive. Respond to each objection.
6. Examine the present level of preparation and set some goals for greater competency. Set a specific date for beginning and concluding the goals.
7. Rehearse and memorize the ten suggested questions a counselor can ask in securing a counseling commitment.

The Counselor And Counselor Relationship

Introduction

Counseling never happens in a vacuum. It can never be successful without a meaningful relationship between the counselee and the counselor. Good counseling is not mechanical, mathematical, or scientific. Its best context is the human interaction in a responsible environment.

Knowledge, skills, insights, and competency are all vital qualities in an effective counseling effort. No shortcuts can be taken either in acquiring these qualities or in exemplifying them in every counseling event. However, equal to any of these qualities, and sometimes more crucial, is the relationship that is developed between a counselor and a counselee. How is such a relationship described? What are its qualities? Are there counseling situations where relationships are difficult? These topics will be covered in this chapter of the Introduction to Christian Counseling. This chapter will explore the counselor and counselee's relationship and examine six different models of relationship between the two. It will also look at ten qualities that are of the utmost importance in relationship building in Christian counseling and the three characteristics of the difficult counselee.

Relationship Models in Counseling

Counselors have universally agreed that some relationship should exist in the counseling experience. However, they have differed widely and even sharply over what model of relationship should be developed. Basically there are six relationship models that would be of interest to the Christian counselor.

The most common relationship model is the one of **therapist/client**. It is seen in a variety of approaches in which

the counselee responds to a counselor's initiatives in seeking information through testing, questioning, reflecting, role playing, confronting, storying, writing, and so forth. From such listening, evaluation, and insight comes the counselor's diagnosis of the counselee's complaint and a prescribed and accountable program for addressing the issue. This relationship is asymmetrical. Much is known about the counselee by the counselor, but little is known about the counselor by the counselee. There is no effort by the counselor to share with the counselee. This model intentionally precludes relationship intimacy. Its emphasis is on the counselor being able to identify the problem or growth need of the counselee and effectively guiding him toward a life-style solution.

The second relationship model is that of **parenting**. A significant number of human problems are determined during childhood development. In some way many parents are unable or unwilling to provide a healthy environment to promote wholeness in their children. The counselor might assume the role of "re-parenting" those who seek his assistance. Children struggle toward adult life with resentments, insecurities, anxieties, low self-esteem, insensitivities, and inadequate and even destructive values and practices. These unresolved issues are at the core of much of the counseling being done today. The counselor becomes the "parent" the child never had or focuses on an area where there has been a parental breakdown. Teaching, affirming, and holding the counselee accountable are at the core of this model doing what a good parent does best.

The third relationship model is the one of becoming a **helper**. In contrast to the knowledgeable professional who diagnoses and prescribes a course of action, the counselor in this model is the servant who stands nearby to help the counselee identify a problem, find solutions, and achieve goals. Such a counselor should be knowledgeable and skilled, but in manner he puts more emphasis on working alongside a counselee. There are no authority issues as in the therapist or teacher/parenting models. The counselor is there to help and accomplish the most good that can be done. Insights are offered, candid observations are made, and encouragement is given. In this model the counselee is often more quickly and more increasingly responsible and in control, with the goal of learning and doing what is necessary to live effectively. The

counselor steps back as soon as possible when help is no longer needed and the short-term relationship is ended.

The fourth relationship model is one of **friendship**. In a culture where there is a crusade for equality, a thirst for friendship relationships and where transparency and disclosure are demanded, it should be no surprise that friendship counseling would become a common model. In this model, counseling is two friends sharing their stories, needs, wisdom, and holding each other accountable in achieving their expressed goals. This model has been practiced wherever there have been friends. It calls on counselors and counselees to become friends in sharing, advising, encouraging, and being accountable to one another. It emphasizes mutual openness, candor, and caring.

The fifth relationship model is the one which promotes **healing**. It is believed that much of the potential in effective counseling depends on a counselor connecting with a counselee. When a counselee feels that there is understanding, a genuine desire to help, and responsible regard on the part of the counselor, there begins a connection between the two that releases the forces of healing in the counselee. This model sees the need of the counselee to be understood and cared for as much more crucial than clinical therapy, knowledge, insights, or counseling techniques. Responsible and wise intimacy is at the core of this model symbolized by the human touch.

The sixth relationship model is the one that requires **confrontation**. This model sees that all counselee dysfunction is the result of personal sin. Thus, the beginning of counseling is to call the counselee to repentance and personal responsibility. This counseling model confronts the counselee with the following questions:

- What wrong did you do?
- What have you been doing about solving the problem?
- What does God say must be done?
- What would happen if you obeyed God?
- What hinders you from obeying God?

Environment is not the issue. The wrong behavior of others is not central. The counselee is responsible before God to reject what is wrong and start doing what is seen in Scripture to be abundantly right. A call to repentance and a commitment to right thinking and right behavior are at the core of this

counseling model. The counseling is characterized by genuine concern for the counselee and an earnest desire that the counselee resolve the troubling issues that his sins have caused in his life. The counseling focuses on a **prophet/sinner** relationship.

There is some truth in each of these six counseling models. Each can be carried to an extreme if considered the whole of truth. One's training, counseling experience, situation, and one's personality can have a great impact on the model he chooses as the most frequently used in counseling. Some good can be done developing any one of the models because each emphasizes the value of some level of relationship. One may want to identify and master the best of each model and be prepared to use what would be most effective depending on the counseling situation and the needs of the counselee.

There are some times when one would do well in assuming the more professional role of a therapist to infuse structure and discipline in a counseling relationship. Some times the deformation of personality can only be reformed by a parenting role of teaching, affirmation, and guidance. At other times only the faithfulness and patience of a helper is needed to spur on a counselee's initiative and accomplishment. At some time everyone needs a friend to be loyal, candid, and understanding, but also demanding. More often than ever imagined many people refuse to risk turning loose of their crippling issues until a counselor touches them both literally and emotionally with his concern, understanding, skills, and high regard. Many times, especially when a person resists acknowledging and accepting responsibility, a counselor must take a confrontational role and call the individual to repentance and accountability.

The point of this discussion is to say that Christian counseling runs deeper than knowing well the techniques, approaches, dangers, and personality theories. It must go even deeper than just knowing the right Scripture for the right situation or knowing how to classify a personality disorder or how to teach right behavior. The well spring of Christian counseling, after a counselor's right relationship with God and with oneself, is to develop a right and productive relationship with the counselee.

Relationship Qualities in Christian Counseling

What are the qualities that insure that a right and productive relationship can be developed? The most desirable and productive relationships include some specific characteristics as they preclude characteristics that are counter-productive. The wise counselor determines to pursue those qualities with integrity and discipline, knowing how important good relationships are to being effective in Christian counseling. There are ten basic qualities that are the irreducible minimums in relationship building in Christian counseling. These qualities will be referred to as clusters because each cluster involves a variety of characteristics.

Cluster One involves being real, authentic, genuine, sincere, and credible. Probably the first message the counselee strains to hear is the core values of the counselor. Thin veneers, contrived concern, and valid contradictions alert the counselee not to trust, not to reveal, and not to cooperate.

Being real means that the counselor's responses come from the heart. Being real means that concerns expressed to the counselee are weighed with thought and individuality as opposed to stock answers. Being real is being true to one's values and purposes.

Being real for the Christian counselor is wanting to do what is right, wanting God to determine what is right. Being real means being in disciplined contact with one's own feelings, needs, and weaknesses. Being real means knowing one's counseling limitations, the value of other relationships outside the counseling relationship, and the commitments already made to others. Being real means being in contact with all that is happening, having clear objectives in the counseling situation, and wanting only what is best for the counselee.

This quality confirms the work and purpose of the counselor as authentic, something that the counselee can trust and in which hope can arise. There will be many times in the counseling exchanges when credibility will be put to a test. In most cases the sincerity of the counselor will mark the pathway to progress.

Cluster Two means being a working model of what is proposed to the counselee. One of the most forceful confirmations that a proposed change or practice is valid is the evidence that the changes or practiced lifestyle is working in

the life of the counselor. Even the best counseling will become blurred by the failure of the counselor to live by his own counsel. While no counselor is perfect, every counselor should be a model of self-supervision, change, and growth. Whatever the counselor asks of the counselee should already be well on its way in the counselor's personal life and relationships. Out of one's personal commitment to excellence, struggles to change, and taste of growth, the counselor can identify with the counselee and hold him accountable until growth becomes a lifestyle.

Cluster Three involves being trustworthy, careful, and confidential with counseling information. Most people want to open themselves up to someone. A basic need of every human is to be transparent in voicing needs, hurts, dreams, and meaningful events. Some counseling is largely giving a trusted, caring, and understanding environment for the exercise of this pressing human need. The trustworthiness of a counselor is crucial to a counselee being able to be transparent and to be open to any needed guidance. Sharing makes one vulnerable and is an act of courage and trust. The careless use of confidential information by a counselor can cause one of the deepest hurts, closing the door to future counseling. The counselee feels betrayed, devalued, and used. The quality of trustworthiness in the careful guarding of counseling information affirms the person, enriches the relationship, and opens the door for further, significant sharing.

Cluster Four is being candid, caring, and attentive. As much as truth sometimes may hurt, the counselee needs and wants the counselor to be candid about the problems being addressed. In most cases the candor of the counselor is not a revelation but rather a needed confirmation to help the counselee face the problem responsibly. Candor is a virtue only when it comes with a caring choice of words, clothed in sensitivity, and guided by an attentive attitude of the counselor. All the while a counselor is being candid, he must be attentive to the reactions of the counselee. The best door to understanding a counselee is through body language, which is eight times more revealing than words spoken.

Cluster Five involves being selective in making promises and faithful in keeping them. A wise counselor is careful in making promises, making only promises that he thinks are important to the growth of the counselee and only those select

ones the counselor is able and determined to keep. Broken promises erode the trust that the counselee must have in the counselor. In some cultures even “perhaps” or a “we’ll see” response is taken as a steadfast promise with a whole set of counselee expectations being formed. Clarity in the areas of counselor commitment is basic to establishing and maintaining a right and productive relationship.

Cluster Six means being stable, firm, committed, and providing decisive leadership. People are more secure in following a leader who knows exactly where he is going and what he wants to accomplish. The more severe the accumulated problems of a counselee are, the more leadership qualities will have to be exercised by the counselor. There are times when the counselor will have to be firm in insisting on a course of action. Being stable or predictable gives the counselor a context of security. The counselee needs to know that the counselor is committed to this relationship for the long haul. Some counselees have spent their lives running from reality. A stable, firm, committed, and decisive counselor can give them a reference point for staying somewhere long enough to resolve troubling issues.

Cluster Seven is being reflective, responsive, and supportive. Some counselees do not need additional knowledge or strengthened skills as much as they need someone to listen reflectively, respond accurately, and be supportive in a valued approach chosen by the counselee. Listening reflectively means to carefully understand and weigh what is being communicated by the counselee. This quality includes follow-up questions, clarifying inquiries, and affirming gestures. Responding accurately means one has clearly understood the message of the counselee and helps him to frame it even more fully and precisely. Being supportive is the skill to encourage the counselee in pursuing an agreed course of action to resolve the problem.

Cluster Eight means being hopeful, positive, enthusiastic, excited, and commendatory. During, and especially after, counseling sessions have ended, a major contribution the counselor can make, both to relationship building and to counselee growth, is being an initial source of hope. Most counselees have lost some degree of hope or they would have never come to the counselor for help. Most counselees come for an assurance that there is still hope. Identifying problems,

finding solutions, developing skills, and projecting a course of change give renewed hope. However, beyond the objective things that should happen, the quality of hopefulness expressed in a positive way on the part of the counselor is like a spark to gasoline. The counselor's enthusiastic belief that the counselee will succeed spurs the counselee forward. The commendations by the counselor along the way assures the counselee that he is going in the right direction in being all that God designed him to be.

Cluster Nine involves being clear in stating boundaries, the depth of involvement, and rightful expectations. There are some boundaries of time and conduct that must be clearly understood by the counselor and stated to the counselee early in the counseling relationship. It is wise to map out the anticipated number of sessions and specify that the length of each session will not exceed an hour, sometimes less. It is helpful, sometimes essential, to speak clearly to counselees of the other sex of what they can expect in moral conduct during the counseling relationship. It can be of great importance to place clear limits on how much the counselee can rightly expect from the counselor. It may be necessary to limit phone calls or even preclude any contact except in the appointed sessions. The quality of being clear in these matters gives structure, discipline, and seriousness to the counseling work.

Cluster Ten involves being determined to bring closure in the context of evaluation, fulfilled objective, and referrals. No counseling should continue without a clear termination date. A mature counselor will not encourage an open-ended counseling relationship. The quality of closure gives purpose and plan to counseling. Closure means that the counselor has the ability to conclude the counseling, to say no to a counselee becoming counselor dependent, or even to say no to his enjoying the counseling relationship to excess. The ability to have projected the length and purpose of the counseling sessions and to evaluate if and how much of the objectives have been accomplished crowns the counselor's work. The ability to know one's own limits, to understand further unmet needs of the counselee, and to wisely refer the counselee to others who are capable of continuing the therapy that is needed is an act of counselor humility and genuine concern for the counselee.

These **cluster qualities** are basic to building a productive counseling relationship and to achieving the results that are

desired. Counseling relationships and results can be threatened by the **opposites** of these ten cluster qualities. Getting emotionally involved to the point that objectivity is clouded by pity, taking sides, or justifying counselee misbehavior will threaten the good that can be accomplished in Christian counseling. Being compromised by “best friend” commitments will weaken the candor that may be necessary in counseling relationships. Being reluctant to call a counselee to responsible behavior because of personal guilt will cause damage in the counseling relationship. Other irresponsible qualities to watch for would include: yielding to self-importance by divulging confidential information, growing impatient with the failed or weak efforts of counselees because they seem to reflect on personal, counseling abilities, and being unprepared for each session because of marginal importance given to counseling in general or to counseling a specific person.

Not giving structure, purpose, or planning to a session may result in confusion of what might have been accomplished or of when the responsible time is to conclude the counseling relationship or when to refer the counselee to others. One who counsels more for what is important to himself than what is needed by the counselee undermines the necessary counseling.

Developing relationship qualities will be one of the surest and quickest routes to effective counseling. Knowledge and skills are strong building blocks but must have the environment of good relations to do what is best for the counselee.

When Counseling Is Difficult

The more competent a counselor becomes, the more people will request help to cope with their problems or to accelerate growth. It is easier to think that everyone who seeks help does so with a voluntary and correctly motivated eagerness to identify his problems, correct mistakes, to find better life responses, or to enhance personal strengths or relationships. More often than not this will be the case and the responses and results of such a readiness to grow will soon begin showing themselves. Then the Christian counselor “will live happily ever after” with the satisfaction that another person has been helped to become a whole person. However, one must be aware, eager, and prepared to relate to counselees at other levels of growth and motivated by less productive purposes.

These will be the times when relationship building skills and goals will be of particular help to the Christian counselor in achieving the clear objectives of the counseling enterprise.

The Christian counselor knows that counselees can be reluctant, resistant, and hostile. However, a difficult counselee does not lessen a counselor's desire to help. It seems contradictory, but there are people who ask for counseling assistance who actually seem resistant to the work of the counselor. The counselor may feel that such counselees actually fight the treatment being offered. They seem to regularly do things that slow down the counseling process. All of the relationship skills of the counselor will be called upon to make any meaningful contribution to the growth of **resistant counselees**. What can a counselor do?

A counselor must be aware of what is happening and avoid taking the resistance personally or reacting angrily. Such resistance most often occurs when the counseling process begins to get close to the root of the problem and changes are urged. The sad fact is that the counselee would prefer the dysfunctions of the present to the fear of the unknown changes being urged.

A counselor must have some insights on the motivations that cause the resistance. For some the healing would mean giving up their dependence on the counselor (transference). For others it means giving up some secondary gains of attention, freedom from responsibilities, punishing others, and so forth. Still for others there is the need of self-punishment for shameful actions or to confirm their own sense of unworthiness.

A counselor must learn the varied characteristics of a resistant counselee and learn how to calmly respond to each one to keep the counseling going forward. There are some definite characteristics of a resistant counselee. Knowing these characteristics and responding appropriately can be helpful.

Silence is the most common response of the resistant counselee, leaving the counselor with the burden of trying to involve the counselee in an effort to understand his needs. The better form of counselor inquiry is to be alert to the feeling level expressed even at the body language level and direct any statements at how the counselee must be feeling about personal problems, hopes for the future, or expectations of the counselor. Expressing discomfort over the silence of the counselee, attacking the silence by diminishing the person,

asking “yes” or “no” type questions, or filling the silence chasm with counselor talk usually proves ineffective in building a counseling relationship.

Laughing frequently and jesting, especially when discussing emotional issues, can be an indicator that the counselee wants to divert the course of counseling. For some, insecurity and pattern laughing go closely together. The context does not seem to merit such degree or expression of humor. Again, a counselor needs to sensitively focus the counselee’s attention on the painful area he is trying to resist. A question like, “From what you are saying I am wondering if you feel some pain in this area. It would be good for you to discuss it some more.” can invite the person to go forward.

Excessive talking is comparable to a team staying on the offense to keep the other team off the field. If the counselee can consume the counseling hour, the counselor will have little time to call attention to painful areas. Often the talk may take the forms of self-diagnosis, intellectualizing the counseling issues, deflecting blame to others, and making empty promises. The counselor is a listener to be sure, however, the counselor is also a teacher and must intervene into the aimless monologue to bring the counselee to face the reality of his resistance to change. The counselor needs to avoid some of the same verbosity and intellectualizing of the counselee by being crisp, to the point, and never far from the issue that needs to be treated.

Generalization, both in expressing understanding of the problem and in making a commitment to change, usually reflects a resistance to embrace the counseling conclusions. The counselor will need to focus on specifics, even asking the counselee to repeat or write down the issues and the solutions.

Crises are not the most common but are quite effective diversionary ways to resist the course of counseling. A burst of tears, a passionate call for pity, accusations of counselor unconcern or lack of understanding, threats of abandoning the counseling, and even threats of suicide if something does not happen are all in the experiences of counselors as they work with resistant counselees. The counselor rarely needs to be greatly agitated, knowing that a diversionary effort is under way. However, the counselor needs to be alert to what nerve was touched, refuse to be manipulated, and go calmly about helping the person to come to grips with the unresolved issue.

Tardiness, either by regularly coming late to the counseling session or frequently rescheduling an appointment or often leaving early, frequently indicates that the counselee is unconsciously trying to slow down the counseling process. Sometimes, the repeated failure to complete counseling assignments makes the same statement. In the “Counselor’s Bill of Rights” a counselor has the right to say to the counselee that their continued effort on the counselee’s behalf depends on punctuality in attendance and in preparation. There are many things that a counselor needs to tolerate. However, condoning irresponsibility that undermines the very structure and desired outcome of the counseling process is not one of them.

Multi-track counseling, that is, going to several counselors at the same time and playing smorgasbord with the counselors is the ultimate diversion of a resistant counselor. No medical doctor would long condone it and no counselor can work effectively with such resistance. With humility, the counselor must confront the counselee with the necessity of deciding to work with one counselor with whom he can be comfortable and can sufficiently trust and to make every effort to confront the painful and unresolved issues. The counselee must be guided to acknowledge the diversionary efforts and to understand that such resistance will never lead to healing.

The **reluctant counselee** is a person who does not want to be in counseling and has come through the insistence of another. Thus there is little expressed motivation to be in counseling and he is only minimally committed to acknowledging any need or working toward any change. The counselor is faced with a non-voluntary relationship. The significant challenge of seeing any change is preceded by building a personal relationship in which the person can begin to see the value in being in counseling.

The counselor begins to build a relationship by recognizing that reluctance comes from not wanting to examine and admit any failure. There is likely anger because someone forced him to come to counseling. There is a threat to an already diminished sense of self-esteem. There may be a perception that only failures come to counseling. This counseling situation presents a high percentage of failure, especially if the counselor has unrealistic expectations. As always in these cases, it is especially true that “first a friend, then a counselor” must be valued.

The counselor's approach will need to include the following considerations. The reluctant counselee must be accepted for who he is, reluctant and uninterested to be in counseling but with feelings and rights. The objective must be kept in clear focus. The reluctant counselee is the first concern, not the referring person or institution. It could be better for such referees if the counselee "shaped up" but the focus must be on improving the person over improving the situation. The first meeting is, at best, an effort dedicated to removing barriers to counseling, gaining a mutual trust and personal regard. It would be a breakthrough if the counselor can amiably explain the process of counseling in such a way as to lessen the mystery and fear associated with counseling and create some interest in the reluctant counselee to explore whether to go forward or not. Explanation of possible benefits of self-knowledge easily derived from testing can be in the forefront of the counselor's efforts to break down barriers.

Many reluctant counselees have become cooperative and excited in a purposeful quest of healing and growth. It is one of the special delights of an effective counselor to be involved in such meaningful transformations.

Like the reluctant counselee, **the hostile counselee** does not want to be in any kind of counseling, probably having been forced against his will. All of the things said of one type is true of the other. However, the hostile counselee brings a considerable amount of anger and resentment and will test the counselor, trying to push all the buttons to obstruct the counseling process or even to provoke a conflict justifying a "walk-out." There will be challenges to the counselor's academic training. There will be skeptical questions raised about whether the counselor has enough counseling experience or experience in life to think that he can counsel others. There may be unfavorable comparisons made between the counselor and others, even of the hostile counselee with the counselor. There will be challenges and rebuffs at every step in the opening session. This kind of counseling can be the most frustrating that many counselors will encounter because it may hold so little immediate promise of a good outcome, and it can cut deeply into the confidence of the counselor. The counselor can make a difference sometimes by applying the following considerations. Avoid angry responses or getting into a defensive or explanatory role when the hostile counselee

attacks. To do so puts the counselee in control of the session and encourages further manipulation. One can always benefit from more training and experience but he can only use what he has to try to help people. One hostile counselee berated the counseling diplomas on a counselor's office wall as being nothing but useless paper only to be told by the counselor that he hoped that one thing they said was how much he was willing to invest of his life to be helpful to others.

The counselor must not respond to the elements of the challenge or even give the hostile efforts any personal meaning, but rather his responses must address the motivation behind the question that lies just beneath the surface of the skepticism. It may be a painful protest to the way he is being treated. It may be a cry for someone to regard him, to care for him, or to treat him with dignity. A good counselor can respond well to all of those messages if he does not make a personal issue out of the hostile counselee's outbursts.

The counselor must communicate interest, understanding, and human warmth. The counselee probably has not had much regard expressed to him in some time. These expressions must come out of a genuine belief in the unique value of the individual and a clear view of what the person could become if unburdened of so many unresolved issues.

In the end, the counselor must communicate regard for the counselee coming to the meeting even though coming may have been difficult. It can serve well to express that he hopes that they both have come to know each other better and regard one another more and that they can meet again soon. Genuine affirmation of some positive qualities of the counselee would be in order. Here, the counselor could describe the process of counseling and cite some immediate benefits to be gained in a second session. It could help if the counselor can dismiss the ones who referred the counselee from the counseling equation and offer a one-on-one relation to the counselee. Such as, "The next time you come, you do so without being sent. You come on your own decision. I promise to regard you as one coming because you want to discover something that may better your life."

Conclusion

To win the voluntary participation of a former, hostile counselee takes the sting out of all the stress and frustration of

the process and makes the effort worthwhile. A friend will have been gained and a whole person is in prospect. The Christian counselor joins Paul the apostle and all concerned counselors of the ages in “making it my aim to present every man whole in Christ Jesus” (cf. Colossians 1:28).

Thought Questions for Chapter Eight

1. Know the six types of relationship models in counseling.
2. Know the ten qualities that are minimums in relationship building in Christian counseling.
3. Describe three types of counselees who make counseling difficult.
4. Know five of the seven characteristics of a resistant counselee.
5. Reflect and understand well the five most common counseling models.
6. Reflect on the ten clusters of characteristics of relationship qualities in Christian counseling.
7. Reflect on the times and circumstances that a counselor will encounter obstacles in helping difficult people.
8. Reflect on the value of prayer, knowledge, and competency in helping resistant, reluctant, or hostile counselees to take advantage of the opportunities for growth.
9. Determine which counseling model might best describe how you would counsel others. Foresee and report on how you can be prepared to get the best of all five models.
10. Over the next week, pray that God will accelerate and deepen your growth in the relationships qualities of Christian counseling. Record them on a card to refer to it frequently.

Productive Counseling

Introduction

The adage, “Anything worth doing is worth doing well” applies especially to Christian counseling. Helping people think like Jesus, feel like Jesus, and act like Jesus is worthwhile. It is worthy of good men and women who invest much time and effort to make a difference in the lives of people in whom God has made some deeper investments. This chapter will propose some ways by which Christian counselors can make the counseling enterprise one that is worthy of serious people. It is important to determine the qualities and characteristics of productive counseling. Anyone interested in Christian counseling needs to consider three gifts which constitute the elements of a guiding focus in successful Christian counseling. They will need to examine and evaluate several things which will serve to equip them with a guiding approach to counseling. And they will need to learn the sheer joy of helping people in their problem times in life.

A Guiding Focus

A far-reaching rediscovery of the last decades will reveal that Christian people differ widely in their ministry gifts, but all the gifts are focused on fulfilling God’s vision of an all-sufficient Church. The more Christians can discover their giftedness, develop each gift toward its potential, and use their primary gifts effectively, the more the Church will achieve its purposes on earth. The gifts can be seen in three areas: gifts of passion, gifts of service, and gifts of ministry approach.

From observation and personal experiences, it is evident that individuals have greater capacities to serve one kind of people more than other kinds of people. Different people are particularly drawn and feel deeply about ministering to select

kinds of people in particular circumstances. Some people have an infinite amount and quality of concern for little children, teens, adults, or senior adults. In each of these age categories different one may have pointed concerns for specific circumstances common to each group. For these reasons individuals are happy in preparing and serving as nurses, teachers, preachers, counselors, and servants of all kinds. They serve long, they serve well, and they serve with a sense of fulfillment. There is a marked difference between doing something for which there is a strong and driving passion and doing something though right and necessary for which there is a lesser motivation. Every Christian needs to know what kind of people and with what specific needs God has assigned and make the preparations to serve them.

Among the **gifts of passion** are the gifts that call people to be gifted counselors. Some can become gifted counselors to children, teens, adults, or senior adults. Some can be especially good in child development, marriage counseling, conflict resolution, drug abuse, financial management, parenting, prison counseling, and clinical dysfunctions. Each gifted Christian can soon find an age group and the specific circumstances that he feels most called to serve. When the gift of passion is identified and preparations have been made to serve effectively, God will give the opportunity to use the gift fruitfully and joyfully.

Gifts of service provide a capacity for a Christian to be equipped to excel in specific ministry areas of the Church. Testing and experience confirm that each Christian has three to four primary gifts and the same number of secondary and tertiary gifts. While each one needs to develop skills in each gifted area, special attention needs to be spent in the primary gift areas. These are areas of God's specific assignments in the Church (cf. Romans 12:6–8; Ephesians 4: 11–12). In these areas of ministry, God will hold each gifted believer particularly responsible and accountable. The Church needs each gifted member to excel in the primary areas of giftedness to carry out its mission in this world.

Among the ten or more ministry gifts are the three gifts most necessary to be an effective counselor: the **gift of mercy-showing** is the capacity to be sensitive, caring, insightful, patient, kind, and understanding. The **gift of exhortation** is the capacity to make truth real and to help people translate truth into practical, fruitful living. The **gift of shepherding** is the

capacity to strengthen, to lead, to correct, and to develop people.

All of the qualities of these three gifts, when they are developed, serve well in assisting people through times of need and growth. They blend together in making a Christian a superb counselor.

The **gifts of ministry approach** are less understood but are among the richest of God's gifts. An exciting discovery is that God's people do the same things in service but differently. The differences too often become the cause of conflict rather than the cause of unity and greater productivity. Each counselor will approach people differently than others. Basically, there are four gifted approaches to any ministry.

The first approach is used by **task oriented/structured people** who greatly tend to set goals for each time period and organize themselves to reach each objective. These people see this approach as the most effective and productive, the best use of the available resources. **People oriented/structured** people focus on people, relationships, and service. People's needs take precedence over getting all the planned tasks completed, yet sharing with the task oriented person, the people oriented person places great importance in being well organized in relating and reaching out to people.

People oriented/unstructured people, like the people oriented Christians, focus on serving people, but prefer to do so without any specific or set schedule. They like to let the people's needs of the hour dictate the schedule and the priorities. **Task oriented/unstructured** people gather together the love for getting things done completely and being free of the tyranny of specific planning.

God must have actually believed that all of these diverse people could work harmoniously and fruitfully together. He created each one and called all people by the same Gospel to be in one Family, charged with fulfilling common purposes. It is easier for some to relate to others because each group shares something with two other groups: structure/structure, people/people, unstructured/ unstructured, task/task. It becomes more difficult when nothing is shared. The task/structured, people/unstructured, task/unstructured, and people/ structured have to work harder to relate and team together. However, each approach brings something very rich and very necessary to every group action.

Counselors working alone or in a group ministry will each approach an identical counseling situation differently according to his giftedness. This fact calls upon each counselor to maximize the best of the gift and guard against the possible abuses of the gift. For example the task/structured counselor can be highly productive but can become absorbed in following a counseling plan and forget the feelings and diversities of people. He might insist on everyone marching by the same drum beat. The people/structured counselor can achieve a marvelous balance, but fail to achieve some important parts of the counseling agenda in deference to the counselee.

The task/unstructured counselor will be highly productive and flexible to meet unforeseen situations but may not make concessions in his work schedule for people. The people/unstructured counselor can seize added opportunities to serve people because of his alertness to people and being able to freely respond to the moment, but he can fail to meet the expectations of others who depend on prior promises.

The ideal is for each counselor to know his own gifted approach and to appreciate the giftedness of others, seeing how valuable each approach is to a group effort. Some attention should be given to acquiring the skills of each approach and using them to some extent in confronting the various situations that arise in the counseling process.

Productive counseling results when a counselor maintains a guiding focus on his giftedness both to discover, develop, and employ each gift of passion, each service gift, and the gift of ministry approach.

A Guiding Purpose

The navigators of old traveled the world following a “guiding star.” Counselors, no less, must have their guiding stars, their stated purpose, and hold steadfastly to it in making a difference in the lives of counselees.

There is a pronounced relationship between intention and accomplishment in the lives of productive people. In great part, one’s statement of purpose must be consistent and supportive of a person’s giftedness or else one’s giftedness might frame one’s statement of purpose. Paul’s giftedness gave voice to his statements of purpose:

So that [I] . . . may present everyone perfect [whole] in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16).

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation (Romans 15:20).

Paul was a gifted evangelist and a gifted counselor (cf. Romans 15:14). His statements of purpose came out of the richness of his giftedness.

To be at his best, each counselor should have a purpose statement that flourishes in the exercise of God's appointed gifts. It could begin as Paul's statements began: "I make it my aim," or "*I am compelled to preach.*" Christ, gifted without measure, was clear with His omni-purpose statements:

"[I] . . . the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10).

" . . . I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

A counselor with a guiding purpose will have clear direction in every session and in the whole of the counseling process. Every counselee will benefit from the guiding purpose. Time will be used to its maximum value when the counselor is guided by a terse, clearly stated, gripping, and consuming purpose.

Truman Scott's Sample Purpose Statement

I have chosen a purpose statement for my life and my counseling that puts emphasis on my own personal and responsible relationship with God and my ministry to people in need: "**Living Christ every day, making Him real to everyone in every way.**" This purpose inspires me to keep growing in my intimate walk with God, which is foundational

to being an effective counselor. This purpose keeps me motivated to think of the need for Christ to be central in the lives of all. This purpose alerts me to look for the many ways that I can make Christ as real to others as HE is to me.

A Guiding Approach

Whether a counselor is more task or people oriented, structured or unstructured in how opportunities are confronted, there must be some thought given to a systemic approach to counseling. Depending on the individual counselor, the approach will be more or less task oriented and structured. The common desire is that a difference will be made in the lives of the counselees. How might counselors with diverse orientations be productive in their counseling? There are four considerations in getting the most out of each counseling opportunity: seeing, preparing, doing, and enjoying.

The counselor needs to spend some time before every counseling session visualizing the flow of the meeting, how to conduct the relationship, anticipating the desired responses of the counselee, and picturing the desired outcome. Not everything may happen as foreseen, but looking ahead adds to the preparedness of the counselor, increases alertness, improves the responses, and keeps goals for the session in clearer view. Failure to take time to see may be approaching the warning of the proverb, "*If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a ditch.*"²⁹ A counselor's leadership is no better than his vision. A counselor's vision gives content, purpose, and direction to every session.

With a clear vision of the session, especially the desired outcome, a counselor will know what is needed to make the experience a productive one. The session can be planned as to areas to be addressed, problems to be resolved, questions to be asked, and responses to be solicited. Areas of needed research and learning can be identified and processed to make the session rich and meaningful. Resources can be collected, organized, and placed within easy reach. Prime time can be given to inviting God to supervise the session and add His blessings. The counselee is worth the preparation being made

and will be encouraged to see that the counselor gives time to be prepared for every session.

Knowing the desired direction and outcome and being prepared to conduct a productive session, the counselor is ready to accomplish the chosen objectives. After greeting remarks, the session needs to get started as soon as appropriate. Often, much time is given to non-productive exchanges, sometimes filling most of the counseling hour. Extended visiting precludes accomplishing the purposes of the meeting.

Along the course of the session, the counselor needs to refer to the counseling plan for the session, adjust the plan to meet necessary changes, but push forward with the aim of accomplishing the preplanned objectives. Staying as closely as possible to the planned track, a counselor can bring the session to completion within the stated time. In the concluding moments, the counselor needs to wrap up the session in terms of what was discussed, agreeing on an evaluation of what was accomplished, and making preparation for the next session.

The doing part of counseling is the most visible, bringing both satisfaction and challenge to the counselor and having the most impact the counselee. However, the counseling hour would not be productive unless the seeing and preparing parts were done well. Nor would future sessions be as productive without the fourth part of the counseling approaches.

The session is not over when the counselee leaves. Productive counseling takes some purposeful time to evaluate the whole process. The evaluation should include the answers to the following questions. Was the plan accomplished? Was the counseling plan followed and how was each step effected? Were any steps deleted and why? Were any considerations added during the course of the session and why? Were the results achieved? Even with deletions and additions, were the pre-session objectives achieved? Could they have been achieved more completely? What was learned to make the next session more helpful? What deficiencies were exposed? What areas need to be researched further to enhance future counseling? What preparations need to be made?

The last act of counseling is the most necessary and noble. Giving thanks to God for His provisions, asking for His continued supervision, presenting the counselee to God, and pledging to bring joy to God through dedicated and improving service.

Whatever one's ministry approach may be, structured to unstructured, people to task, one must make the most of the opportunities in counseling that God gives. So much is possible when one person is given renewed hope, when obstacles are removed, and when new direction and skills are gained. Responsible counseling is the means to making that difference in the life of people, one person at a time.

A Guiding Commitment

Productive counseling involves a commitment to life-long growth. In the first steps of counseling there is excitement in learning. Faced with a new problem in counseling there is both desire and effort given to research the issue. These special learning moments are exciting. However, the real difference in being productive or not is the commitment to life-long growth. The productive counselor is committed to a continual lifestyle of learning. Particularly in the areas of greater giftedness, he will determine to master everything to be learned in that field of counseling. While there comes a sense of confidence that one has become effective in select fields of counseling, there must never come a time when one feels there is not more to learn. The rush of excitement when a new resource is discovered or a new advance is proposed should never be allowed to die.

Growth resources are now available as never before. When counseling was emerging as a separate discipline, all of the earlier resources were books and articles written by secular theorists. Educational institutions began adding courses and counseling departments to their academic offerings. Secular associations for professional counselors emerged in the Western world. As counseling was increasingly recognized in Christian circles as a specific and valued ministry, there has been an explosion of resources. The Christian counselor has wide and rich choices to make to continue his life of learning.

Books by the hundreds are available in bookstores by Christian oriented writers covering a wide range of counseling issues. Taped audio and video cassettes address individual subjects and entire courses. Certified and degree programs are available through numerous colleges, universities, and institutes. Counseling associations are growing in number and

quality to help keep counselors on the cutting edge of knowledge in the counseling field.

Most of these resources and many more can be found through research on the Internet by signing on to “counseling,” “Christian counseling,” “American Association of Christian Counselors,” Internet book companies, and other sources. Some of the more common names of noted writers are: Gary Collins, Lawrence Crabb, Gary Smalley, Wayne Oats, Jay Adams, and H. Norman Wright.

A Guiding Expectation

Too much is made of the stress, frustration, and the limited success of counseling. Much more needs to be said of the joys in Christian counseling. The difficulty has been that a counselor does not have a continuing knowledge of all the growth being experienced in the lives of counselees. Too often the counselor joins with Jesus in wondering why only a tenth of those healed ever come back to express gratitude (cf. Luke 17:16–17). A significant amount of the counseling results must remain forever unsaid and nameless, protected by confidentiality and only discussed in the most general of terms. Yet the counselor does know enough to be assured that many lives have been changed, values affirmed, marriages saved and strengthened, child development enhanced, hurts healed through genuine forgiveness, conflicts resolved, clinical dysfunctions corrected, new skills and visions claimed, new ministries launched, and churches united.

Again and again, God has been glorified. It is sheer joy to the Christian counselor to look back over a life of counseling and reflect on the ones whose lives are richer, more fruitful, and closer to God through his counseling efforts. The joy of being a counselor can be seen in the comments of John the Apostle:

It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 3–4).

The joy of being a counselor can be seen in the commendations of those who were taught by counselors:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you (Philippians 2:19).

For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere (1 Corinthians 4:17).

The joy of being a counselor can be seen in the continuity of the message through those he has taught:

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).

The joy of a counselor is seen in the work of other counselors:

I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Romans 15:14)

The joy of a counselor is seen when even a few of those benefitted do return to God with gratefulness in their hearts:

[One of the ten lepers who was cleansed] . . . threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him — and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?” (Luke 17:16–17).

Conclusion

If the purpose of counseling is to glorify God by presenting everyone **whole** to Him (cf. Colossians 1:28), then Christian counseling has to be one of the most promising joys of all Christian ministries.

Thought Questions for Chapter Nine

1. Know the three gifts which constitute the elements of a guiding focus in successful Christian counseling.
2. Reflect on four considerations in getting the most out of each counseling opportunity.
3. The counseling session is not over until there is evaluation. Know the four areas of evaluation.
4. Know Truman Scott's purpose statement.
5. Reflect on the immense value, even necessity, of identifying, developing, and employing one's giftedness so as to gain a guiding focus.
6. Reflect on the relationship of one's focus on ministry giftedness and one's stated purpose.
7. Reflect on the vital, systemic steps in one's approach to counseling.
8. Reflect on the joy you will have each time you have helped someone to think like Jesus, feel like Jesus, and act like Jesus.
9. Avail yourself, if not already done, of a profile on ministry giftedness to define your primary gifts. With results in hand, foresee how God can use you as His effective servant according to His gifts to you.
10. Be open to a counseling opportunity and make a pointed effort to use all parts of the suggested approach: seeing, preparing, doing, and enjoying.
11. Give attention to building a list of resources to enhance your counseling efforts.

The Responsibilities of a Counselee

Introduction

A full chapter will now to be devoted to responsibilities of the counselee. Counseling can be no more productive than the level of seriousness of the one being counseled. The counselor can help the counselee in his part to get the most out of the counseling experience. Such matters of initiative, disclosure, integrity, accountability, punctuality, credibility, closure, and discipline will be featured in this chapter. This introductory book to Christian Counseling has been all about the counselor and effective counseling. Only marginally has it covered the counselee. Is the counselee just an object, a minor player in the drama of counseling? Actually, the counselee is the only reason counseling exists. Everything said and done to improve counseling is to benefit the counselee. Without counselees all the counselors would be looking for something else to do as a ministry or professionally.

Consider the responsibilities of a counselee. Many of these responsibilities will have to be taught or urged in the counseling process by a competent counselor. Nevertheless, the fulfillment of these responsibilities belong to the counselee alone. Counselors who help counselees fulfill their counseling responsibilities make a significant contribution to building a triumphant army who revels in repeated victories all to the glory of God. This chapter will help the student/reader to learn a definition of and the nature of responsibility and to discover eight (8) different areas of responsibility to be instilled in the counselee.

The Nature of Responsibilities

One of the major reasons many counselees have problems is because they have not learned to be responsible or are caught in a relationship where others have not learned to be responsible. Responsibility is a must in discipline, in self-supervision, in keeping promises, in building and maintaining relationships, and in honoring values.

Being responsible speaks of being “capable of responding” to the surrounding situation or persons. This is largely a learned ability. Adults are often deficient because insufficient learning took place in their child development to enable them to cope responsibly. Many adults have had to learn to act responsibly during adult years that otherwise should have been years of productive behavior and fulfilling relationship development. This deficit is what brings a majority of people to ask for counseling assistance. The Christian counselor accepts the invitation to work with people knowing there may need to be a rebuilding of a deficit value system, an introduction of a new set of relationship skills, a repairing of a predictable list of emotional hurts, or teaching other life skills such as communication, conflict management, or financial management.

From one point of view, the major goal of every counselor is to aid the counselee to become more responsible in life. Adding the Christian dimension, the Christian counselor aims at helping the counselee to be responsible before God, to serve others humbly and responsibly, and to be whole within oneself.

Counselee Responsibilities in Counseling

An irresponsible counselee leaves little opportunity for the counselor to be of much help. This makes teaching the counselee an important part of many counseling relationships. A counselor must teach and urge the following responsible responses: the responsibility of initiative, disclosure, integrity, accountability, punctuality, credibility, closure, and discipline.

The first responsibility is the one of initiative. Many counselees have to be urged, seemingly pushed, to go for help. This is especially true for men. Some entirely refuse to ask for help that would be readily available and sometimes at no cost other than initiative. The effectiveness of the counseling is

closely related to how responsible the counselee is in asking for help. The following statement of Jesus is very applicable to our topic of initiative:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you (Matthew 7:7).

Initiative is often hindered by learned pride, low self-regard, negative perceptions of the value of counseling, hurt feelings, and unresolved anger. These issues will long remain and dampen initiative even when life is coming unraveled unless something intervenes. Desperation will sometimes motivate people to ask for counseling assistance, however, we need to take more positive measures to elicit initiative.

A loving family can sometimes win over the reluctance of a would-be counselee. A church family, who knows that partly from their own failures and triumphs, knows how to understand, accept, and love is one of God's best invitations to reluctant counselees. A Christian counselor, whether he is an elder, a preacher, or a faithful member who has been effective in building relationships and reaching out to many, will be more easily sought out by a person having difficulty in taking initiative to seek counseling.

A congregational leadership who affirms the value of Christian counseling by scheduling frequent seminars, making counseling readily available, providing publications on spiritual/counseling needs, seeing to it that biblical help in practical living is frequently presented in all areas of the church, and are encouraging para-counseling training will create an environment where less stigma is attached to asking for counseling help. A membership who speaks of how Christian counseling has been a blessing to them will encourage others to seek needed help.

The **first step of initiative** is a commitment that requires courage, hope against hope, and humility. The person who makes this step should be both encouraged to take the step and applauded when he does take the initiative to do something right and good for himself or others.

No counselor can read minds. Not every fact or feeling can be known from prior knowledge of the counselee. A counselor's guessing or presuming can be disastrous. One of the key sources of information and the beginning of

understanding for the counselor is a counselee who will make **responsible disclosures**. This is the second responsibility of any counselee. Counselee silence, evasion, superficiality, partial, distorted responses, and allowing a counselor to assume untruths are all signs of a long, unproductive counseling experience. Fortunately most counselees are responsive and very helpful in making the needed information readily available to a good counselor who is skilled in assessing just what is needed to understand the situation. Why would a counselee engage in any of these above activities especially if he came to be helped?

People are reticent in talking about subjects in which they may be diminished, accused for wrong behavior, or situations in which someone toward whom they feel angry is seen as right. People may be unsure and will test the counselor to determine if he can be trusted before they will begin full disclosure. Some topics are harder to discuss: sex, finances, personal failures, personal faith.

Perceptions of the wrongness of sharing with anyone, especially leaders or professionals, make people uncomfortable. A counselor must be aware of the possible difficulties the counselee might feel and be ready to help bridge the discomfort. Several considerations need to be evaluated. The counselor needs to be **attentive** to both words, tone, and expressions that can communicate his pre-judgment bias or disdain to the counselee. The counselee may full well know that he is wrong, but most early meetings are not usually the appropriate place or time for what would be regarded as rejection. If the counselor is reputed to be harsh, rigid, and quick to condemn, the readiness of the counselee to be open and transparent would be predictable. Many preachers are not sought out for counseling because of their known treatment of others or because of their harsh views presented in public teaching.

The counselor must **communicate** a genuine desire to understand and not judge, a sincere intent to help and not diminish, a dependability to be loyal with shared information and not reckless to the hurt of the counselee, and an availability to work through the problem with the counselee, not leaving until the job is done. Early in the counseling relationship the counselor must give the counselee a **solid basis of hope**, things

can be better and the desired results validate all of the right efforts.

In such a counseling context, a counselee will find greater motives to be open and transparent, and the counselor will soon have the basis for understanding the situation. Then he can begin to be helpful in guiding the counselee toward valid decisions and behavior.

The third responsibility for every counselee is to be able to fulfill the call for **integrity**. Reluctance to reveal is one thing, while intention to distort is entirely different. While most counselees are honest or really make an effort to tell the truth as they see it, some will just not be truthful. The counselor knows that it is still true that “*. . . the truth will set you free*” (John 8:32) and hiding behind a lie or living a lie will greatly obstruct the counseling process and largely preclude the desired results. What does the counselor do to insure that the counselee fulfills the responsibility of integrity? In the first meeting, the expectation of integrity needs to be stated. The counselor needs to say, “You can expect me to be honest and open with you and I expect no less of you.”

There should be a special effort made to commend the counselee when he struggles and succeeds in being honest, especially when there is a need to be in contact with long repressed feelings. When it becomes obvious that the counselee lacks integrity, an appropriate recall to the earlier expectations must be made. Dishonesty left to go un-confronted and unresolved derails the counseling process. Some counseling may have to be interrupted or precluded if there is a pronounced practice of dishonesty. Until that deficiency is resolved, there is no context for helping a person. Working with honest people is one of the greatest teaching experiences one can imagine. There is understanding, response, effort, and a sure growth result.

Good counseling includes assigning and expecting a counselee's completion of assignments. There may be reading assignments, completing questionnaires, listening to well chosen audio or video tapes, Bible readings and reflections, writing assignments, projects like assisting or visiting others, or attending certain events. The counselee sometimes learns more from assignments than from counseling sessions. If the counselee has really made the connection between what a counselor wants him to learn and how much richer his life will

become, this fourth responsibility of **accountability** will be a delight to both the counselor and counselee. How can the counselor make that connection more obvious?

The counselor must think seriously about every assignment; it must be more than “busy work” or general in nature, and it must be directly related to the individual need of the specific counselee. The counselor must state clearly the connection of the assignment with a valid, desired result in the life of the counselee. Occasionally, the counselor might communicate with the counselee between sessions on how the assignment is progressing and if any help is needed. This attention adds credence to the value of the assignment and underlines the responsibility of the counselee to complete the assignments. When the assignment is presented in the next session, the counselor needs to commend those parts that reveal effort and learning and give candid suggestions on strengthening any part. Reassignments of deficient parts where little learning is evidenced would be appropriate. Learning is the value and purpose of accountability.

There are other areas of accountability in a positive counseling process. Many changes may be discovered during the course of the counseling. The counselee needs to be confronted periodically with some commitments to be made to change past values, attitudes, and behaviors. Calls to accountability should be as frequent as seems necessary.

An important part of counseling, in some cases, is to help counselees gain a deep and reverent sense and practice of accountability to God. Valued time may need to be spent in the counseling sessions teaching them the elements of prayer, confession, the art of self-examination, the Christian disciplines, and a purposeful and lifestyle study of the Word and sharing its message with others.

Particular attention, for some, needs to be given to accountability in relationships. The model of 1 Corinthians 13, the portrait of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1–8, or the traits of Galatians 5:22 can be of monumental help in the growth of accountability in relationships. If the counselee lacks the trait of accountability, counseling should provide the opportunity for needed growth. Holding the counselee to accountability in assignments, commitments made, and in growth is an important service that the counselor must give.

The time of most counselors is limited. Being on time and ready to make the best use of the time allotted for the counseling session contributes to the value of the counseling, permits the counselor to use the limited time wisely, and is the responsible thing to do. Already noted in an earlier chapter, repeatedly being late, leaving early, or changing the appointment may indicate a resistance to the counseling. In any case, the need for responsible involvement must be the commitment of the counselee. How can the counselor help a counselee to fulfill the fifth responsibility, that of **punctuality**?

Make sure that the counselee has understood clearly when the next session is scheduled. If a trend seems to be developing, the counselor can call and express that he is looking forward and making preparations for the next session, repeating the schedule. Mention to the counselee who comes late to the session the importance of being punctual. No comment may soon indicate to the counselee that it is not important. Give the counselee a clear example of counselor punctuality. Seeing the efforts to be on time for every session, sometimes with much difficulty, communicates to the counselee that being on time is important. Commend the counselee each time he arrives punctually and is ready to begin the session.

Everyone knows how difficult it is to be punctual, especially in a metropolitan area or having to contend with crowded work or family schedules. Still, disciplining oneself by allowing time for the unexpected and coming directly to the appointment are virtues to be learned. The counseling experience is a good place to teach the counselee if there is a lack in fulfilling the responsibility of punctuality.

It is important for the counselor to inspire trust in the counselee. However, the counselee has a responsibility to give the counselor every reason to believe that he is serious about learning and growing in the counseling process. After all, the counselor is investing heavily in the hope that the counselee will grow toward his potential. No one can be excited long about wasting valuable resources. The counselor is investing time, strength, training, knowledge, and costly resources. What time is given to one counselee means that another needy person may not get help. The sixth responsibility of a counselee is one of **credibility**. Many of the other areas of responsibility go into making the responsibility of credibility valid: taking initiative, being open, being accountable, being honest, and being

punctual. Genuine efforts in all of these areas, even at times failing, would make a counselee credible, giving renewed hope to the selfless counselor. There are other responses by the counselee that would make him easier to be believed. Just a quick study of one Scripture selection about responsible responses to teacher/leaders would help in the responsibility of credibility:

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith (Hebrews 13:7).

In this verse, the disciples were urged to be sensitive, look to the leader with feeling, and value the outcome of the life of a teacher/leader in such as way as to determine to learn and practice the good in his life. Believers were urged to make every effort to believe in their leaders, give them margins of consideration, and be careful about making their work more difficult than it was already. The reason cited for Christians to remember their leaders was because these people were working hard on behalf of those they were leading. Leaders carry an additional burden of being accountable to The Shepherd of souls concerning the outcome of their work. It would be well to note many other biblical citations which teach about the regard that people are to have toward those who teach and lead them to become more like Jesus (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13).

It is important that each counselee be aware of his own responsibility to accept **closure**. Some counselees will want to remain in counseling past the reasonable time of closure. They may want the counselor to continue dealing with every problem and each flaw or to allow the counselor to teach a list of skills. Some good would come out of such prolonged, open-ended counseling. However, a counselor has many others to help in critical ways who cannot wait until the present counselee becomes perfect. There are many books and classes in the resources of the local church and small groups in which continual growth can be encouraged. There are other counselors who could help in one-session appointments to deal with specific needs. Periodic follow-up sessions might be possible with the earlier counselor. The point is that no counselor should allow any person to become a dependent counselee. There are some things that a counselor can do to assure that each

counselee will be prepared to accept the terminal date of counseling.

In the first pre-counseling sessions a terminal date can be given or at least an estimate of how many sessions may be required. Remind the counselee several times during the process that there are a certain number of sessions left in which the counseling will be completed. It is important, especially with the opposite sex with whom an attraction would be possible, that the number of sessions not be increased.

Toward the end of the planned number of sessions more and more resources should be made available to counselees to assure them of their readiness to apply what they have learned without further counseling. The counselor must remember that his counseling commitment is healthier for both if it is focused on major problems for appropriate durations. Necessary longer term counseling can be segmented with purposeful breaks in between. Both counselor and counselee will profit from "time out" periods. Referrals serve both to bring closure to a counseling relation and to give a counselee more specific help. Counseling prepares people to walk confidently, to cope successfully, and then to help others who struggle as they once struggled. To encourage a counselee to remain dependent on counseling violates the very nature and purpose of Christian counseling.

Counseling is successful if people can continue to grow, serve, and die faithfully in the Lord. However, this requires that each counselee will be responsible in **personal discipline**. The battle begins again after counseling is over. Though the counselee is stronger than before and armed better than before, Satan is more likely to attack with stronger weapons and with greater malice. He resents all spiritual gain. He hates all clearer visions and stronger purposes. He loathes all healed relationships. He holds God in contempt for saving or renewing even one of his presumed servants. How can the counselor help the former counselee fulfill the responsibility of discipleship? Be a brother's keeper by watching the steps of the counselee, praying by name and circumstance for the counselee, and by keeping the counselee surrounded asking for the Spirit's attention. Intervene if a serious defeat is threatened. It should be as if Satan will have to pass through the counselor to take charge or exercise his diabolical influence. The counselor must fight harder to retain the counselee than he did to save, heal, or teach. Commend the former counselee often as victories are

won and as fruitful living and service result. Invite the counselee for “check-up” sessions to confirm that growth is progressive and stable. Involve the counselee in helping others who are struggling in the same ways the counselee once struggled. Make some counselees skilled para-counselors. Growing numbers of healthier Christians make a congregation and a brotherhood more able to fulfill the mission of the Church in every community and around the world.

Conclusion

Counselors, who help counselees fulfill their counseling responsibilities, make a significant contribution to building a triumphant army who will revel in repeated victories all to the glory of God. Through kindness, patience, and fraternal love, a counselor will need to teach people to be responsible in counseling so they can be responsible in the larger picture of life. By firmness and purpose, a counselor may have to demand responsibility in counseling to some, even as he holds him to a high standard of responsibility.

Thought Questions for Chapter Ten

1. Be able to complete the following sentence: Being responsible speaks of _____.
2. A counselor must teach and urge eight responsible responses. Know these responses.
3. Concerning integrity, what statement does the counselor need to state clearly?
4. Reflect on and discuss each of the eight counselee responsibilities.
5. Reflect on the frequent futility of counseling when a counselee will assume little or no responsibility in the counseling experience.
6. Reflect and exchange views on the statement at the beginning of this lesson: ". . . the major goal of every counselor is to aid the counselee to become more responsible in life."
7. Prepare a handout to be given to each counselee at the beginning to impress on him your expectations in the counseling relations. Use this chapter's material to complete this assignment.
8. Visit an esteemed, competent counselor to learn his counseling experiences that emphasize the importance of each counselee assuming as much responsibility as is possible.

Advances in Christian Counseling

Introduction

From the limited view of one-on-one counseling this chapter presents other approaches being used to broaden and deepen the scope of helping people. This chapter will cover small groups, para-counseling training, self-help resources, pulpit counseling, community counseling sponsorships, mission counseling, and electronic counseling.

From the modern beginnings of counseling as a separate field of study until now, there have been many advances. From the long, theoretic and in part, godless counseling efforts of Sigmund Freud, many have showed their dissatisfaction by advocating other approaches. Most of them were not much better than earlier theories and practices. However, some of the proposed advances brought value to understanding how to help people. The sum of those proposed secular advances in counseling gave a frame work of counselee responsibility, as opposed to no personal accountability, better techniques, and higher purposes. Not until Christian men and women began bringing godliness and biblical truth into the field of counseling were any real, substantive advances made. For coming generations of Christian counseling there still remains a vast horizon to be explored and still more proposals of better ways to help people. This chapter surveys some innovative ways being used to reach more people, more effectively.

Christian counseling began deeply rooted in the commands and practices of Jesus. Jesus by the Great Commission made the Church a dynamic body of missionary-minded, preaching, teaching, and discipling people empowered by the Holy Spirit and full of the love of Christ. By the practices and teachings of Christ, it is strikingly clear that He made the Church to be a healing Body where hurting people can find acceptance, understanding, forgiveness, hope, wholeness, and abundant living. The Church must be evangelistic and therapeutic. One without the other is a distortion of the mission of the Church.

Jesus did both and He sent His disciples into the world to do both. Nothing has changed over two thousand years. People are still lost and in need of the Gospel to be saved. People are hurting and in need of the Gospel to live abundantly and to die in hope. Christian counseling is teaching people to think, feel, and live like Jesus until He comes again.

This chapter will investigate several areas of counselor training opportunities and responsibilities concerning the Church. Students will be encouraged to study and examine several ways the Church can extend Christian counseling throughout the congregation.

The Vast Horizons of Christian Counseling

Most counseling is seen as one-on-one dialogue in an office somewhere where a person with some degree of training is helping another person find some answers to an unresolved issue. If this is all that counseling is, there is a world of rich benefits to come to the number of people who will be helped by the limited number of competent counselors. If this were the whole of counseling, it would still need to be developed to its highest potential and regard it as one of the marvelous ways we can obey our Lord in “*... teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you ...*” (Matthew 28:20). However, there is vastly more to be done to make Christian counseling more available to a greater number of needy people.

Small groups within the Church are a microcosm of the congregation. Small groups do, in partial degree, what the whole Church does in all of its parts. They evangelize, teach, heal, comfort, give hope, strengthen, raise up leaders, and in all things, they glorify God. Through healthy, small cells within the Body, the whole Body functions, heals, and reproduces itself. Counseling is a prominent feature of each functioning small group. In most cases, except perhaps when problems have been long ignored, a trained small group can embrace the problems of a new or old member and provide the support and guidance needed. Someone in most groups will have experienced the same problem and is able to share the ways in Jesus that led to victory. This does not happen just because a congregation has small groups. Just the practice of friendship, social exchanges, study of Scripture, periods of prayer, and the growing closeness and understanding found in most small

groups is greatly helpful. There are some things that need to intentionally happen for the small group to be increasingly effective in the healing ministry.

The group needs to understand biblically that one of its purposes is to provide the environment and opportunity for healing and growth. The group needs to be profiled to identify the ministry giftedness of each member and records developed so immediate responses can be made to specific needs. Each gifted member of the group needs to be trained to be as effective as possible in responding to the kind and circumstance of people needing help for whom he is gifted. A leading feature of a small group is the open disclosure and the trusted sharing of a person and the promised acceptance and understanding by the group. To this must be added the statement of victory when, within the group, victory has been achieved.

When small groups are functioning well in a congregation and ideally, every member is active in a small group, then there is no need that goes unidentified or unmet. There is no hurt that is given time to fester and destroy. There is no gift that is not employed in the purposes of the church. There is no member who leaves the fellowship not having needs met and hurts healed. There is no member needing advanced help that is not guided to the Shepherds and to others who may have special counseling gifts and training. However, even that number will be greatly reduced and within the scope of the traditional one-on-one counseling model.

Christian counseling, to be effective and available to more of the people who could benefit from it, must be integrated into small groups. Otherwise, there are not enough trained persons in most congregations to respond to all of the needs. And most of the people in a congregational setting will not request help.

Para-counseling training can become an extension of counseling in the congregation. Para-counseling training, either in relation to small group training or certainly in relation to specially gifted members, is a necessary extension of counseling in the congregation. Small groups are a great improvement on having to rely on one or two trained persons within the congregation to try to respond to the counseling needs of a whole membership. The development of a larger group, who is given basic counseling training and specific training in areas of giftedness, is a further positive advance in

Christian counseling. There are some considerations to assure that para-counseling becomes a force within the congregation.

A qualified teacher must be recognized and invited to organize and supervise the training program. Other area personnel may be available to enhance various phases of the training. The best prospects for para-counseling training are those whose primary ministry gifts are in the areas of mercy showing, exhortation, and shepherding. These areas represent at least an overlap of over 20% of the membership of a local church, giving a good number of people who can specifically be trained to give counseling assistance in a semi-professional way.

The training should begin with studies that include The Distinctiveness of Christian Counseling, The Qualities of the Christian Counselor, The Preparation of a Christian Counselor, and so on. The training should continue giving smaller group training according to the primary giftedness of each member of the para-counseling group.

A library of video tapes, counseling books, and available spiritual growth seminars should be made available to the ones being trained. Supervised counseling (para-counseling internships) should be included in the training agenda. The availability of the para-counseling group should be of common knowledge among the leaders of the small groups for referrals, valued by the Shepherds if special needs are to be addressed, and seen by the membership as a good secondary choice to accelerate growth.

Prepared small groups, trained para-counselors, gifted counselors, and equipped Shepherds should provide both the opportunity and means to help every member to resolve difficulties and be instructed in Christian growth.

The importance of counseling self-help resources needs to be stressed in a congregation. Self-help resources should be provided in congregations for its members or for area people. Despite every effort in small groups, para-counseling, and Shepherding, there are some people who will want to try to resolve their own problems before going to anyone else. Such initiatives are both right and understandable if not carried too far.

What can be done to extend Christian counseling further to assist this number of people? Elders need to provide a library of books, tapes, video productions, or guidance in purchasing

a significant amount of Christian materials to aid people wanting help. Events need to be organized in the congregation in seminars, workshops, classes, or retreat formats to provide opportunity to self-help people. There should be someone appointed who will stay aware of all helpful events being organized and announced in the area. While our preference may be towards church sponsored events, with careful scrutiny, some select community events can provide helpful experiences to some. If resources are available then self-help groups, short term or continual, can be organized to address particular needs and give a support system. Many congregations have sponsored groups to help members struggling with an ongoing family or personal problem. These can be patterned after the multiple groups in the community that provide a support system and professional help: alcohol and drug abuse, ex-smokers, parents of drug abuse children, single parents, blended families, and other such problem areas.

These self-help resources may be all that some may need and would help everyone with special needs. They clearly speak to the fact that the leadership of a church really cares and really understands.

Pulpit counseling provides one of the best focal opportunities to reach the largest number of members and visitors in one seating and during one hour. The preacher (and the churches of Christ have some of the best in the religious world) needs to think of the full counsel of God and meeting the total needs of the whole congregation. He must not turn the pulpit into a counseling office, however, he can build select lessons into the preaching year that deal with presenting every member whole before Jesus Christ. How can the preacher make the pulpit a place where healing and victorious living are affirmed?

The preacher in a congregation needs to assess the life situation of each member and preach to meet those needs on a regular basis. He needs to study extensively so he can give definitive affirmations and biblical documentation on many of the themes being treated in other counseling situations in the church.

As a spokesman for the congregation, the preacher must give a passionate, caring, and careful treatment of life issues to affirm the heart of the Church, identifying it with those who suffer and struggle. The message of the church must be seen as

relevant to people. He must examine his heart deeply to assure himself that he truly feels the hurt and needs of many people and must vigilantly guard his heart continually so that no root of bitterness weaves itself among his better thoughts. A negative tone or manner of delivery can out-shout his well crafted message.

The preacher must be a ready resource to those who feel that his lessons speak to their hearts. He has much to offer in one-on-one dialogue, in materials to be shared, in small group settings, to Shepherd referrals, or in suggestions to upcoming seminars and self-help opportunities. He must spend a significant amount and quality of time praying for each member, knowing each member better, and visiting with each member both by social exchanges and telephone contact.

More than any other in a congregation, the preacher is the most visible leader because he holds a prominent place in the congregational meetings and is usually more available during the work week. Whether that may seem more desirable or not, it is a reality to be used to provide focused help to assisting members meet growth needs. He has the pulpit, his office, classes, visitation, and personal prayer time to serve members in their longing to be like Jesus.

Community counseling can provide an enormous opportunity to a congregation to extend the benefits of Christian counseling beyond its membership to many throughout the area. The value of becoming known in the community as a caring, helping, and healing Church family is incalculable. It would be informative to determine how the Church is viewed in a community. The Church needs to be perceived as having a head that thinks soundly, a mouth that speaks wisely and truly from the Word of God, a heart that feels careingly, hands that serve gladly, and feet that run to people in need either of salvation or healing. What can a church do to reinforce the perception that it is a place where people can come for love and acceptance?

Plan community interest events and advertise them widely. Seminars can be planned on parenting, marriage harmony, coping with stress and anxiety, financial management, and select issues like divorce, bereavement, and being a care giver to the chronically ill. Care must be taken that the presenter and the environment be of superior quality.

Articles in circulated newspapers and local periodicals should be frequently published that address developmental

issues with a Christian solution. Some may have to be paid articles but most of them can be written as "human interest" pieces and will be gladly published for free. A congregation can offer free, self-help literature to the public through a regular column in the newspaper or by leaflets handed out by members. These areas can often provide a door into the lives of grateful recipients for further teaching.

Through a small group, members can invite the persons who have been befriended by any of the above activities to attend a meeting where much love and acceptance can be personally expressed — first a friend, then a brother!

The Brotherhood has far **too few publications** to sound a distinctive Christian treatment of the issues of human hurt and healing and of Christian wholeness and practice. Most of those who do research and write, do so at great personal sacrifice and in the midst of a demanding ministry schedule. Why couldn't some church family or individual provide a situation where some chosen person could devote large blocks of time to producing materials that could be published and distributed to a wide audience of appreciative people? Good men are supported to preach to a small audience every Sunday for many years. Why couldn't a few good men and women be supported to teach thousands year after year? Experienced men are supported to hold Gospel meetings in places where there are limited local resources. Why couldn't some mature and capable men be employed to go to those same areas and hold meetings to accelerate spiritual growth through counseling themes like learning to forgive, learning Christian disciplines, or learning how to be sensitive and effective in building servant and loving relations?

Christian resources which deal with Christian wholeness could become a reality within the Church if several wise men, well respected for their fruitful experience in counseling ministries, could be consulted to learn the most pressing themes and most likely writers who would be available to produce a series of needed studies or counseling programs. Congregations could make this a budget item even as generous as adding any other staff member to work with the youth, education, or evangelism. The church should search for the indicated counseling writer/lecturer as thoroughly and seriously as a search for a pulpit minister might be conducted. They should develop a clear, detailed job description describing the full

expectations, compensations, and a job standard for evaluating a completed project or assignment.

Congregations could develop a support system to keep the counselor/developer encouraged and focused. The work is by its very nature one that requires much discipline and little initial results. Churches need to be prepared to supply or find support for the publishing and distribution of materials, travel funds to hold seminars, and funding for expected follow-up requests for additional information and resources. If several visionary leaderships do not arise among the Church today, it will remain where it is today without the abundance and quality of resources to further the pursuit of being a credible community of believers who genuinely care that people grow to the full stature of Jesus Christ.

Mission counseling needs to become a part of our church planting strategies. How could this thought be implemented? A trained counselor should be recruited and placed on every mission team to integrate a counseling awareness in emerging small groups, developing a para-counseling group, and preaching planned lessons that relate to member needs.

As many mission teams reach into a community with Bible Study Centers, some featuring English as the means of instruction, an effective outreach could be launched through a Family Studies Center. Such a center, staffed by qualified people, would make a strong appeal to people interested and even struggling as parents, marital partners, and those lacking life skills. People with a unique readiness to learn would be attracted. Friendships through helping could be developed from which evangelism could blossom.

Planning and forethought would have to precede any mission counseling efforts with a thorough study of the culture, acquiring a full understanding of the ethnic needs, and guarding against offensive cross-cultural practices and expressions. There must be the preparation of culturally relevant materials to help people in the particular culture. These materials should be presented professionally without economy being the chief priority.

People are people even though they may be dressed differently, speak another language, and live in a diverse culture. Human needs and human problems share a common urgency everywhere. People who reach out to those in need with what seems a foreign and theoretic message that is so

much in contrast to their world view and cultural values better have it accompanied by a message of care, acceptance, and relevant service. Helping people will not save them without the Gospel, but it does put a human face and heart to words that will more quickly become meaningful and compelling.

Electronic counseling opens doors around the world to expand the benefits of Christian counseling. The Church may not be able to preach openly to the Muslim searchers, reach the Indian masses, or ever arrive at the door of most of the six billion without Christ in our exploding world, but the Church can reach many of them who are in the growing millions of Internet users. How can Christian counseling make an Internet impact on a global basis?

Hundreds of congregations and church organizations have web sites focused on specific features of their ministries. Some are superbly professional. Christian counseling themes could be included in the menu or separate web sites could be developed to feature counseling resources available to Internet users. Software programs could be developed presenting complete training courses in Christian counseling. CD programs could be developed with select books and testing applications available for personal or certified growth results.

Greater initiative could be taken to challenge the growing thousands of computer/internet persons among us to envision the mind-boggling ways that both the Gospel message and the Christian invitation to a Christ-centered life could be communicated in this century, a century in which even greater leaps ahead will be experienced.

God surely has given the Christian technology that is just beginning to be understood to match the greatness of the task ordered in the Great Commission.

Thought Questions for Chapter Eleven

1. Reflect on the continuing opportunities and expanding methods in which people are being helped.
2. Reflect on coming advances in counseling just appearing on the horizon.
3. Reflect again on the definition of counseling given in this course: “Teaching people to think, feel, and act like Jesus.”
4. Research areas to determine what counseling advances mentioned in this chapter are being employed.
5. Choose one of the eight counseling advances presented in this chapter and **write a five page essay on its use**. Include this paper in your notebook after showing it to your Test Administrator.

Questions Counselors Ask

Introduction

Chapter Eleven of this book present thirty-seven questions in five areas: personal concerns, counseling concerns, family concerns, counseling logistics, and specific counseling situations. Every counselor asks these and many other questions to keep the counseling process in perspective. These answers could save some counselors a great deal of time and misdirection of efforts.

Question and answer forums are often the best learning experiences. This chapter will try to anticipate the questions that could be asked, knowing quite well that at best, they are only samplings of the many and perhaps better questions that each student of this course could ask. The questions and responses will be grouped into five areas of counseling concerns.

Area One: Personal Concerns

Q: 1. Should a counselor focus on an area of counseling?

A: A major need is to identify one's gift of passion to determine what kinds of person and what kinds of situations he is primarily gifted. One will do better focusing on both preparation and ministry in those areas. However, one should respond to people in need even if they may not be in his primary areas of giftedness and do the best he can until other help can be given.

Q: 2. How does a counselor find time for ministry renewal?

A: He can't unless a priority is given based on a sense of its value. Ministry renewal should involve getting enough rest, planned periods of recreation, having social exchanges with an inner circle of friends, having

a non-ministry hobby that is creative and fulfilling, having fun for the sole purpose of having fun, being able to have one or two high points in every year, and experiences of major growth events in which personal affirmation results and “going apart for awhile” as Jesus did with His disciples. He was crushed with people’s concerns but made time for renewal in prayer, separation, and meditation.

Q: 3. How does a counselor foresee being overly committed in counseling?

- A: It is difficult to stay in contact with one’s own needs and feelings, especially when there is great fulfillment, when one is driven by a distorted value system or when one struggles with self-discipline. Some telling signs of over commitment are:
1. When commitments are suffering in areas of punctuality or quality.
 2. When one is continually tired, increasingly irritable, and aloof.
 3. When high priorities like family, personal development, and other ministry commitments are being neglected.
 4. When focus is lost during counseling sessions and there is no time to do the record keeping and home work for the next session.

Q: 4. How does a counselor deal with false accusations?

- A: Prevention is the best response. Live impeccably and humbly before God and man at all times. Be sharply attentive during a counseling exchange to give no room for error or to communicate a message that would be wrong or easily misunderstood. Review the session to scrutinize your conduct. Be quick to apologize if a mistake was made. Keep records of where and with whom each day is spent. Most accusations are rooted in inaccuracies of place and time and can be exposed by documented truth. Avoid compromising circumstances like going alone to a home or being completely alone in the counseling situation. The first line of defense is a clean conscience before God. After that, it is important

to try to understand why the person is falsely accusing you and what need is being met by the wrong conduct. It is crucial to begin the process of anger management and forgiveness. Anger has hardly ever been the best response to false accusations.

Q: 5. How does a counselor determine if he has other interests than helping people through counseling?

- A: One should be greatly aware of other interests that will eventually diminish or destroy the effectiveness of his counseling. The other interests could include the desire to control or even manipulate the hunger for counselee acceptance and affirmation, the unhealthy need of a sense of competency, the lust for sexual fulfillment, or if fees are charged an inordinate desire for material gain. Integrity, self-examination, accountability, and recommitment to the highest purposes and to the very nature of Christian counseling are the steps to keeping one's counseling work right and fruitful.

Q: 6. How does a counselor guard his heart against sexual attraction?

- A: One should begin with the admission that such attraction could and often does begin to occur. Few men have the absolute gift of abstinence that Paul professed (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:7–8). A confronted attraction is the safeguard of the heart. The best long term response is the moral pursuit of becoming all that the “one woman man” expectation of 1 Timothy 3 requires. A frequent reminder of one’s relations to others (family, wife, children, grandchildren, the Church, ministry colleagues, the lost, and to God above all) helps guard the heart. Meeting Christ regularly in the Word and at the throne of grace is singularly crucial (cf. Acts 20: 24, 32). Having a covenant with a trusted and mature brother who will hold you accountable for a pure heart can be the difference in moral integrity (cf. James 5:16). Self-discipline guards the weaker places (cf. 1 Corinthians 9: 19–27). God is faithful in His promise to give a door of escape to every believer under attack (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13).

Area Two: Counseling Concerns

Q: 1. How high is the priority of counseling in a busy schedule?

A: In part, the answer comes through identifying one's ministry giftedness. If God has gifted one for counseling, it is an assignment in Kingdom building and must be given due priority. Schedules are entirely what man makes them to be. He determines which activities get the best of his attention. He sets priorities according to the importance he gives to people, tasks, and activities.

How are you gifted? How valuable and needed is counseling to the people around you? What activities are more or less important than counseling? After determining one's own giftedness and the importance of counseling, it seems that the rest has to do with setting one's priorities including or excluding counseling.

Q: 2. What are some of the richer counseling resources?

A: The following are among the first and most useful resources in counseling:

1. **The Counselor Library** by Word provides an excellent resource book and two albums of counseling tapes and assignments on a broad range of counseling concerns.
2. **Resources for Christian Counseling** by Word is a library of recently written books on many counseling themes.
3. **American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC)** are producing both books and certification programs in counseling.

Q: 3. How can a person be encouraged to begin a counseling relation?

A: Most people will come or be referred for counseling. Far more need counseling but will not come without an invitation, if then. Seeing how a counselor has helped many others invites a person to consider asking for assistance. The best invitation is building

a rapport in which caring and trusting are mutually felt. Serving people in lesser needs insures people that one is ready to help them in the bigger needs of life. Most people wave flags on which needs are written clearly and some cry out for help. Being there at the point of need opens the door to make oneself available to help. There are times when a counselor may have to intervene more directly. Hopefully, a trusting relationship is growing. However, Matthew 18:15 authorizes one to go uninvited if another's relationship with God is put in jeopardy by sin and even to take further steps to help a sinning and unrepentant brother.

Q: 4. What are some guiding principles in honoring confidentiality?

- A: A commitment of confidentiality must be made and maintained from the beginning of the counseling relation, but it needs to be defined. Under the laws of most states, pastoral confidentiality is not protected. In cases of child abuse, rape, murder, and other such grave crimes, a counselor is in jeopardy of prosecution if he fails to report his knowledge of such felonies. Particularly in child sexual abuse there are often no statutes of limitation on the crime. Even in other cases of confidentiality, a counselor may need to urge the counselee to make full disclosure of some knowledge to someone who is seriously impacted by the material. At other times a counselor may need to indicate that the counselor's pledge of confidentiality would be detrimental to the counselee's well being or would jeopardize the counselor's integrity. However, most of the material shared by a counselee can and must be protected by the counselor. The desire is that the counselee can trust the counselor and will hold back nothing that the counselor needs to know to help the counselee. There is much that the counselor does not need to hear such as blow by blow accounts of an event, detailed justification of activities, and much background material that is irrelevant.

Q: 5. How does a counselor bring closure when a counselee demands further counseling?

A: This situation most frequently happens when the counselor has not been clear from the beginning of a desired terminal date and has failed to remind the counselee of the upcoming date. A counselor works with every counselee with self-sufficiency in mind. He does everything reasonable to help the counselee toward autonomy. At other times, the counselor finds it difficult to say “no” and mean it. Too often such a situation is the result of an unhealthy need, either of the counselor or counselee, being met in continued counseling: need for attention, control, affirmation, and other such needs. The greater the demand, the surer the clinical dysfunction of the counselee and the surer that the average counselor knows that it is past time to refer the person to someone trained in clinical disturbances. In most matters, though, if the counselor is persuaded that the major objectives have been reached, the counselee needs other therapy or time to apply the counseling guidance, or that future sessions will not be productive, he must conclude the relation. Depending on the counselee’s state of mental health, these times can become critical. These are times that accusations can be made, guilt can be laid on the counselor, and the counselee may see the termination of counseling as rejection or a counselor’s statement of his little worth. These are times when the progress seemingly seen in earlier sessions can be washed away. Yielding to a counselee’s demand is not the answer because the next time it may be even more difficult to bring closure to the counseling. Done with kindness, genuine concern, and interest in the well being of the counselee, closure must occur. Safe guards and other resources should be offered and in place: small groups, visitation by others, materials, and other sources.

Q: 6. How does a counselor deal with a counselee who calls or comes without a counseling agreement?

A: In the first session, it would be wise to put a “contract” in place in which the responsibilities of a counselee are defined. Most people will respect the private time of a

counselor and will know that he has many other commitments. However, some will be so pressed by personal need that too little consideration will be given to the counselor's needs, especially if it is indicated by the counselor to call whenever there is a need. The fact is that most counselors want to help whenever there is need, but if said without definition, it does not teach the counselee to be responsible, respectful of the needs of others, or to work toward autonomy. The counselor needs to say that he can be reached at certain hours. If called or visited at other hours, after determining the nature of the need, the counselor can schedule a meeting. I have found that even discussions about a threatened suicide can be scheduled!

Q: 7. When does a counselor know it is time to refer a counselee to another counselor?

- A: There are some counselees who need to be referred before meeting with them and others after a few introductory, precounseling meetings. If one is not prepared in clinical counseling, it is not good for the counselor to play doctor. If a young man is asked to give counseling in areas of no experience or training, it probably should be referred if there is an older counselor available. If a male counselor is asked to counsel a woman when his marriage is in shambles or he is struggling with sexual issues, he should refer her to someone else. If there is a close friendship or dependent employment relationship, the counselee should be referred in most cases. If there is perceived distrust, the counselor should consider referral. In all cases in which the counselor feels particularly inadequate, he should help the counselee find help elsewhere. The well being of the counselee is foremost in importance, the first consideration.

Q: 8. Should a congregational counselor charge a fee for counseling?

- A: This is certainly a judgement call. Some charge a fee, even if it is minimal compared to market charges, believing that counselees will be more punctual, more responsible, and more accountable if they invest

something. Others give the counselees a list of needs in the counseling ministry and ask them to consider a donation or underwriting a need (books, cassettes, software programs, furniture, or other needs). Others if members of the same congregation feel that a service is being given, especially a supported minister may consider that the counseling cost has already been paid by a caring congregation even as it underwrites service in other areas.

Area Three: Family Concerns

Q: 1. What are some major counseling concerns in child development?

A: The values, knowledge, and parenting skills of parents are primary in developing an environment in which children can grow toward healthy adulthood. In counseling adults, the failures of parenting are prominent. In fact, most adult counseling is related to “re-parenting,” finding what was lost, healing what was hurt, fixing what was broken, and teaching what was left out. Some of the most valuable counseling is preventive counseling in teaching young parents how to raise healthy children. Parenting foundation principles must be taught, parenting pillars must be erected, and parenting skills must be developed.

Q: 2. What are some of the topics that must be covered in counseling parents?

A: Christian parents must know that the Bible contains all of the basics for effective parenting:

1. God is the author of parenthood (cf. Genesis 1).
2. God has given the law of parenthood (cf. Deuteronomy 6).
3. God has given the optimum seasons of parenting (cf. Proverbs 22:6).
4. God has given the model of parenting (cf. Luke 2:52).
5. God has given the strategy of parenting (cf. Ephesians 6:1–4).

Christian parents need to learn that one of the best gifts to their children, other than faith in God, is a genuine, lavishly expressed, and faithful love for one another.

Q: 3. What are some considerations in parent-child counseling?

- A: The Christian counselor needs to have an accurate view of the quality of home in which these relationships have been forming. A few areas to consider would be the strength, openness, and faithfulness of the marital relationship, the roles of each parent, the effectiveness of conflict management, the handling of finances, the parental involvement in the home, the affirmation of children, the affectionate care of children, the recreational experiences in the family, the value system, the goals and hopes of the family, and the purposeful building of a spiritual fiber in the home. Counseling would contribute to strengthening any of the above areas that might be lacking.

Q: 4. What approach could be used in pre-marital counseling?

- A: A couple could be invited to attend a pre-marital seminar regularly scheduled in the congregation, followed by a set number of couple sessions to review personal wholeness, compatibility, communication, expectations, and values, closing with planning for the wedding and setting goals for the first year.

Q: 5. How does a counselor educate a congregation on the value of pre-marital counseling?

- A: The more the value of mature and happy marriages is emphasized, the more clear the need for marital preparation will become. More preparation is required for professions of all kinds than is urged for a life-long marriage. Somehow the myth that “love” will solve all problems has continued through the ages. Instruction on attitudes, foundational principles, relational insights and skills are the basics of a good marriage. This training should be continual in the homes, in teen and adult classes, and sounded clearly from the pulpit. Select reading materials should be provided. A thoughtful

marriage policy, including emphasis on the need for pre-marital counseling, approved by the congregational elders, should be published and distributed. The counselor, with few to no exceptions, should condition performing weddings on the assurance that adequate preparation has been made. Churches insist on instruction as a basis of salvation. For some of the same reasons, it is important to stress that a life commitment in marriage should be on the basis of sound biblical and relationship instructions.

Q: 6. How does one approach marital counseling?

A: The counselor must have some “intake” time to assure himself that he understands the strengths and deficiencies of the relationship, the specific issues causing tension, and the history of the marriage. The pre-counseling sessions proposed earlier would serve these purposes. These sessions should include some effective personality testing, evaluating and determining if both of the couple counselees are ready to invest in the marriage recovery or strengthening. If it is discovered that only one is eager to take responsibilities, then the counseling is no longer marital counseling. It becomes an effort to help one person become more complete in Jesus. Sometimes marriage counseling must be placed on hold as a counselor works separately with each person. With individual issues resolved, the couple counseling can start on a more promising basis.

Q: 7. What are the basic principles in marital counseling?

A: Believing that marriage belongs to God and that He alone has the right to legislate all matters relative to marriage, Christian counseling aims at teaching people to honor God in knowing His will, doing His will, and enjoying the fruits of obedience. Often, a call to repentance and responsible relationships stand at the return to a God-honoring marriage. In many cases a renewal of hope that characterized the early days of a marriage will have to be experienced before responsible efforts can begin. Most couples wait too long before asking for help, making the work of the counselor more

difficult to revive hope and trust. Renewing hope and trust is aided in helping a couple understand what deficiencies or circumstances have contributed to their marital difficulties and in setting an agenda for resolving the conflicts and acquiring the necessary relationship building skills. In most cases there will be hurt that must be healed through understanding and forgiveness and conflict management skills that must be learned.

Q: 8. What are major marital problems that should be addressed?

A: After knowing and sincerely trying to obey God's will, some of the major marital problems are:

1. Dealing with the unresolved issues and hurts that a person brings into the marriage, such as the residue of abuses, the learned inadequacies in resolving conflict, responsibly managing finances, effectively communicating, and battling a diminished self-image.
2. A misunderstanding of the biblical roles that each must agree to responsibly fulfill.
3. Over-commitment to goals that leaves little time to build a mutually fulfilling relationship.
4. Ignoring basic values to fulfill human desires that are distractive to the health of the marriage such as sexual affirmation, career aspirations, and recreational choices.
5. Failure to grow in all of the essential areas of marital development: attitude, insights, and skills.
6. Permitting the demands and joys of parenting to displace marriage building and fulfillment as the primary couple objective. Forgetting that two people who deeply love and honor each other in a marriage is the couple's best gift to a child.
7. Differences in child discipline, spending money, recreational choices, tastes in dressing, care of possessions, choices of friends and careers are all irritants that can escalate into more serious problems.

8. Allowing in-law interventions or friendship disruptions to diminish a mate or distort a couple commitment strain otherwise promising marriages.

Q: 9. What are the stages of marital development?

A: A counselor needs to help a young couple prepare and successfully pass through each of the stages of marriage. A Christian counselor has the privilege of helping couples in each and sometimes all of these marital stages:

1. **Security:** A young man needs to provide an environment for his young bride to feel secure, valued, and wanted. It starts with material security of sufficient income, a safe residence, and trustworthy transportation. Especially essential is that he provide a place where faith can grow and enrich the lives of the children being given to the marriage. The young woman provides security in responding with shared faith, feminine acceptance, affirmation, and dependence. This stage could well consume the first ten years. If done well it releases the couple to go into the second stage.
2. **Affirmation:** Each must be assured that he is doing well, progressing toward mutually defined goals, and is satisfying the other mate's needs. An emerging basis of realistic hope should be forming as the resources for fulfilled goals are being assembled. Meaningful relationships, productive skills, and early tastes of desired outcomes should be taking shape. A real sense of being valued and of enjoying a marital partnership should be regular realities. By now an assurance that the marriage belongs to God is deeply motivating to each to give his best in honoring God together in building the marriage, parenting, and serving others. These are the qualities of the second marital stage.
3. **Confirmation:** Careers are established, children are nearing adulthood, material security is of lesser concern than before, values have proven to be trustworthy, relationships have been meaningful, and major purposes have been pursued with

satisfying results. Even more than ever there are some higher couple and spiritual purposes demanding the best from the marital partnership and giving excitement to thoughts about the fourth marital stage.

4. **Realization:** Becoming a couple all over again because children are adults and grand parenthood is important. Time to indulge, long-denied pursuits are more possible and cherished dreams urge fulfillment. Some health and material restrictions are daily concerns. Time for intimacy with God, reflection, savoring, serving, and making contributions from storehouses of wisdom, faith, and experience make a day livable and worth singing about. This stage becomes special if both can live some years together in reasonably good health and companionship. At its moment of triumph one lays the other into the arms of God.

Q: 10. Can a counselor help people prepare for grand parenting?

- A: Successful grand parenting starts earlier than most people think. Mature young people choosing and marrying mature mates and working together in developing mature adult children is the best preparation for grand parenting. A class in “The Art of Grand Parenting” should be a part of every church curriculum. People have to learn to accept a new family role that features supportive counsel. Parents must develop a different relationship with their adult children that features a respect for the autonomy of the adult child and the chosen mate. It is difficult to have so much perceived wisdom while the adult children, often times, choose to “reinvent the wheel” and learn all over again from their own mistakes. It is difficult to resist taking control when clear mistakes are being made or when giving money would resolve the immediate problem. Restraint is required not to diminish a parent before the grandchildren and intensify a loss of respect. Humility comes hard when parents of highly successful children want to take the full credit for developing model children.

Area Four: Counseling Logistics

Q: 1. Should there be a time limit in formal counseling sessions?

A: Keeping a counseling session within the hour makes good sense. After forty-five minutes there is a sharp drop in energy for both counselor and counselee. Such a period is usually sufficient in most cases to work on one or two major issues, summarize the session, and give follow-up assignments. In prolonged sessions it seems that much of the intensity wanes, repetition and rambling occurs, and it is more difficult to stay focused on the stated purposes.

Q: 2. How frequent should sessions be planned?

A: Many variables dictate the frequency of counseling sessions. Two times a week may be necessary when cases are in urgent need of attention but once a week fits most people's schedules. If the counselor has a heavy schedule, a once a week meeting gives the necessary time for preparation in prayer, study, and planning.

Q: 3. How many sessions should be recommended?

A: The nature of the counselee's problem, the availability and readiness of the counselee, and the counselor's schedule impact the decision concerning the number of sessions. There can be no set number in all cases. Open-ended counseling with no terminus in mind is not wise. It is wise to learn how to foresee the number of counseling sessions to be expected and work toward such a projection. One or two sessions may be all that are needed. In most cases, other than clinical counseling, six sessions can be the maximum number with evaluations being made at the end of the sixth session to determine if a second block of three sessions might be recommended to conclude the effort.

Q: 4. What are important considerations about the place of counseling?

A: Whether the counseling takes on a more formal format or is more a friendship or para-counseling format, there are some basic considerations in all cases.

1. The place should provide quiet with a minimum of distractive noises or movements. A counselee should not bring children to adult sessions.
2. The more intense the content of counseling, the more thought should be given to the selection of the place.
3. The place should provide comfortable seating, temperature, and non-glaring light.
4. The place should provide a clean and orderly appearance, free of clutter.
5. The place should provide an obvious level of privacy to give comfort to the counselee.
6. The place should provide a clear signal to the counselee that any effort toward illicit intimacy or a contradiction of values will not be tolerated and that appropriate accountability of all participants is expected.
7. The place should provide access to needed materials, means of communication, and easy exit.
8. The place should provide room for arranging separate seating favoring direct, frontal positions that are three-to-five feet distant. In more formal settings some counselors prefer having a desk or small piece of furniture separating the counselor and counselee.
9. In substance, the place should provide a suitable environment without distracting or dominating the purpose or diminishing the desired outcome.

Q: 5. What kind of counseling assignments might be given?

A: Counseling assignments have value only to teach the counselee. An assignment could teach discipline, responsibility, accountability, new skills, rethinking past values or behaviors, and claiming new values and attitudes. Reading and writing assignments, listening to

tapes or studying video programs, completing projects, consulting an Internet offering, attending significant events, engaging in prayer, fasting, and service assignments could be among the various approaches an insightful counselor may require.

Q: 6. What kind of response should be given when a counselee fails to do an assignment?

- A: A counselor needs to be considerate about the circumstances or counselee difficulties in making a response. However, even on the first failure a point must be made of the counselee's commitment, the importance of investing in the process, and the virtue of being responsible and accountable. A counselor needs to identify the problem if there is a repeated failure to complete assignments. A counselor might cancel a session at the very beginning, telling the counselee that no other sessions will be scheduled until more responsibility is shown. A counselee must not be given the idea that a waste of the counselor's time is of no consequence or that the assignments are of little value.

Area Five: Specific Situations

Q: 1. How does a Christian counselor help a young lady who is premaritally pregnant?

- A: The Christian counselor needs to be sensitive to the trauma that the young lady is experiencing. She may be overwhelmed by fear, shame, guilt, rejection, and anger. She may be deeply torn by the societal pressures to abort the child. She may not have the understanding, acceptance, and support of her parents. She may feel all alone with a problem for which she may have few resources. She must know that her condition is a direct result of a sinful choice, but there is a way back to responsible behavior. The young lady probably does not need a long, indicting sermon as much as she needs a helpful, genuine friend. The counselor may have the opportunity to help parents who are devastated, embarrassed, and struggling with coming to the side of a daughter as readily as if she had made a serious traffic mistake and needed help. Wise counsel must be given

on the future of the child. The child has done no wrong and should be treated as any other child born in more favorable conditions. The age and health of the young mother, the financial means available to raise the child, the family structure into which the child is born, and the pre-commitments need to be considered in deciding to keep and raise the child or to secure an appropriate adoption arrangement. Living and growing up in the home of even one natural parent precludes some of the down-sides of adoption. However, if the deficiencies are many and severe, adoption by approved, Christian parents is often the better choice. Thus a Christian counselor should be in direct contact with a well-documented adoption agency or, with great care, become qualified to conduct private, legal adoptions. Not to be forgotten is the young man involved in the untimely pregnancy. He has responsibilities to assume and some responses to make, both spiritually and materially. He, nor his family, should be either left unnoticed in their needs or ignored in acknowledging their responsibilities. Urging marriage without a valid basis of compatibility is not a solution to even be considered.

Q: 2. What does a counselor do when an affair is exposed in the life of a married counselee?

- A: At first, confidentiality guards the “little secret” as the counselor works insistently with the counselee to abandon the illicit relation. The counselee must be confronted with the fact that no failure, real, perceived or exaggerated, on the part of the mate justifies the breaking of his marital promise. Two wrongs do not make one right. The counselor will have to insist that being fulfilled in the illicit relation is no justification for beginning or continuing what is sin against God and is a repudiation of a promise. Issues of integrity, responsibility, promised love, care, and sensitivity need to be brought to the forefront. In the mix, the counselor must know what needs are being met in the affair to understand the dynamics that hold the counselee in the grips of the relationship. The erring counselee will not likely leave the relationship unless a stronger

motivation can be felt: a call to a right relationship with God, to integrity, to past joys and future hopes, to repentance, forgiveness, and healing. However, with a continued refusal to sever the wrongful relationship, the counselee must be made to understand that the counselor's pledge of confidentiality can no longer be expected to cover a sinful choice. The counselor must maintain a clear view of the value of souls, the defeat of sin, and the objectives of restoring, renewing, and strengthening the failing marriage.

Q: 3. How does a Christian counselor honor confidences in the face of questioning by concerned parties?

- A: A reckless handling of information given in confidence will shut the door to counselee trust and the opportunity to help the person wanting help. Yet, it is acknowledged that others are rightfully concerned, and in some cases, could help if given some needed information to guide them. As a rule the promise of confidentiality prevails if it does not compromise the counselor's integrity or deprive the counselee of the help that is needed. The counselor needs to be informed concerning some kinds of information that may not be retained in confidence without being in violation of law. A first step is to show the counselee the value of sharing the information with the appropriate persons, with the pledge to support him. A young person using drugs, involved in homosexual promiscuity, being pregnant, or being in violation of a law will need more help than one counselor might be able to give. Eventually, most of these cases will become known and sometimes too late for any positive solution. While honoring confidentiality to a point and deciding what further resources the counselee can obtain through wider disclosure, the counselor must work for a solution of the causative problem. Most of the information shared with a counselor need never be shared and the counselor will go to his grave never having revealed the large amount of confidences shared over the length of years of counseling.

Q: 4. How does a Christian counselor respond in cases of divorce?

A: Divorce counseling is near the top of the most difficult counseling challenges. Divorce takes a heavy toll on every part of a person. The hurt, rejection, loss of emotional, spiritual, and material resources, disruption of many relationships, challenge to every cherished value, and the ruthless blasting of hope and purpose present the counselor a multi-dimensional set of counseling problems. Intensifying these questions is one's understanding of the will of God concerning biblical solutions in the aftermath of divorce. A counselor will need to make an exhaustive study of the divorce-remarriage issue to be in a confident position to guide the divorced person. The conviction needs to be at such an informed depth that the counselor can offer counsel that is first true and is consistent to his considered beliefs.

Q: 5. How does a Christian counselor serve those suffering the loss of a family member?

A: The counselors who help bereaving families the most are those who have invested much time and concern in the family in the years before the loss. Grieving families will turn naturally to those who have long loved them and served them unselfishly. The Christian counselor makes changes to be available, is eager to help, goes beyond expectations, and lets actions speak persuasively. Times of grief need more the language of feeling that speaks with a few well chosen words than the language of fact that thrives on many words. The counselor must reject the role of judge and the assigning of destiny to the deceased. The counselor functions as a healer to a wounded family, a guide to an uncertain future, and a friend in need. The objective is to give special attention to the bereaved until the sun starts shining again and then returning to confirm that there is still hope in God's tomorrows. The Christian counselor especially knows that the bereaved will get even more attention than they may need in the immediate days of the loss but are often forgotten as people get back to their pressing schedules. These days may be the days in

which the Christian counselor can best give the needed help as the bereaved ones begin to feel just how deep the loss has been.

Q: 6. How can a Christian counselor help people with financial difficulties?

A: The counselor needs to identify the nature of the financial difficulty. Some people are in difficulty through no direct fault of their own because of changing demographics, collapsing markets, natural losses, job downsizing, and other events. Many more lack personal maturity and management skills. Some are over committed and give too small priority to their financial stewardship. Some couples have not yet defined their roles in the financial matters of earning, budgeting, spending, and accounting. The Christian counselor either functions as a financial teacher and consultant or a referral is made to someone who can offer the service, either professionally or in friendship. Whether in a computer software program or in a manual set of books, every Christian should employ a system by which responsible planning and accounting enhance one's stewardship of financial resources.

Q: 7. How does a Christian counselor not trained in clinical therapy help a dysfunctional counselee?

A: Anyone at any level of counseling needs to know that no one has such knowledge as to effectively respond to every counseling situation. The more intense the counseling need, fewer are the ones who have the training and giftedness to offer positive therapy. Every serious counselor knows his limits and refuses to go further at the risk of the counselee. A non-clinical counselor needs to study enough to recognize that a prospective counselee has needs beyond his training. There is nothing to be gained by playing therapist to the detriment of the counselee. Often the dysfunctional person may cling to a well known counselor and resist being referred to someone new. The Christian counselor must persist in doing what is best in the long term for the counselee. Even though one may not be able to offer clinical therapy, one can keep a list of reputable and

competent therapists to whom a counselee can be referred. Throughout the process, a non-clinical counselor can give valuable support, greatly needed assurance, and continuing direction.

Thought Questions for Chapter Twelve

1. Reflect on other questions that could have been asked.
2. Reflect and discuss the values of having many of these questions answered in an introductory course without having to learn by “trial and error.”
3. Reflect on how you could apply the response to several of these answers in your own efforts to help people.
4. Develop at least ten more questions about some specific area of counseling, research appropriate materials, and write your responses.
5. Choose one of the questions discussed in this lesson and write an extensive response.

Part Three

Case Studies in Christian Counseling

- Case Studies in Pre-Marital Counseling**
- Case Studies in Marital Counseling**
- Case Studies in Parental Counseling**
- Case Studies in Wholeness Counseling**
- Case Studies in Member-to-Member Counseling**
- Case Studies in Church Leadership Counseling**

Case Studies in Pre-marital Counseling

A reflection on cases in pre-marital counseling have taught the author of this book some valuable lessons. Perhaps, a study of such cases will save other counselors both some grief and ineffective effort. Specific cases will be double-indented after the lessons for clarity in all of the following Case Studies chapters.

Lesson One: Persist in urging couples to begin and complete a pre-marital counseling program.

Pre-marital counseling is an investment, both by the couple and the counselor. Many couples, and especially men, do not want to make the investment. They do not see the connection to beginning well in their marriage with spending six or more sessions with a counselor and doing between session assignments. While pre-marital counseling is not an absolute, it **can be the difference** in erecting a good foundation that will last rather than trying to build on human passions.

Fred wanted to have one session with the preacher/counselor. He wanted to know when and where the marriage ceremony could take place. That could be accomplished, as far as he was concerned, with a telephone call. He had a good job that paid him well, he was twenty-four and, after a fun-filled young manhood, felt it was time to settle down a bit. He loved Julie and was pleased she was a nurse and could earn her part in the marriage. He did not want the responsibility of children.

The Christian counselor, after failing to persuade a couple to invest in counseling, is faced with the decision of helping such a couple to the extent they want to be helped or to decline

the invitation. There are liabilities with either decision. The predictable consequences of either decision would have to be weighed and the more hopeful one might be the choice.

Lesson Two: Be alert to “red flags” in the counseling process.

People are not always honest in revealing themselves. Many will do much to avoid telling the truth. An experienced counselor eventually becomes increasingly alert to the tell-tell signs, the “red flags” that telegraph a breach in integrity. The counselor can wantonly turn his eyes in another direction because of pressures he feels from the family or affection for the couple or from not wanting to confront an issue. One thing is sure: the issues that were being hidden during counseling will surface into the marriage. They could develop into major, marriage threatening issues.

Kirk and Sandra requested counseling. Into the first session it became clear that Kirk did not want to take a test being recommended by the counselor. In fact, he bluntly and rudely refused. For no reason that the counselor could define, Kirk got up and angrily left the session. Sandra assured the counselor that he would soon get over it and requested copies of the test, one for her and one for Kirk. In a few days she returned with the tests completed. Upon examining the answer sheets it became clear that Sandra had answered them both.

Upon inquiry, she admitted that Kirk refused both to complete the exam or to continue the counseling. Later, the couple went away for a weekend and got married. Over the next years Kirk had more frequent and violent eruptions of anger. He refused to allow Sandra and the children to have any contact with her mother in the same county. He physically and verbally abused Sandra until she finally sought security in state protective services and ended the ill-begun relationship in divorce and abject poverty.

In this and many such cases, the woman is an enabler and either is blinded by other considerations or feels so needed by the man as to go into a relationship that has little promise of

meaningful good. The only exits are all filled with grief and the future offers little hope. Counselor, parental, or friendship appeals often fall on deaf ears.

Lesson Three: Emotions, even genuinely felt, are often not enough to get a couple through the adjustment years in marriage.

Unfortunately “love is often blind and marriage is always an eye-opener.” One of the most difficult tasks facing a pre-marital counselor is to honor the romantic feelings but get a couple to take a reality check on the difficulties they face in building a productive, marital relation. It sometimes is as futile as trying to sweep back the waves of an ocean at high tide with a broom.

Ron and Alicia eagerly and faithfully attended their pre-marital sessions. Their personality profile indicated multiple areas of urgently needed growth. The positive prognosis for an easy and productive adjustment in marriage was poor, almost predictive of serious conflicts. The marriage ceremony date was already set, cards were printed, and an early bridal shower had been given. The pressure was on from all sides. Gently encouraged by the counselor on deciding what was most important in the long term, Ron and Alicia decided to postpone their marriage for a year and work on the multiple areas of needed growth. Most couples would have pushed resolutely forward with their marital plans.

Other couples are convinced that they can “live on love” and that their love for each other will conqueror all threats. Love is priceless and love is the source of so much strength and resolve. Why make love pay such prices in trying to fit two very fragmented people together especially when the conflicting traits can be patiently improved and fitted harmoniously together by taking more time before marriage?

Lesson Four: The counselor should be careful about making promises that later compromise pre-marital, counseling decisions.

Promises are made to be kept. Every effort must be made to be faithful to one's promises. Breaking promises must not be a part of a counselor's way of life. Every promise should be preceded by much forethought of one's capability, one's resources, and the circumstances in which the promise will be fulfilled.

A special **little girl** grew up enjoying the marriage ceremonies performed in her church, dreaming of her day in the white dress. She asked the minister to promise her he would perform her marriage ceremony. Her innocence, her goodness and her endearing ways made the making of the promise easy and delightful for the preacher. However, the young man she chose to be her life companion was to all but her clearly not the man with whom she could honor God. Circumstances had changed in the picture that the preacher had seen when he made the promise. Most would understand that the changes nullified the binding nature of the promise. But at the insistence of the girl and her family, along with some hopeful qualities of the young man, the preacher felt he could not withdraw the promise. He did not have to live long to sadly regret his part in such a disastrous marriage, filled with abuse, addiction, and abandonment.

Not that the preacher/counselor bears any responsibility for the bad choices and behavior of others, but he must keep himself free to make informed commitments and be consistent to his principles in making promises.

Lesson Five: Honor pre-marital, counseling standards that have been set for good reasons.

It is crucially important to set clear boundaries, standards to be honored in counseling. It is even more important and difficult to consistently practice the standards. While there will be reasonable circumstances that might justify some degree of

compromise, the counselor needs to have his standards written down and rehearsed in prayer.

A couple came to see the counselor without an appointment, wanting to be married the next day before he shipped out the following day for what would likely be a six month tour abroad. It was the first time the counselor had met the couple. The girl had wanted a church wedding since she was a teenager. There was a strong smell of alcohol and their eyes betrayed drug use. They further inquired about a dance reception for their friends and the serving of alcoholic drinks. The man was incensed when the counselor/preacher read the church policy on the use of the building. More prominent in the standards of the counselor was giving God's blessings on a marriage that was being consummated for all of the wrong reasons and was providing such a fragile context for survival.

The personal integrity of the counselor and his determined intent to do nothing but good for the counselee must be guarded with discretion and courage.

Lesson Six: Confidentiality is a pledge to be honored.

In counseling pre-marital couples, there are frequently very personal matters that are revealed. They may be sexually active, hiding a drug use, living under false pretenses, or have plans very disagreeable to their parents. Parents will often want to know "How the counseling sessions are going?" or "Is there anything we should know?" Save refusing to shield the couple in matters of criminal offense or impending threats to life or limb, confidentiality is a pledge that is an integral part of the responsibility of counseling.

The mother, **Jasmine**, frequently asked if her children were being open and honest about their relationship in the counseling session. She would be more specific and asked if they had discussed the issues they often argued about or if there was any reason to believe that her daughter was pregnant and thinking about an abortion. It was clear to the counselor that the mother was both

controlling, manipulative, and had not built an intimate relationship with her daughter. It was even more clear that she had little regard for the integrity of the counselor and that **her** objectives were of first importance.

Our hearts do understand the deep concerns of parents and committed friends. They want the best for the young couple. There are matters that can be discussed involving what they can do to encourage and be available to the young couple. However, most all matters of content explored in the counseling sessions are off-limits.

Lesson Seven: The greater the diversities, the more likely the increase of difficulties in adjusting into a compatible marriage life.

While some may feel a case can be made against interracial, mixed religion, and cross-cultural marriages, the point of this entry is to underline the probability that extreme diversities increase the likelihood that there will be increased problems in a new marriage. Shared love may make the problems less weighty but love does not erase the problems.

Jess and Sharon were both committed and active in their different religious faiths. In their pre-marital counseling, the problems that each would face were openly discussed. They would not be able to share fully what was most precious to each. Their children could be torn in one direction or the other. Was it right and fair to them? They both felt the pull from their parents and religious friends to convert the other. They neither wanted to leave their religious choice to go with the other. Yet, they dearly loved each other and both had strongly desirable qualities precisely from their religious, core values. They could not bring themselves to leave each other and each go on with his or her life without the other. The counselor, beyond helping the couple to understand the challenges of blending their diversities into a mutually satisfying marriage, emphasized more the necessity of doing what each felt

would most please God and would best honor His purposes in a marriage.

Although a counselor is fundamentally a teacher, a guide in making right choices, he needs to encourage people, themselves, to make the decisions that will impact their lives. If he seems to be imposing his views and values, the couple may impulsively resist him or later resentfully conclude he had made the decision for them, a decision with which they might not now agree.

Lesson Eight: The more genuine the quality of love, the greater extent to which one will go to understand and support the struggles of the other.

A selfish, self-consumed person thinks only of his own needs, preferences, and conveniences. Unless he changes radically he can never be a loving, serving husband. At best, he will not find a perfect, fully mature marital partner. Nor will he be the perfect husband and always the model of maturity. Every mate will require understanding and support in his or her struggles.

Elliot and Janie were deeply in love. They really believed that they each cared fully for the other. In counseling, it was discovered that Janie might be suffering from a bi-polar condition. Medical tests confirmed the condition. That began to explain the wide, mood swings that had troubled their relationship. Without warning Janie would swing from euphoria to depression. Elliot expressed privately to the counselor a shameful impulse to leave the relationship, not wanting to spend his life on such an emotional roller coaster. The counselor helped him first to understand that advanced research had developed controlled medication that could provide normalcy to Janie's life. Secondly, he asked Elliot what he would do if Janie had been diagnosed with breast cancer or a life threatening kidney condition? Would he bail out of the relationship?

While genuine love will think long about pledging a lifetime of understanding and support and may even see the wrongness and futility in some cases of making such a commitment, it will not turn away because of selfishness and an unwillingness to serve and support the struggles of another.

Lesson Nine: A selfish act of lust can be redeemed by a sincere act of renewal.

Every age has seen young lovers failing to honor boundaries of morality, foresight, and unselfishness. Our sex-saturated age and public flouting of secular and pagan values have only made a pre-marital life of moral constancy more difficult. The ability of moral restraint remains a choice. The response to failure determines how deep and severe the consequences of an act may be.

Bruce and Melodie did not act on their knowledge of moral excellence. They let lust throw a dark cloud over what was becoming a model relationship. Melodie learned she was pregnant. They were in pre-marital counseling at the time but had not set a date for marriage. They determined to give the child a home and set a date for their marriage. They shared their bad choice and contrition with their faith community and found forgiving and understanding hearts and warming acceptance.

The marital counselor saw that his mission did not change because of the sin of the couple. He still was committed to helping them build a marriage that would honor God and help the couple mutually serve one another. At the moment of confession, they did not need a condemnation of what they knew to be wrong. It was important that they were contrite over their act and were accountable. He knew that they and the congregation needed to believe and practice the marvel of forgiveness and acceptance.

Lesson Ten: Painful hurts need to heal before new relationships are begun.

Losing a mate in death or divorce leaves deep gashes in the heart that require time and the best of circumstances to heal. Some have observed that three-to-five years may be required in

most cases for full healing to take place and a healthy life-style to occur. Loneliness frequently presses a person to make hasty and sometimes wrong decisions. Couples considering a second marriage seldom seek pre-marital counseling.

Eunice lost her husband after their children were grown and married. He was greatly admired and an honorable church leader. Her pain in the loss was great and her life of emptiness was beyond words. Being left with wealth did not lessen her hurt. They had often taken their vacations in Death Valley, California. She went back to their place of many fond memories. There she met a man of the desert. He was everything that her husband was not. He lived on welfare in a shamble of a trailer. He was an artist of some ability. She became enamored with him. It wasn't long until a marriage was being planned. The elders of her church were dismayed and urged her to rethink her decision. They were proven right in believing that the man was only interested in bettering his life fortunes. The greater irony was that the man was an atheist, showed no moral aptitude or purpose in life. He could provide little spiritual content or leadership in the marriage to a woman who had lived her life in a robust, spiritual life of service with a man who fully loved God and honored Him with all of his life. The preacher had a struggle of conscience in pronouncing God's blessings on such unequal yoking of a man and woman and would not perform the ceremony. The "man of the desert" went on to cheat the dear woman of her wealth before leaving her with a broken heart and empty purse.

A spiritual leader in counseling people finds that reason often loses the battle with the overpowering emotions of unthinking people. Perhaps in good times, people would profit greatly from being taught to think biblically, morally, and unselfishly. Then when emotions want to take over the mission of the mind and of the will, they will have the tools to weigh every decision and make the right choices.

Case Studies in Marital Counseling

Experience can only be gained by living in a circumstance or in a relationship or observing well the choices of others. Studying what others have learned can be helpful. These case studies are taken out of the midst of counseling experiences and are general enough to describe multiple and similar counseling situations.

Lesson One: Successful marital counseling requires a willing husband and wife.

Many times only one mate will request and participate in a counseling program. Usually the wife is the most frequent and most interested in improving the relationship. Without the other mate, many marital problems can only be addressed indirectly or partially. What usually happens is that the counseling will need to focus on the needs of the one present. By all means, judging and speaking diminishingly of the absent mate should be avoided. There are usually at least three sides to every story. Inviting the absent mate to take one of the criss-cross exams on the other mate to help in counseling him or her often gets the absent mate interested and involved. Much greater progress can be achieved when both mates are similarly involved and committed.

Helen came to the minister/counselor without her husband. The counselor told her at the start that marital counseling at its best had to involve both marital partners. She not only insisted that her husband would never come to counseling but that she absolutely did not want him to know that she was coming. She clearly stated that she was coming to counseling to learn how she could straighten out her husband. The counselor, becoming alerted that the

woman was a part of the problem, assured her that he would be very happy to help her be both a better person and respond better to her husband and, thus, indirectly help the husband. However, he stated that he could help the husband only by being with the husband and understanding his viewpoints and needs. She reluctantly agreed to focus the attention of the counseling on her growth needs. The counselor believed from long experience that the steady improvements she might make in her own attitude and behavior would awaken at least a sense of curiosity and maybe even a sense of wonder in the husband.

These things are said while painfully understanding and caring about the plight of many men and women who are married to extremely difficult mates. All the help that can be given to these often courageous people is time well spent, both in giving them hope and, perhaps, even helping to lift some of the burden and to the final end of improving the marital dilemma.

Lesson Two: Caution should be exercised in counseling between a counselor and the other sex.

The stories of counseling gone in the wrong direction are numerous enough to caution every counselor to take the moral responsibility of providing a safe, secure, and healthy environment in counseling one of the opposite sex. Stopping wrongful thoughts at their inception is the best precaution. Resolving personal issues of lust, loneliness, unmet needs, greed, and low-self-esteem that give life to wrongful thoughts takes the passion out of evil thinking.

Jim, a greatly skilled preacher and personable communicator, and Jillian, a devoted homemaker and mother, were having marital problems because of early infidelity on the part of Jim. Jillian did not know how to forgive nor had she ever learned how to fulfill the needs of her husband, either emotionally or sexually. Jim ignored all of the feelings of attraction he had for several of the women who requested counseling in the difficult marital problems they were

facing. While certainly guided by good intentions of helping, Jim allowed the sessions to become more and more self-serving in satisfying his felt needs of feminine acceptance. It is not hard to guess the rest of the story.

One must remember one's own marital covenant, one's promises to the faith community, one's pledge of only helping a counselee and never hurting even one and remember one's soul devotion, gratefulness, and covenant with Jehovah God. Therein, he should find strength to conduct every counseling session in an exemplary manner.

Lesson Three: Open ended marital counseling can become counter-productive.

It is wise to start every counseling session with a terminal date in mind based on the assessed objectives to be achieved. A counseling program can go on endlessly if the objective is to make the counselees fully whole and perfect in all relations. The problem is there are other people who need urgent help and are most eager for attention. Another problem is that a couple can become dependent on the counselor. Check-up or maintenance sessions can be periodically scheduled, but the couple needs to skate out on the ice under their own power.

Liz and her husband began marital counseling and the initial issues were resolved. However, Liz was so eager, it seemed, to confront some of her issues stemming from past years in foster care and drug addiction that she requested further counseling. At each terminal date, she resurrected another problem, then another, and another. The counselor awakened to the reality that he had been an enabler to her addictive behavior encouraging her to be dependent on him. She went to dire ends to convince him how needy she was of continuing counseling, even to staging a suicide attempt.

Abandonment is not the proper response, but decisiveness, wise scheduling, clear communication of objectives, and

insistence on the counselee's involvement in their own therapy are imperative responses.

Lesson Four: Effective marital counseling thrives on the counselee taking responsibility and being accountable.

Regardless of how experienced and knowledgeable a counselor is he cannot foster growth without the active, responsible, and accountable participation of the marital partners. If the couple comes to the sessions regularly and on time, if they are openly and candidly responsive in the discussions, and if they seriously do all of the out-of-session assignments, there can be a growing hope for the success of the counseling. If there is a direct correlation between what is covered in the sessions and measured growth in the marriage, there is probably a confirmation that things are going well.

Arthur and Ann were on the verge of separation and a likely divorce. It became clear that neither was meeting the needs of the other. They were both starving the other mate to death and both of them had the ample resources that were needed to stop the attrition in their marriage. The mutual needs were defined and acknowledged. A list of responsibilities was composed in which each promised to serve the other. They pledged accountability with a signed covenant which the counselor agreed to monitor. They met periodically to evaluate how each was fulfilling the promises and being accountable to the covenant. They are now on their way to an exemplary marriage and are counseling other marital couples.

A major factor in the above case and in most cases is to realize the problems early on. Whether in treating a health issue or a marriage issue, time is a major factor. Solving early problems is much better than having to deal also with extensive damage that has occurred from untreated issues.

Lesson Five: Counseling will likely be unfruitful if an illicit relationship is on-going.

Some men will come to counseling when under threat of an unwanted divorce because of an illicit relationship that the wife has discovered. If the man comes contrite and repentant, wanting help to rebuild his commitment to fidelity to a woman he cares for, much progress can begin. However, if he comes still holding on to the illicit relationship in any dimension, little progress can be made unless he is brought to repentance. Only then can the rightful relationship be restored through forgiveness.

Edward, in a twenty-five year marriage, had been seeing another woman for the better part of a year. His wife discovered the affair through a friend. She was deeply hurt but loved Edward, the father of their three adult children. When the counselor confronted him about the nature of the affair, Edward admitted that he was still seeing the woman intimately. When faced with the necessity of decisively ending the relationship, he plead that he just could not bring himself to closing the door on the illicit lover because she needed him and he had made some promises. The counselor reminded him of the obvious promises he had long ago made to his wife and of her continuing need for him in the present season of her femininity. Not to usurp the responsibility of Edward but to underline the need for decisiveness and urgency, the counselor, knowing the identity of the woman, dialed her number and handed the phone to Edward.

The statement made by Jesus that a man can not serve two masters (cf. Matthew 6:24) could not be any more true than in a love-triangle. Faithfulness in a monogamous relationship cannot be substituted with an affair without hurting everyone involved.

Lesson Six: A counselor must refuse to set aside the basis of his counseling approach.

Christian counseling is distinct because of its insistence on the Bible being the foundation and context of every counseling situation. It is believed that the Bible is relevant in any age and in every culture. It is believed that secular approaches and responses have some merit if based on valid research in human behavior, but those secular resources can never rise any higher than human wisdom. They are to be rejected if in contrast and contradiction to clear teaching of the Bible.

Everett, a well respected counselor, began marital counseling with **Barbara and Jeff**. Both seemed willing and came to the sessions. Jeff was an atheist and Barbara was a believer. Jeff made it quite clear that he had no interest in “religious solutions” to their marital problems and would not come if any mention of God or God’s will was made. The counselor, not wanting to be offensive, but wanting to reach out to Jeff, agreed that if Jeff wanted a sermon he could come with Barbara to worship on Sunday. However, the counselor would be content to “reason” with Jeff on improving the marriage. Everett soon found out that he did not have anything of great value to say and that he had given up the use of the best resource he had used with such effectiveness, the Bible. He felt that all that was left was matching his secular thoughts against those of Jeff. Jeff was highly intelligent and vocal and Everett’s advice did not always impress him. Jeff’s life philosophy was voiced in the popular song, “I’ll Do It My Way.” The sessions were all but entirely fruitless. The last time Everett saw Jeff was on a street corner and he was completely “stoned” on his drugs and alcohol, having lost his bar business and in the middle of a divorce. Not long afterwards, the news came that Jeff had committed suicide.

If Everett had refused to compromise, Jeff would probably not have continued. The compromise restricted Everett to human responses, shutting out the intervention of God speaking through His Word. The tragedy in the life of Jeff is obvious.

The tragedy in the counseling choice of Everett speaks loudly that a Christian counselor must stay on the foundation that makes his counseling worthwhile and authoritative.

Lesson Seven: A counselor should defer counseling of an employee or some close relationships to other counselors.

Counseling an employee, like a church secretary, a very close friend, a close colleague, or a relative all have varied degrees of liability and ineffectiveness. First, it is difficult for any counselor to wear two hats from one hour to the next. In some cases, the counselee will not be as forthcoming or as accountable as he might be with a different counselor. The future relationship often is compromised by the knowledge that the counselor would gain about the person. In most of these cases, it would be wiser to refer the person to another trusted counselor and be an encourager and supporter during the ongoing counseling.

Robert greatly appreciated Norman, the outreach minister, and his wife, Sara, the church secretary. They were dedicated servants despite their serious marital conflicts. It often threatened to break open into the church life. They each were talking with inappropriate persons who usually sided with them against the other mate. Robert, understanding the liabilities of getting involved, felt compelled to intervene with an offer of counseling. While some good was accomplished, the overall outcome was not encouraging. The lines between each of the two focusing on their ministry jobs and counseling became blurred. They let their hostility break out in the wrong places and at inopportune times and Robert often felt torn by changing hats almost hourly. At last Robert understood that the two had to get counseling away from the work place and with another counselor.

The main point in this lesson is that the desire to help and the need for some to get counseling help are not the most pressing issues. More so, the most appropriate help that promises the best results claims precedence over all considerations. Sometimes counselors let their affection for

people or their pride get in the way in making wise, counseling decisions. Best serving the needs of people must be dominant in every choice.

Lesson Eight: A marriage counselor must be alert to other needs beyond his expertise or training and refer the counselee.

Good physicians understand that certain conditions have to be treated first before surgery or other treatments of major health issues can be initiated. Counseling may not be the first thing that is done to help a couple with marital problems. There may be medical or clinical problems that must be treated before marital counseling can be effective. Most counselors do not have the expertise to deal with these levels of need. A counselor would do well to have instant referral information and a professional relationship with specific care givers. With medical or clinical help being given and the counselee improving sufficiently, marital counseling might be scheduled.

Les and Fran would go for a month or so with their marriage being such a delight to them. Then without any apparent cause Fran would become depressed, antagonistic, and accusatory against Les and would want out of the marriage. Les was totally confused, afraid to do or say anything to Fran, and felt like she often accused him that the disruptions were more his fault. Family and friends urged them to go to a marriage counselor. They did, but the cycle continued, with the episodes repeating themselves fairly regularly. They had all but given up any hope that marriage counseling held any promise for them. They consulted another marriage counselor who recognized that Fran was likely suffering from either a hormonal or vitamin imbalance, or was bi-polar and even could be suffering from a personality disorder. He urged them to go to a doctor for testing and gave them a list of several professionals in whom he had great confidence. He assured them that he would be eager to help them when Fran had either cancelled out the suspected conditions or had been given a diagnosis and treatment of the causative problems.

It would make sense that marital counseling, though badly needed, would have to wait for a patient to recover from an automobile accident, cancer surgery, or other treatments. Why, then, would it not make sense that there could be medical and clinical problems that should be given priority before beginning other procedures? The end result of effective, marital counseling is the improved relationship. Yet, counseling, in the short term, can cause stress and require a maximum emotional commitment.

Lesson Nine: Follow-up sessions at periodic intervals can prove to be helpful to reinforce the values of the counseling sessions.

Some people become dependent on the counselor, even to resolving minor details in their marriage. Couples must be encouraged, in every way possible, to take charge of their lives responsibly and become accountable for their choices. One thing a counselor would be wise in doing would be set an end date for counseling by saying, "We will meet six times and deal with the following issues." At the end of the sixth session the counseling is concluded. However, single, follow-up maintenance sessions can be scheduled to evaluate progress and, if necessary, recall the couple to responsible behavior and to encourage them in reaching their well defined objectives.

Pete and Sally faithfully attended six sessions of counseling dealing with mutually recognized issues. During the sessions they were asked to form a covenant promising to meet the needs of their mate that had emerged during counseling. The counselor formed the covenant and they signed it. Three months, six months, and one year later they came back into one-session counseling to determine if they were keeping their covenant toward the other, what help they needed, and were encouraged and praised for their progress.

The couple probably could have been kept in counseling longer. However, as soon as a couple is ready to fly, they should be "put out of the nest." They can be helped as needed or periodic, maintenance sessions can be scheduled. What

successes occur will be their successes. What crashes occur will be their choices and can be helped with counseling.

Lesson Ten: When possible, the counselor would do well to provide supplementary opportunities for the couple to grow in their marriage.

Few counselors have the time or the resources to give every couple all they need to build healthy and productive marriages. Fortunately, today there are many marriage resources being made available. Only sectarian or personal pride keeps some counselors from pointing a couple to enjoy added help. Besides organizing multiple marriage and family growth experiences in the local setting and developing a library of books on marriage, there should be marriage seminars in the area, courses being taught to the public in areas like finances, communication, parenting, and selective, healthy television programs, and Internet resources that are available.

Al and Jennifer really enjoyed and benefitted from their counseling with Edward. All along the way he was frequently suggesting or giving them books they could read, keeping them informed about learning opportunities in the area and some that required taking a week's vacation to attend. He had trained mature members in the congregation to sponsor married couples and gave Al and Jennifer a list from which they could choose one most compatible to them. Edward, besides giving them immediate marital guidance and building tools, put them in charge of their continuing growth. He helped them develop a culture in which they saw the growth of their marriage linked inseparably with a commitment to continuing, marriage education.

If it takes "a village to raise a child," it may well take a church and the better influences in a community to build a marriage. The counselor must look beyond himself to marshal every opportunity and resource that would help him to give a couple all they need and will use to build their marriage. To think that he is the only and best resource is arrogance that could prove costly to those who come to him needing objective and well informed help.

Case Studies in Parental Counseling

As parents go through the seasons of parenting with each child they often feel the need for counseling assistance. Each child is different and often presents a different set of challenges. As one parent said:

“We got our first child, a girl, through her teens and I thought I had parenting down to a science. But, the next child was a boy and it was almost like starting over again. Then, with him well on his way I knew we would surely sail through raising the third child. She was a girl alright, but like day and night different from the first girl.”

The parental circumstances also change from one child to another requiring adjustments and need for different skills and attitude adjustments.

Lesson One: Parental counseling must acknowledge the directives of God in developing children.

The final results of parenting depend directly on the directives or values that parents follow in raising their children. Christian counselors will present the directives found in the Bible to guide parents. To the extent that parents understand and faithfully work to achieve what God wants for their children, they can expect a more favorable result. When secular and even godless values or parental selfishness are involved, an unfavorable result is to be expected. When parenting skills and knowledge are lacking, the outcomes can almost be predictable.

Paul and Debbie both came from dysfunctional families. Neither had the benefit of healthy homes or

parents who believed in God. For several generations the parents had been failures in many areas of parenting. Almost every common sense guideline and every Christian value had been ignored. It would be expected that Paul and Debbie would carry on the dysfunctional cycle. Through associations at work Paul became interested in a different way of life, a life of faith in Jesus. In time both he and his wife became Christians. They were faced with a long road of rebuilding most functions of their life, including parenting. The Christian counselor led them through a study of Genesis 1–2 to capture the principle of God's ownership and authorship of the family. He studied Deuteronomy 6 with them to understand the parental responsibilities in educating the child. He studied Proverbs 22 to understand the optimum seasons of growth. He studied Luke 2 with them to see the outline for child development. He studied Ephesians 6 to understand the strategy of child development. They not only gained a deep appreciation for the Bible as being relative to modern living, but also began their journey of effective parenting.

There is much to be learned by observing effective parents, adapting and implementing counsel given by knowledgeable people, and being willing to explore better ways to parent children. Yet, the foundation of effective parenting starts with the inspired directives and models to be found in the Bible.

Lesson Two: Counseling parents must acknowledge the importance of parental double stamping.

God began the home with a father and mother. He could have begun the home in many other formats. The fact is that he created the male and the female to complete each other (cf. Genesis 2:18) and, consequently, to complete each child. Each parent has qualities that are unique by virtue of his or her created nature. It is called “double stamping or imaging.” The father gives the child the self-confidence to do and dare, to take risks, to forge forward, to be independent and self-reliant. The mother gives the child a sense of endearment, healthy dependence, sensitivity, and the joy of relationships. Parents

can fail in their created mission to the detriment in the life of their children. However, when they function as God designed them, the children become whole and productive adults.

Elliot and Charla knew that their parenting was going in the wrong direction. In counseling they began to discover some of the reasons. They both worked demanding jobs of long and exhausting hours. They had little emotional strength and energy to invest in the lives of the children. Child care was good but never could match what committed parents could do. The fact was that neither of their children, a boy and girl, received the molding influence of the parents. The boy was timid, reserved, and fearful of any new adventure or change. He was not affectionate, was harsh to his little sister, and spent most of his time in his room. Some of the same traits were emerging in the daughter, except she was also clinging to anyone, moody, and distrustful. In counseling, the parents were faced with a choice. Would they pursue their financial dreams, with the ability to retire at age fifty and travel, or would they reshape their commitments to have the right and necessary impact on each of their children?

Our hearts go out to single mothers who find themselves trying to be both parents to their children. A faith community needs to surround her with caring alternatives to help supply the masculine imaging the children need. She can hardly do more than what God designed her to provide.

Lesson Three: Counseling parents must add stability and unity to the marriage.

The healthy development of children is greatly impacted by the strength and affection there is in the marriage. Dysfunctional marriages distract from good parenting. One of the best gifts parents can give to their children, all year long, is the loving relationship of a Dad and Mom. Many parents bring baggage into the marriage that gets in the way of becoming good parents.

Malcomb and Alice came to the counselor with frustrations in parenting. The kids were always fighting, being belligerent to parents, and generally unruly. It did not take long for the counselor to help them discover the source of the problem. Both had come from homes where disputes invariably ended up in yelling arguments and sometimes in physical fights. Malcomb and Alice had not achieved a healthy, conflict management skill. Their kids were merely copying what they saw in their parents and throughout the extended family of uncle and aunts and grandparents. Somewhere, most of the time, there was a fuss going on and alienation was common in the family clan. The counselor led the couple through studies and assignments in communication, conflict, and anger management and forgiveness.

Children must have a stable, united, and loving environment in which to grow. What they see and hear might well be more instructive to them than what parents formally teach. Until they are old enough to make their own choices and have the knowledge and values to make good choices, they have only what happens around them as resources for knowing how to behave.

Lesson Four: Parents must achieve a sound and united practice of values, discipline, and choice of objectives.

Young children are not yet able to identify values on their own. They regularly become confused by mixed signals from the parents in matters of discipline. Knowing what life goals would be good for them comes later through consistent training. A counselor is a teacher. In this case he may need to help some parents acknowledge and agree on a set of parental values that they want to honor at all costs. He may need to teach them to compose and practice a united approach to discipline. They might need help to set some goals for the family and for the development of the children, remembering the individuality of each child.

Norman and Dorothy had little preparation in becoming parents. Parenthood just happened, catching

them with little more than the desire to have a child. Some serious parental failures in their family got their attention. They were ready to tackle a sharp learning curve so they could give their new baby all he needed. The counselor started with helping them put together the values that would guide their parenthood and that they wanted to inculcate in their child. They studied at some length both the importance of discipline as a learning experience and the principles that they would practice together so as not to send mixed, contradicting and confusing signals to the child as he grew. They determined the kind of family they wanted to achieve to give their son a healthy environment in which to grow.

Parents who are caught without informed knowledge and mutual agreement on values, discipline, and purposes will be constantly changing direction and never accomplishing enduring results.

Lesson Five: Parental counseling needs to include teaching them to explore and develop the gifts of each child as individuals.

Regularly, every child is giving signals to parents about his interests, his passion, and his designed destiny. The job of parenting is to discover, early on, the giftedness of each child and start providing the resources, incentives, and environment so the child can maximize what God has given. Forcing a child to be what the child was not designed to be can be unproductive, confusing, and sometimes defeating.

Matt was a gregarious, personable man who was a sensational prep and college sports hero. He enjoyed it immensely and wanted his son to have all of the benefits of playing sports. He dreamed of practicing with his son, going to games, seeing his son perform and getting the accolades that would come with being a champion. David was personable like his dad but was born with a somewhat smaller frame. It became apparent as he grew that he would not likely be a bruising fullback like his dad. For whatever reason, in part for the over aggressiveness of his dad, David was

not all that eager to play football or any sport. He enjoyed art, music, and working with people. In his teens, he, on his own, taught younger children how to paint, how to play instruments, and played in a music group or two. Matt saw all of his dreams collapse around him and let David know it! He made it an issue of ungratefulness and indifference for his desires on his son's part. That is when the counselor was invited into the family disruption. The counselor taught Matt about the principles of giftedness, in life and in ministry. Matt began to understand that God had designed David and his job, as a father, was to honor God in helping his son become all that God had planned for him. David went on to become, to the delight of his father, an outstanding educator who impacted the lives of several generations of kids.

Children will be happy being what God designed them to be and having their parents as their most enthusiastic supporters and coaches. Instead of being stuck in jobs and professions that are unrewarding and boring, the child will work with passion, purpose, and fulfillment. His life, his marriage, and his parenthood, all will take on meaning and productivity.

Lesson Six: Parental counseling involves teaching the optimum seasons of parenting.

Proverbs 22:6 is a gold mine of knowledge for parents. Better translated it reads, “*Give every child all that he needs when he needs it and the passing of years will not efface what has been printed.*” In other words, there are optimum periods of instruction. Child development experts and educators have long affirmed that children are ready for instruction according to predictable stages of growth. Ages 1–5 are the best ages to teach **attitudes**. Ages 6–10 are the best ages to teach **values**. Ages 11–15 are the best ages to provide **modeling**. And, ages 16–20 are the best years for **experimentation**. Parents often try to teach the right things at the least productive times.

Jess came gruffly into the counselor's office without an appointment. He was complaining about the Youth Minister failing in his job of teaching the kids about

respect for a father's authority. He described, in some details, all he had been saying to his son in these last months about his smart aleck attitude and lazy ways. What he said had a ring of truth in it. Every young guy should know what the son was hearing. They were the right things being said at the wrong time to be most effective. The sad truth was that Jess missed the optimum time to teach his son attitudes and values and was too busy working away from home to serve as a winsome model. Now that the son was experimenting, it was in the wrong places, with the wrong people, and with all of the predictable consequences. Jess, in the counseling, was faced with the choice of radically changing his attitudes, reshaping some of his values, and starting to prioritize his time or he would be having the same uncontrollable experiences with the other kids who were coming fast behind his son. Perhaps, the counselor suggested, the father's contrite change and reaching out to his older son might even redeem the troublesome behavior of the son.

The resiliency of children is amazing. They can take a lot of abuse, neglect and mishandling and still turn out surprisingly well. However, the better a parent understands what and when he can best teach a child, the better possibility there is that the child will have imprinted on him those lessons that will grace his life and relationships.

Lesson Seven: Parental counseling must set ideals for family living.

Families produce predictable results. Wise parents devote themselves to creating an environment where each child can grow to become a healthy, productive adult. They define and seek to achieve some clear ideals. They know the value of maintaining close relationships and valuing each other and pay the price of time to insure them. They create an atmosphere of open expressions of affection and need. They instill the joy of giving and serving. They make values a core belief of the family, values that include honesty, fairness, industry, caring, purity, responsibility, and accountability. They keep Christ at

the center of the family and spiritual devotion a regular, family practice.

After attending a parenting seminar and participating in a group, parenting counseling program in their church, **Willard and Naomi** began restructuring their family ideals. Before work, recreation, school, hurried and costly vacations and infrequent attendance at church filled their schedules. They were frequently all going in different directions throughout the week. They had no goals for the family and no ideals that overarched what they were doing. It was a day-to-day rat race, hurrying and scurrying from one event to another. At the pace they were going no long term achievements would likely result. By determining that their home would be ideal driven rather than event driven, things began to change. Church, service to others and relationships gave content and purpose to their lives. Events that were empty of value or meaning were no longer attended. By spending more quiet, home time together they found endless pleasures in being together and doing things with and for each other. By attending one another's performance events they shared in one another's accomplishments. The parenting group continued to meet periodically to keep the families on track in the pursuit of their ideals.

Few things even come close to being as important as keeping the family together. It is said that "a family that prays together, stays together." Family members will be drawn in many directions and some of them will not be wholesome if the parents do not make family togetherness a warm, needed, and meaningful experience.

Lesson Eight: Parents must be cautioned about unhealthy practices in child development.

A parent may be involved in some unhealthy practices because of lacking instruction, getting too busy in making a living, or keeping up with a busy schedule,. Failing to affirm a child can make the child defensive and overly eager to please

as he gropes for approval. Diminishing a child can make a child self-diminishing and doubtful of his worth. Making love conditional on performance can instill in the child the wrong motives for achievements. Being too demanding and severe on a child can either cause him to despair of ever pleasing a parent or be driven to prove himself to a parent. Being too busy to take ample and quality time with a child can communicate the lack of regard for the value of the child. All of these unhealthy practices distort the child's purpose in life and teach the wrong work ethic.

Larry was not known for any ability to teach or take public leadership. He was generally quiet, but very congenial, always helpful and zestful about life and people. Being thought of as a counselor never entered his mind. Yet, one-by-one, parents came to Larry for advice. There was something very special about his family. They were close, affectionate with each other, thoroughly enjoyed being together, and used every opportunity to visit with each other. He was always affirming, re-enforcing each child, and challenging them to do their best. He had a way of knowing what every child felt and identifying with him or her. He was always involved in some game or project with his children. Larry, whether at home or traveling, played his Bible quoting game in which the kids would read a Scripture and he would tell them where it was and even, sometimes, would quote the passage before or after. People saw in Larry and his family what they wanted in their own and came to him for counsel.

It takes a lot for a child to give up on a parent. They thrive on every moment of attention. They beam with every affirmation. They hunger for the affection of each parent. They believe in a parent when even others will not. There is a bond between them that becomes even more meaningful through the years when the parents know and give the child what God has designed the child to receive.

Lesson Nine: Counseling with parents is about pointing them to rich parenting resources.

In past generation a young parent had a hard time finding any advise concerning parenting except from family members. Wisdom was usually passed on from one generation to another. Today there are hundreds of books, video productions, audio tapes, seminars, parent-interest groups, radio, television, and Internet sources available. There is almost a communication overload with the abundance of resources. The work of a counselor is to stay abreast of the materials available and make the information available to parents.

Conrad, as a counselor, enjoyed helping families find and experience the joy of a close-knit family. He had come from an extraordinary family and knew how meaningful good parenting could be. Every quarter he scheduled a parenting seminar in his congregation and invited select parents. He persuaded the leaders to invest significant money in developing a fully supplied library of books, parenting programs, audio and video materials, and family development supplies that could be checked out by parents. He guided a monthly parent-interest, discussion group. He organized trips to cities in the state to attend parenting programs and seminars. He reserved time for private counseling with parents. He conducted testing for parents in counseling or anyone who requested the tests. He invited and trained mature members to be mentors of young parents and some to be adopted grandparents. Older women of the church were urged and trained to reach out to younger women, especially to single moms and abused wives. His sermons were proportionately devoted to family themes. Special emphasis was made to celebrate with families in their achievements, with well planned events to mark anniversaries and births. The church was involved in family needs in the community. The church he served became known in the community as the “family church.”

Some parents will take personal initiatives to know and acquire the needed help to raise their children. Others would benefit from the help that a counselor could provide. The counselor, by nature of his training and work, will know how to choose the most helpful and wholesome resources.

Lesson Ten: Some parents and grandparents need help to face hurt, defeat, and failed expectations.

Parenting is work. It is seldom easy. Sometimes parents have unrealistic expectations. Things happen beyond the control of the best of people. Some parents have, seemingly, an unbroken litany of good things that happen in the lives of their children. Others, good people, seem to frequently face hurt, defeat, and failed expectations. A counselor's best moments are when he can help parents or grandparents to learn how to dwell on their mercies rather than on their miseries.

Katherine, a grandmother of ten grandchildren, became absorbed in grief over a grandson who was involved in drugs, was in and out of jail and, almost certainly, was getting deeper and deeper into a life of crime. Prison seemed to be his sure destination. The elders of the church surrounded Katherine with their concern and prayer. One of the elders, a professional counselor, spent significant time in helping her work systematically through her grief and overcome her depression and anxiety. Members of the Ladies' Bible Class would include Katherine in their service visits or social gatherings to help her focus on positive things. Over the weeks, while the pain and concern over the grandson would resurface, Katherine learned to praise God for her other nine grandchildren, to commit her wayward grandson to God's care, discipline, and keeping, and to be involved in encouraging others to trust in God and be thankful for all of His promises.

Into each life some rain will fall but one must be able to look through the storm and see God at work, believing that the sun will soon shine again bringing its warmth and healing. Through tears, a parent can believe that God intends that some good can yet come through failed dreams and much hard work and sacrifice.

Case Studies in Wholeness Counseling

Counseling is needed, largely, because people are not whole. They either lack the necessary knowledge or skills and need to be taught in counseling or they are in the early stages of their journey of growth. Some of the latter may be fragmented in their development with personality traits being blocked by some unresolved issues. Counseling is dedicated to helping people grow. Thus, Christian counseling is all about teaching the knowledge, the skills, and how to unblock growth channels and point people toward the Christ-like qualities they need.

Lesson One: Testing is very helpful in measuring progress and needful growth.

In time, an astute counselor can understand most of what he needs to know by insightful questions and keen observations. However, time can be used better and subjectivity can be marginalized through the good use of testing. The value of testing is that the resulting profile comes from how the counselee describes himself. Thus, the views of the counselor are not a part of the evaluation. His role is simply to interpret the results and help the counselee make applications. The same test can be given periodically to measure growth in response to therapy. Tests provide the counselor with reliable records for follow-up appointments.

Through systematic testing that eventually included the majority of the congregation, **Greg** was able, both, to help the individuals tested in private counseling and to more accurately know what sermons and classes were needed to promote growth. He saw a pattern emerging that showed that 65% of the congregation had unresolved anger problems and 55% did not seem

to have the skills of processing anxiety. These two skill-sets, then, became a part of his planning of sermons, classes and seminars with visiting speakers. In two years of time, those alarming scores were reduced by 75%, with only a few remaining as earlier tested. Insightful testing served the same purposes that lab tests serve a physician in diagnosis and treatment of patients.

Tests are tools to be used to accurately analyze problems, to focus attention, and to accelerate treatment. They are time savers, usually giving more objective results. The Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (TJTA) is widely used by counselors. The administration of the test does require certification. A counselee can take the test on-line with the results being sent directly to the certified counselor.

Lesson Two: It is instructive to know the background of people in counseling.

There are some problems that lie under the radar of some conventional testing tools. Only skilled inquiry can get to the heart of the causative problem. If the problem remains unknown or misunderstood, all subsequent counseling may be limited in value or can even be frustrating to both the counselee and counselor.

Sharon and Rob came for marital counseling. One problem that surfaced fairly quickly was that Sharon refused any sexual contact with Rob. Their one child was something forced on Sharon out of the frustration of Rob. In one-on-one counseling the sad truth came out. Sharon had been locked in a closet for the first four years of her life. She was poorly fed and treated as less than a house pet. She had not learned to talk, and could hardly walk or run. Her mother was harsh and abusive to her. Sharon had been often sexually abused by her grandfather who had regularly abused her mother throughout her life. At age five, a child agency intervened and Sharon was adopted out to a religious family who took excellent care of her. As she grew, Sharon continued to have her fears, her

contempt for men, and hatred for her mother. She smoldered with the plan to find her mother and kill her. She kept a pistol ready for her vendetta. Through sensitive counseling Sharon learned to forgive, turning her hate toward love and reconciliation. Counseling helped her understand the traumatic life that had been forced on her mother as the victim of the cruel and sinful behavior of her own father, the grandfather. In his regard, though he was long since deceased, she was able to divide between a necessary disapproval of his despicable life and understanding how one gets to such a place in their values and behavior.

Knowing a counselee's background does not change what has to be done to change the present problems. But, it does help in understanding why a person has the problem and how intense the problem may be. Just knowing this information, helps a counselor know where to start and how to proceed in helping the counselee.

Lesson Three: Identifying a growth plan is even more important than knowing the cause of a wholeness deficit.

As helpful as background information is to getting started in the right direction, the best gift given by a counselor is giving the counselee hope that he can enjoy a better future. The best hope that a counselor can give is to teach the counselee about some new tools and approaches and how to get started. There is hardly any thing more exciting to a counselee than to see positive changes in relationships and attitudes because of new things learned in counseling.

Phil was deeply angry with his father. He had not seen him in years and did not ever want to see him again. His two sons had never met their grandfather. Phil's dad had been a heavy drinker and gambler. He earned well when he was sober but invariably lost everything to drink and cards. He was hard when sober and fiercely abusive when drunk, both to Phil's mother and to Phil and two brothers. His mother worked two jobs to support the family. Under such stress and continued physical abuse, she became very ill and

died. Phil, though a deacon and active in church and a good father, would almost boil over with his anger and was over-defensive of his sons. In counseling, Phil was taught a plan for anger management and forgiveness that led him, for the first time in his adult life, to want to re-establish contact and be reconciled with his father. When contact was made, he found a father broken in health, guilt ridden for all of the abuse he had given, and alone and unloved in the world. Reconciliation was experienced, the aging father affectionately held his two grandsons on his lap and felt the embrace of a forgiving son. He begged for forgiveness and felt love for and from his family for the first time. He died in peace two days later.

Counseling is not just to give a counselee the opportunity to “blow off steam,” certainly not to console him for “being human,” or to put a “band-aid” over a wound. It is for teaching the counselee about a new way to live, to give needed healing for hurts by tying the hurt and forgiveness together and to give the counselee some tools for better life-building.

Lesson Four: Every person can grow with timely help and by being responsible and accountable.

To insure the surest and most meaningful growth a person needs to be aware of the origin of problems. All men are, in part, what they were made to be genetically. Just as surely as each one bears resemblances in his physical features to his ancestry, so are some other characteristics passed on. Adoptive parents who provide the best of environment are soon aware of some genetic characteristics that come out in the reactive behavior of the child. Men are also in part, what they have been taught to be in a developmental environment. Each person takes on the values, whether they are taught or “caught” from his parents and from his surroundings. A person’s vocabulary, reactions, gestures, and responses find roots in his daily life. At the point of counseling, **nature** and **nurture** are not man’s responsibilities. However, one thing does remain within his grasp. **Man can and must determine who he will become.** He can curb or channel any negative inclination or propensity that may have become a part of his life genetically. He can change

any of his values, habits, and relationships that are detrimental to positive growth. He can make a covenant with himself to be personally responsible and daily accountable for all of his actions. A Christian counselor is devoted to helping people, regardless of their genetic or environmental background, to be responsible and accountable for ongoing choices.

Joe was a mess! He was like a patient being rushed in from a devastating car accident. There was something to be treated on every part of his body. Like a physician, a counselor could start just about anywhere and do much good. Joe did not come to the counselor, Monty, on his own. He was brought by his wife who once shared with him the tumultuous lifestyle until she was reached by a friend and brought to Christ. Monty, like a good doctor, took care of some issues to make Joe more comfortable but then focused on what hurts were the most important. Bringing him to faith in Christ, helping him recognize destructive values and denounce them, and helping him regard relationships differently and to build them on solid foundations were among the leading counseling initiatives. It was not done in a few weeks. There were too many distortion and lies in Joe's life. The major breakthrough came when Joe quit blaming his parents, his job, his wife, and the world around him and began accepting personal responsibility and accountability for change and growth.

A Christian counselor believes in a miracle-working Jesus. However, he, himself, is no miracle worker. Regardless how well trained he is or how much effective counseling he has done and over a long period of time, a counselor cannot do much with someone who will not be responsible or accountable. A medical doctor can give prescribed drugs but the patient has to take them as prescribed for them to be effective. No less, a counselee has to follow what was taught by the counselor before any good will result.

Lesson Five: A counselor must recognize an area of counseling that may be beyond his expertise and know to whom he can refer a counselee.

The medical field has many areas of expertise. Doctors do not hesitate to refer a patient to a specialist who can better treat a patient. The wellness of the patient is the most important consideration. Counseling aims at the wellness of the counselee. One of the first things a counselor must learn is what he does not know or in which areas he does not do as well. Then, without self-pride or a false sense of competency, refer the counselee to someone who can best help the counselee.

Lawrence had been having good results in counseling with couples getting married, in marital counseling, and general counseling needs in personal behavior. Stan came to him in deep depression. Lawrence had helped some come out of depression and went to work helping Stan. They both were pleased when Stan showed all the signs of recovery and renewed energy and productivity. Then Stan introduced a completely new, contrasting set of behaviors. He was ebullient, went day and night with tireless activity, and came up with the most bizarre ideas. Lawrence knew, without knowing exactly what, that something was going on here that he had never dealt with before. He referred Stan to a clinical psychologist for testing. As was thought, Stan was bi-polar. He was given the appropriate medications, and soon with some adjustments, returned to a balanced, productive, and happy life.

There is no virtue in being a “know-it-all” when dealing with the emotional health and well-being of people. No counselor knows everything in counseling equally well. Young counselors need to gain more experience before treating some counseling needs (e.g. marital counseling with other young couples). All counselors need to know how to identify clinical dysfunctions and their characteristics, not to treat them, but to refer the counselees to someone who is able to help them.

Lesson Six: Periodic follow-up counseling visits can be important to the on-going growth of a counselee.

Counseling sessions should be as few as possible to address the major issues. Sessions should not continue to address all of the complaints of the counselee. Most counseling work can be done in one session. If more sessions are necessary, a counselor needs to state a limit to the number of sessions envisioned. Starting with a stated terminal date is always wise. Then, several months or a year after the close of the sessions, a one-time, follow-up visit can be scheduled.

Kirk and Margie were having serious marital problems growing out of Kirk's inability to be an attentive and caring father. Their son was a special needs child and Kirk was always aloof and sometimes harsh to the child and then abusive to Margie when she showed any disapproval of his poor parenting skills. Counseling with him uncovered multiple issues with his passive father, with his overly dominant mother, and his learned, reactive behavior to both and to his younger siblings. Wholeness counseling with him and marital counseling with both soon began bringing them together, united in their marriage and in their mutual joys in parenting. Specialized schooling was obtained for the son, greatly reducing his frustration in his bewildering world. A covenant between them was composed wherein they made promises to one another based on stated needs. In one year, the anniversary of the covenant, a joint meeting was scheduled to measure their growth in marriage and parenting. What had seemed unlikely and certainly unwanted was then a reality. A second child was on the way. Though all tests indicated a perfectly normal and healthy girl was about to join the family, they were ready to embrace and love whatever gift God gave them.

The important point is to avoid having a counselee become dependent on the counselor. There are many other people who need and want help rather than to focus on a few over a long period of time. The counselor must be honest with himself and

consider whether or not he is enjoying the sessions overly much (e.g. sessions with women, with old friends, sessions with people he wants to impress, and so on.). People must be relied on to take charge of their own lives and to pursue growth opportunities and responsibilities.

Lesson Seven: The church may be correct in its doctrine but fragmented in its wholeness.

It is well that a church be concerned that it is teaching those distinctive truths that characterize a faithful and fruitful church. However, doctrinal purity must not become the all-in-all, in exclusion of helping every member to become whole in Christ. Christians have evidently thought that being in church every service and hearing sermons on religious error would be enough to accomplish Paul's aim in Colossians 1:28: "*We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [whole] in Christ.*"

For years, **Kevin** had been holding counseling and wholeness seminars in the brotherhood and doing private counseling with several thousand members. From tests that were administered, he concluded that the church is a valiant and devoted army, but full of wounded soldiers. He, overall, saw that two-thirds of the members were seriously wounded in two or more, critical traits and one-half of the leaders had some of the same deficiencies. Some of the most critical areas were the ability to deal with doubt, fear, loneliness and guilt, the ability to be expressive of emotions or to be caring without being judgmental, and the ability to be forgiving. Since these were core issues in the growth of spirituality, he determined that more emphasis needed to be placed on the wholeness of the members.

The fact is that wounded soldiers cannot fight as long and as well while wounded. In a world conquest that requires Christians to be at their best, battle-ready at all times, becoming a whole, healthy people becomes a high priority in the Church's teaching program. How can we be attractive and winsome to

the world if we show little signs of growth in major portions of our lives?

Lesson Eight: Achieving a life of wholeness is not a “forever” commitment.

Becoming like Jesus is never ending, requiring a life of surrender and following Him with all of one's heart. However, achieving a healthy base for wholeness can be achieved in a matter of months to only several years, depending on the fragmentation at the start.

Sarah was barely surviving from a ragged divorce. As a working, single mom with two boys to raise alone, she was hindered by wide-spread, deficient trait issues. On the test that was given, she showed a serious need to grow in eight of nine, profile areas. From all that could be known in counseling, these deficiencies had been a continuing part in her life DNA. The counselor and Sarah chose the most pressing personality traits and set to work on each, one after the other. Time was taken off periodically from counseling for Sarah to work on one or more of the traits being addressed. Two years after the initial test, her new self was profiled with no areas of urgently needed growth. At last, she had a base for a life of fuller wholeness and spirituality. She was free to grow in being all that God had designed her to be.

It is incredibly beautiful when a person sees his anxiety transformed into hope, anger and resentment transformed into forgiveness and reconciliation, impulsiveness transformed into a disciplined life, or indifference and insensitivity transformed into caring and concern. By being responsible and accountable and being blessed with an effective counselor, a person can find the grace and power of the Lord to become more and more like Jesus.

Lesson Nine: There is an inseparable connection of wholeness issues and marital counseling.

Marriage counseling would suddenly become easier and limited to improvement of skill-sets if all couples were whole in their lives. Someone said that there are only a few problems in a marriage, except for the people. Fragmented people create troubled marriages. When people grow, marriages flourish.

Nolan and Sally came to counseling asking for help in learning how to communicate better. Communication skills are highly important, but, often belie more serious problems. Actually, both Nolan and Sally communicated very effectively on their jobs, in their church, and among their friends. The facts began tumbling out. Sally had listened all of her adolescent life to the complaints of her mother about her father. She alternated in hating her mother, then her father. Nolan, sometimes, acted a little like her father, proving her mother to be right about not trusting men. Sally was fearing the worst and suspecting the good times. Nolan had never forgiven his mother for leaving him to be raised by a harsh grandmother. His opinion of women in general and those closest to him in particular was not healthy. He treated Sally out of his resentments. Those issues needed to be addressed before communication skills could be taught effectively.

Whatever the nature of the counseling situation, the counselor needs to be alert to the frequent, underlying wholeness issues. Otherwise, they will be bubbling to the surface even after the best skills are taught. Because counseling issues have been dealt with superficially with a list of “do’s and don’t’s,” people have continued to be dysfunctional in their relationships and service.

Lesson Ten: Churches should examine the wholeness of prospective preachers as carefully as they examine his preaching skills.

The skills of a preacher in the pulpit are of vast importance, given the central place that preaching has among the Church. How personable he is, how evangelistic, or how administratively he seems to be are high on the priorities in selecting a man to work among us. How long ago has it been since a church gave considerable scrutiny to the wholeness of the preacher? Has a prospective preacher ever be asked to take a wholeness test to be professionally evaluated? And, yet, most preachers are dismissed, in time, because of wholeness issues, not doctrinal conflicts, even though doctrinal reasons are the most frequently cited. How many elders solicit and encourage their co-working preachers to grow in wholeness?

The Search Committee recommended a person to the elders that it had vetted rather thoroughly as regards to his impressive resume, his remarkable taped sermons, the picture of him and his lovely family, and the references he had given. He was invited to visit the congregation. He was impressive in his speaking, his personality, and his biblical knowledge. He appealed equally well across the ages, occupations, and genders of the congregation. His wife was more lovely and personable than the picture had promised. Inviting him to move to work with the congregation seemed the right thing to do and to be done quickly without looking any further. One of the elders thought to do a little more in-depth inquiry. He found out that the minister had divided the last three congregations where he had preached and was actually unemployed from having been dismissed recently. His problems were chronic, going all the way back to college where he was expelled from school. His long history of dishonesty, manipulation, and control had limited his stay at any congregation to less than two years. He had refused counseling when offered or demanded by the series of elderships where he had served. It seemed such a waste of extraordinary talent because of the shocking lack of wholeness. All of the previous

churches, though seeing some red flags, felt that the results would well justify marginal problems that might arise.

The truth is that life wholeness trumps pulpit skills. What a man does 160 + hours out of the pulpit overshadows “his hour in the sun.” He can undo what he says so brilliantly and well by what he does out of his fragmented life. The better solution is not to dismiss him and send him on to another congregation with an impressive recommendation of his impressive skills so they can suffer the same difficulties and repeat the charade in a few months or years. Rather, it is to help him become whole and achieve a balance of life and ministry. Money and time spent in ministry renewal may be the best investment a church might make.

Case Studies in Member-to-Member Counseling

From the study of Scriptures to personal and congregational experience, it is evident church members have conflict. These conflicts, if not resolved in a mature, Christian way, often strain or divide a church. Having someone or some resource of conflict management becomes imperative if the church is to maintain both its unity and forward momentum in fulfilling its mission.

Lesson One: First explanations in a conflict may be smoke screens hiding the real motives.

A counselor should never think that the first explanations or accusations correctly or fully define an issue between two members. Often the members themselves do not understand what fuels a conflict unless assisted to be open, transparent, objective, and encouraged to get in touch with their feelings. A counseling session can go in the wrong direction if misguided by less than causative information. Sometimes, peripheral issues have to be cleared away to focus on what is really bothering the members in conflict.

Philip was forever finding fault with anything that Trevor did. Trevor tried to be patient, tried to win Philip's respect in service and praise, and thought long and often at what he may have done to provoke such fault-finding on Philip's part. Philip did not target others, only Trevor. His zeroing in on Trevor was apparent to all and was weighing somewhat on the good will in the congregation. Trevor was urged by the elders to go to Philip as Matthew 18:15 suggests. Philip would not give him the time of day. Several brethren, including the preacher, went with Trevor to prevail on Philip and to counsel the two of them to

reconcile. The two brethren were wise and patient enough to kindly work through multiple layers of smoke to get at the real issue. Some years before, Trevor had built a new home, using another brother in the congregation as the contractor. Philip not only felt diminished by the decision but had perceived that Trevor's choice prejudiced other members and people in the small community from using his construction company. He had subsequently gone bankrupt. In his mind, it was all attributed to Trevor. As everything came out, Trevor explained to Philip that the other contractor had given him a financial packet that made it possible for him to build. Reconciliation took place that night. Philip agreed to enter a counseling program with the preacher on anger management and forgiveness.

The reconciliation of two brothers is worth the hard work to penetrate the smoke screens and get at the core issues that have disrupted a relationship. Jesus urged His followers to seek the truth and enjoy the benefits of the resultant freedom (cf. John 8:32).

Lesson Two: Perceived offenses left to fester will be more difficult to resolve as months go by.

The human body is not designed to store up the acid of anger for long. There is something very significant in Paul's statement ". . . *Do not let the sun go down while you are angry*" (Ephesians 4:26). Suppressed anger begins to eat away at a person's body and emotions, further destroying relationships. Paul's advice is to confront the offense decisively and soon to stop the festering of anger and worsening all aspects of the necessary resolution.

Don and Jim were close friends and active in the congregation. Their children were engaged to be married, just like they had both hoped would happen. Near the wedding day, and after much expense had been incurred on both sides, the children abruptly called off their marriage plans and engagement. The rumor circulated that Jim had increasingly opposed

the marriage of his son to Don's daughter over her immorality outside of their engagement. Don denied any such accusation of his daughter and held Jim fully responsible for starting the rumor and wrecking the approaching marriage. Don refused to discuss the issues and busied himself in non-church activities to the point that he rarely was involved in church events and seldom attended the worship assemblies. Friends sadly noted that Don's attitude began undergoing undesirable changes. He was increasingly impatient, moody, unpredictable, and harsh. All were traits never before seen in him. An elder who did much counseling in the congregation went to Don and carefully and kindly began helping him pour out the feelings of his broken heart. It came out that Jim had begged him to set aside the gossip and understand the real reasons for the disruption in the wedding plans. At the time Don felt that Jim was lying and covering up his part in the failed wedding. The truth was that Jim's son had broken off the relationship, not for immorality of Don's daughter, but because he had not been sincere in his profession of love and could not enter into a covenant for life.

There was much loss in the experience, but the cancer of unresolved anger could have been the worst tragedy of the case. Confronted with truth, perceived offenses can be resolved, forgiveness can be enjoyed, and reconciliation can result.

Lesson Three: The Scriptures provide a trustworthy and effective basis for counseling between brothers.

A Christian counselor must fully believe that the Scriptures are relative to today's needs. Without this conviction he will resort wholly to human wisdom and secular solutions. At best, such resources are inadequate and at worst they can be damaging.

Matthew 5:1–10 teaches that maturity, in itself, limits conflict between brothers. Matthew 18:15–17 teaches an orderly way to resolve conflict. Ephesians 4:15ff. gives a list of communication tools at their best. 1 Corinthians 13 provides the loving context for all disputes. Both in the words of Jesus

(cf. Matthew 6:14–15) and in the words of Paul (cf. Ephesians 4:32) Christians are taught to forgive their brothers. Galatians 5:22–26 describes the kind of people who are best able to maintain peace with brethren.

Alicia really enjoyed reading the old Ann Landers columns and watching the talk shows, delighting in their responses to domestic problems and relationship issues. Yet, though active in church activities, she avoided the Scriptures in resolving a longstanding conflict with a one-time friend in the church. She would freely blame the old friend but would not go to her and rejected the repeated offer of others to intervene. In counseling sessions she poured out her grievances but resisted any effort to open the Scriptures and look at herself in the mirror of God's Word. At the base of her resistance was a disbelief that the Bible had anything to say about such everyday issues. What possible message coming out of such an ancient and distant culture could the Bible have for a fast-paced, modern world? Somehow her favored sources of wisdom did not move her to want reconciliation, to humble herself in self-examination, to want the best for her old friend, or to honor God in pursuing peace.

The point of Lesson Three is that if a Christian counselor cannot get a counselee “in the Book” in a direct confrontation with the Spirit of God, his hope of promoting any change will be greatly lessened. What change may come will not likely be deep enough or lasting.

Lesson Four: Like fire, conflict needs to be contained in the smallest circle possible.

Seasoned fire-fighters first try to contain a fire and then extinguish it as soon as possible. Experienced counselors first try to contain conflict in the smallest circle possible. The fewer people involved initially, usually the better. Matthew 18:15–17, starting with a one-on-one meeting, portrays the careful and purposeful widening of the circle of those involved.

Confidentiality of counselor-counselor information is a part of the effort at containment.

Leonard, an esteemed counselor, was asked to intervene in a dispute between two sisters in the church. After a first meeting with them that helped him gain many insights but did not resolve the problem, he scheduled a second meeting to get down to work on the problems between them. One of the sisters wanted an immediate resolution. She wanted the other sister to get her act together so that the problem would be over. As soon as the first meeting was over, this sister got on the phone and put the problem, from her perspective, on the congregational prayer chain. She justified her action by saying that the more people who were praying about this matter the faster it would be resolved. For whatever nobility there was to her action, the outcome was that other members started taking sides or offering their solutions to the problem. It wasn't long until containment was no longer the easier option that it could have been.

Sometimes there can be "too many cooks in the kitchen," each with her own idea and way of doing the same thing. Sometimes getting a second, third, or fourth opinion to a health issue can be more confusing than helpful. Not that any one counselor will know how to help resolve every issue, but by getting a lot of people involved in the solution of a problem, many of whom may be lacking either maturity or knowledge, will seldom give the best results.

Lesson Five: Like fire, if a conflict is not fully extinguished it can flame up again.

Firemen work hard making sure that a fire has been completely extinguished before leaving a scene. They often will leave a fireman and equipment at a location to be on the lookout for any smoldering fire. Much too often a problem can seem to be resolved and life gets back to its productive pace, only, to re-emerge at the most unexpected time or place.

There were tears and embraces following the last of several counseling sessions with **Judith and Teresa**. Apologies and statements of forgiveness and affection were freely expressed. Beth, the often used counselor among the women in the congregation, went home thanking God for another reconciliation. The relationship should have taken off from that day, but it didn't. It became clear that God was not through with them yet. Teresa had not been fully forthcoming. There remained a corner of her heart that she had not yielded to God for cleansing and renewal. Like a smoldering fire, it continued to burn away her kindness, her warmth, and her goodness to Judith. Thanks to the intervention of God, Teresa was honest enough to come to grips with her continuing resentment and returned for further counseling help.

The role of a good counselor is to address both the obvious and the possible lingering issues. People tend to be content in dealing with the most visible issues and giving too little attention to the smoldering issues that will re-ignite the fabric of a relationship.

Lesson Six: Immature believers have greater difficulty in resolving their disagreements.

Being childlike is a virtue (cf. Matthew 18:1–5). Being childish keeps people embroiled in conflict after conflict. Even as the Hebrew writer lamented, “. . . though by this time you ought to be . . .” (Hebrews 5:16), so it is lamentable that supposedly grown Christians are still immature, even after years of sitting in the pews. Every Christian counselor fully appreciates Paul’s stated preaching and teaching aim to “*present everyone perfect/complete in Christ Jesus.*” (Colossians 1:28). The need of counseling would be greatly diminished if more members were growing steadily toward maturity in Christ.

The elders, after months of discussions with the preacher, announced to the congregation that the preacher would be dismissed shortly with three months of support given in advance. One brother in

particular abruptly walked away fuming over the decision. He refused to return to the fellowship, refused to discuss the matter though sought out by the elders. He did not return any of their calls or offers to provide more information. Some members were ready to write the brother off, saying he had made his decision and had taken himself out of the fellowship. The elders periodically left telephone messages and kept the brother on mail-out lists. He was placed in the “red-zone” prayer and attention list and an elder was given the mission of restoring the brother, helping him restart his journey to be complete in Christ.

Counseling an immature believer is one of the hardest assignments, mainly because the person does not have a basic knowledge of the Word, does not make his decisions based on the principles in the Word, and does not have his motivations or values framed by the Word. Where does a Christian counselor begin to help an immature believer seek a solution to his problems? The counselor probably needs to first be a loving brother before he can become an effective teacher in the Word.

Lesson Seven: Having a clearly understood covenant between two people in conflict is a goal of counseling.

Most often when two believers are in a continuing conflict, one that is threatening to sever any relationship, it is because one or both has forgotten the fraternal covenant that should exist between them. This covenant is a promise to love one another, to want the best for the other, to be a servant to the other, to die for the other. Conflicts melt away and solutions emerge when brothers in dispute remember and reaffirm their fraternal promises to each other.

Brad and Bill had a shared interest in hunting and went on trips together during the hunting season. They both enjoyed rebuilding old cars and shared in restoring several classics. However, they often were in conflict when not hunting or building cars. Somehow, these shared interests covered over whatever else was lacking. The only thing that seemed to bring a dispute to an end was when it threatened their shared interests.

They feared the time would come when the shared interest would not be enough to insure peace between them. They really wanted to be friends who shared in mutual respect, who were available to help one another, and who were dedicated to the spiritual well being of the other. They went together to a Christian counselor and began a journey that resulted in each one making a list of promises based on Scripture of how they would treat each other all the time. They agreed to meet with the counselor once a year, and sooner if necessary, to review their covenant promises.

God wants His people to be like Him, loving in making promises and being faithful in keeping promises. Friendship and fraternity are built on clearly understood promises and flourish as each covenant member faithfully honors the promises.

Lesson Eight: Growth in Christian maturity is a vital aim of Christian counseling.

Counseling in disputes between brothers is not simply to achieve the short-term aim of promoting peace between them. Many benefits do flow out of such a result. However, the long-term aim of Christian counseling is to unite brothers in encouraging one another to mature in Christ (cf. Colossians 1:28).

Chris and one of the older members were constantly clashing with one another. Chris was arrogantly promoting change, not being considerate of other points of view. Arthur was resistant to change, believing Chris to be both unscriptural and intemperate. One after another conflict was resolved but little time passed by until they were “after it again.” One-on-one counseling and getting them together, not to work so much on the issues they were fussing about, but to set before them a more mature attitude toward each other. Slowly they began to narrow the chasm and finally, a bridge of understanding was built between them. They continued to come from different perspectives to

address the same issue but they did so with mutual respect, a kindly spirit, and a willingness to listen and understand. They might never agree on every detail of every subject but they did begin to feel a tender affection for one another and wanted the best for the other.

Other than the essential truths that demand unity in Church fellowship, most subjects in discussions are matters that should not impact unity. What does impact unity is the attitude brethren have toward one another and the level of maturity with which they discuss their different viewpoints.

Lesson Nine: Conflict resolution and reconciliation between brothers should be a regular part of the teaching program of a church.

From the prophecies in Isaiah (cf. 2:4, 9:7, 32:16–18) to the seventh beatitude of Jesus (cf. Matthew 5:9), a community of peace was highlighted. Peace among brethren was to be one of the identifying marks of the people of God (cf. 1 Peter 3:11; Hebrews 12:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; 2 Corinthians 13:11). Consistent with that fundamental characteristic of the Kingdom of God is one of the aims of Christian counseling, teaching members to be at peace with one another.

Alfred, a preacher/counselor, regularly conducted a seminar in the congregation and around the brotherhood entitled, “A Community of Peacemakers.” In the seminar he taught how fraternal love and unity, forgiveness and healing, covenant making and faithfulness, promises and insights into the diversity among people and improved communication skills would all contribute to a congregation being a community of peacemakers. The seminar, especially in his home congregation, often opened many doors to counseling with people on attitudes and practices of their lives that needed to change for them to be involved productively in making peace among the brethren.

A generation of ill-spirited debates and a rash of witch hunting writings and accusatory inquiries have fostered a people suspicious of one another and critical of every perceived error among the brotherhood. The Church has been found guilty too often of the charge of the atheistic O’Hara that Christians shoot their wounded and shame their dead. Becoming a community of peacemakers should be one of the most important contributions of Christian counseling between members.

Lesson Ten: Jesus envisioned a people of peace, unity, and fraternal love.

Jesus wants the world to see His people at peace, in unity and loving one another. He knew the power of those qualities to convince the world of their identity (cf. John 13:34) and to begin to understand the need for the presence and power of God in their lives.

Gwen was baby sitting for a family who accused her of abusing their young child. The police investigated but did not file charges. Though she denied the charges the damage was done. People, including some members of the church in which she was active, continued to suspect that she was guilty. Fifteen years later she was still marginalized from full participation in church ministries. A new inquiry was opened by the church leaders. After consulting with Gwen and her husband, the parents, former leaders, and other members, it was concluded that no evidence existed or could be remembered that confirmed her guilt. The parents still believed she had abused the child but could not offer any proof. Counseling sessions were included in the initiative as a part of the rehabilitation of Gwen’s damaged reputation. Gwen and her husband were welcomed back into the main stream of the ministries of the congregation. A sore spot in the fellowship was healed and numerous blessings blossomed out of the new peace, unity, and fraternal love.

It was not right to build an accusation on an unfounded rumor and to exclude a sister from serving. It was right to honor truth, to bring peace to a family and a church, and to love one another, even to forgive if such might have been required. Certainly, Gwen had much to forgive for the unwarranted exclusion over all of those years.

Case Studies in Leadership Counseling

By the time most men are recognized as prime leaders in a congregation it would seem that counseling would be something they did, not something they needed. That is generally true. Men in leadership roles are chosen because they are respected for what they have done over their lifetime of faith and for the kind of men they have become. However, reality says that many of the most frequent issues of conflict and division come out of the leadership of a church. Every counselor will have spent a considerable block of his time in counseling leaders or working on issues within a leadership.

Lesson One: Unity in the leadership promotes unity in the church.

A united leadership is the congregation's best hope for group unity and forward momentum. A church draws much strength when its leaders are working as one, both in direction and in affection with each other. Any investment to keep a leadership united is among the best ever that a congregation can make.

The Westside church was sinking fast. At the core of their problems was bickering among their elders, with divided purposes, differing values, and contrasting approaches to their problems. The elders had tried all they could think of to strike some balance and achieve some harmony among them. At last, they decided, with some disagreements, to invite a church consultant, a church growth counselor, to work with them. They agreed on a one-year program. It started by identifying the ministry giftedness of each elder which, in itself, was reconfirming of the value of each elder in the leadership and explained the source of

some of their conflicts. Then they worked through a wholeness test and met separately with the counselor to more fully understand and work on some growth deficiencies. The sharing of the profiles explained other conflict sources and seemed to draw them closer as they recognized common needs. Then some skill-set seminars were held for the elders on conflict management and communication, on building a base for a common interpretation of Scripture, and on capturing a united vision, setting specific goals, and making ministry plans. Then many of these exact initiatives were carried into the congregation by the united and excited eldership.

If church leaders will commit to continued growth through reading updated books and growth oriented periodicals, attending lectureships and seminars, and inviting recognized church growth and leadership experts to accelerate congregational growth, a better day of unity and fruitfulness will dawn among for the Church.

Lesson Two: For a while, a church can usually survive a deficiency in the eldership or in the pulpit, but not both at the same time.

The resiliency of the Church is amazing. What it can suffer, what burdens it can bear, what obstacles it can shove aside, and what shortcomings in its leaders it can absorb are something marvelous to behold. If it can withstand the doors of hell as promised, it can withstand what brethren do to it (cf. Matthew 16:18–19). Yet, with all the might and wit and relying on the Lord, churches must do better. Leaders must grow taller, more noble, more skilled, and more in tune with all that is holy.

The Downtown church was a remarkably, well led church. There was an unusual bond between the elders and the members. They were doctrinally sound, progressive and visionary in their growth plans, and their worship experiences were uplifting and God-centered. However, the last three preachers had ended their ministries with illicit affairs. After each one, there was a tough period of grieving, some members

taking sides and losing trust in preachers. Each time a steady and trusted leadership led the congregation through the turmoil. In the interim before engaging another preacher, the elders invited a church growth counselor to visit with them about the next hiring of a preacher. They agreed that wholeness needed to one of their priorities for a preaching candidate. They acknowledged that they had not acted on the warning signs they had all seen nor insisted on counseling. They reacted by firing each of the men rather than work with them in a healing initiative. They had not offered adequate care of the women in the affairs. Though they fell a little short of using the counselor's recommendation of some measuring tools before engaging a new preacher, they did employ the principles of identifying areas of weaknesses, strengths, and ministry gifts. They did include a higher standard of accountability and morality in the job description. They did prepare a covenant to be made with the next preacher providing counseling, ministry renewal, and a sabbatical and providing candid, openness and regular prayer time with the elders. Checking out references was to be done with greater scrutiny and inquiry, going beyond the list provided by the preaching candidate. Greater care was built into the counseling procedures and the environment to be used by the preacher. Emphasis would be heavily placed on the strength of the marriage coming in and in the efforts of the preacher to keep his marriage strong and exemplary.

All of the training and years of ministry are too valuable to see a single preacher destroyed by sin. The Church is too precious to the Lord to see it ravaged by its very own. Souls in the community either are never reached or are turned off by immorality among the leaders. That is too great a loss for us to sustain. Shepherd/Elders are to protect the flock that includes the preachers and each other.

Lesson Three: An eldership must be concerned over the well-being of the preacher, even as they are concerned with his doctrine.

Most preachers are left basically unsupervised. Some do not have clear job description or encouraging confirmations from the church leadership. Most elderships with which they serve are uninformed on what a preacher needs to continue being effective over a long period of time.

Travis was one of the most loved and energetic preachers in the memory of the members. He served in many areas. His shortcomings in the pulpit were overwhelmingly overshadowed by the ministries he led and by the endless sacrifices he made for others. The elders allowed him to take on more and more projects that he was regularly proposing. In time, he became physically and emotionally exhausted. His sermons were less and less acceptable. His marriage was becoming an embarrassing concern. The usual option in cases of problems with a preacher was to dismiss him. A counselor consulted with the eldership and proposed investing in Travis by giving him a well-deserved, three month, purposely designed sabbatical. The paid sabbatical, with expenses underwritten, would include a reading program in ministry and marital counseling, a real family vacation, attendance at select workshops and a ministry renewal retreat, enrollment in a sermon preparation class to learn some new preaching and research skills and how to prepare his next preaching series. When Travis returned, the elders would have had a chance to study his assignments and reassign him to focus on a lesser number of ministry areas that were most consistent with his giftedness.

Counseling and leadership are compatible, needed for renewal and a part of the assignment given to leaders. Leaders are to be ever learning and growing. They are, by definition, to be mentors, instructors, and guides to others. They should each master the basic skills and resources of Christian counseling.

Lesson Four: Preachers are among the most difficult persons to counsel.

Preachers who themselves are advancing students of the Word often are resistant to being spoken to about their necessary growth. They are too often set on a pedestal and come to believe that they have risen above counseling. After all, they are the counselors, most of the time. What more would a counselor tell them? Even in counseling sessions some preachers feel that they know just what the counselor is going to say. If a preacher starts a counseling experience, like most other preachers, he likely will not continue long.

Henry resisted what the elders suggested. He put off scheduling counseling with any number of Christian counselors he knew. Finally, the elders were more forthcoming telling him to go to counseling at the expense of the church or pack your things and go elsewhere. He went to a counselor out of town. As the counselor patiently worked through one ploy after another, he actually began coming close to what he felt was the core of Henry's issues. Henry resisted anyone in authority or as a father figure. His father had been stern, unbending, demanding, and quite severe in his discipline. Henry could not listen to any discussion about the relationship with the father. He insisted that his father was a hard man in hard times but that he loved him dearly. He struggled with betraying his father to speak of his shortcomings. He insisted that he had forgiven his father, but he could not outline any specific steps he had taken or speak of a specific time of reconciliation. When faced with the responsibility of forgiving, he rejected the assignment saying that his father had died ten years before. That was his last session in counseling. His ministry continued to be one clash after another with the elders, in one church after another.

Research shows that preachers are like most other members. Unless they have had an unusually healthy family system or have worked through wholeness counseling, they will have some of the same, pressing growth needs as others. The

Word that they have studied has the power to transform any deficiency, but it must be focused on the areas of necessary growth. That is where the counselor can be a real friend and servant. Usually, the preacher is studying to teach others more than being taught by the Spirit in the Word.

Lesson Five: Some good elders are not good models of life wholeness.

The criteria for selecting elders determines the kind or quality of leaders chosen to lead the church. When emphasis is placed on a man's success in business or education, on his wealth or his level of activity, or on his doctrinal soundness, wholeness may not always be a prominent quality in a leader's life. Along with all the other, many leadership qualities, he may not be a good model of maturity.

George had been an elder for many years and had been a tower of strength in many crises that the church had faced. In a counseling seminar at a Men's Retreat, he was struck with his serious inadequacies as a husband. He had only known that the statement, "husband of one wife" referred to his having only married one woman fifty years ago. He had not known that it involved "being a one-woman kind of man." He was convicted by how little he had really made his wife the focus of his affection and how little he had practiced 1 Peter 3:7 in her regard or had loved her as Christ loved the Church (cf. Ephesians 5:21ff). He was jolted by the way he had treated her over the years giving her little praise, being aloof and unaffectionate, never enjoying vacations or laughing together, but working day and night. He was sick inside with the example he had left young families in building their marriages. That day he committed himself, then in his seventies, to devote the rest of his life learning how to love his wife as God designed her to be loved. He arranged for marital counseling with a brother at the retreat.

The learning life of a church leader should never stop. Elders typically quit studying when they are appointed to the

work of church leadership. Perhaps, it is the overwhelming work load they begin to carry. Perhaps, there is little time left to think about their own growth needs. Elders are reluctant to spend money to attend lectureships or bring in church growth speakers and consultants. Yet their vibrant, spiritual health is crucial to the future of the church they lead.

Lesson Six: Young families need to be encouraged to take advantage of counseling in view of developing into effective leaders.

Elders need to provide young families with the opportunities in seminars, in group or couple counseling to learn how to build their marriages, to study and pray together, to live lives of holiness, and how to serve and lead.

One church had organized a continuing program for their young families. It began with a marriage course on “His Needs, Her Needs.” The program included personality testing and private counseling. A parenting series was taught regularly, using congregational and visiting speakers. A ministry giftedness profile was constructed for each couple and then they were guided into fruitful service that matched their gifts. A Confident Speaking course was taught for the men and for the women. A three year, Bible curriculum focused on the text was followed, with practical courses on prayer, Bible Study, fasting, and giving being taught. Special classes were taught by some older women in the church to the young wives and mothers. Trained and trustworthy mentors were chosen by the couples to pay closer attention to the needs of each couple, even being the grandparents to their children. Counseling, rather than something negative, was seen by all as teaching, mentoring, comforting, and encouraging.

From the young families of the congregation will come the future leaders. Their training needs to start early and the trajectory of their lives should be aimed at leading the church effectively. There should be wave after wave of families being

ready to assume greater leadership roles. Counseling is vital to bringing this vision to fruition.

Lesson Seven: Good counseling can save leaders on their way to moral bankruptcy.

The big three of sex, money, and power that have long brought spiritual leaders to ruin have just grown to four moral pitfalls. Add dishonesty to the list of situations that cripple leaders. David with his lust, Judas with his enslavement to money, Ananias and his lying, and Diotrephees with his obsession for power continue to live today and bring havoc into the church. Add depression and burnout, especially for ministers, and the value of counseling becomes even more pronounced.

Jerry, in addition to his work as the preaching minister, saw approximately twenty persons a week in counseling. An increasing number were preachers in the area who came for counseling help. The larger number had failing marriages, struggles, and defeats in their sexuality and staggering problems with financial mismanagement and irresponsibility. Some were on the brink of burnout, having already sunk into different levels of depression. All, to one extent or other, were knee deep into lying and deception to cover their misdeeds or problems. Jerry knew of other preachers in his area and in the brotherhood who either did not have counseling available to them or who refused to seek help. Thus, the dream was born to start a Center of Ministry Renewal just for preachers. It would be a place where preachers could come for professional, confidential, and affordable counseling. He would try to interest church leaders to contribute financially to the ministry and to encourage their preachers to avail themselves of its services. It would be a place where preachers could come for retreats and sharing sessions, with renewal being the theme and purpose. Where else could preachers go for the help and renewal that all men in ministry some times need?

The church has invested much time and finances into training and supporting its preachers. Their leadership and service are invaluable to the church and its growth. There is no one who Satan, in his hate of the Church, wants to pull down more than the preachers, tarnishing their image and destroying their influence. Counseling can make a difference in giving a preacher the tools, the weapons, he needs to fight against the temptations of sex, money, and power and rise above the depressive burnout that could engulf him.

Lesson Eight: Sometimes it is better to qualify than to resign.

Sometimes leaders become discouraged and want to quit. Sometimes, in their study, they come to realize a gaping hole in their spiritual armor and feel driven to withdraw. To be sure, some should quit altogether. Some should withdraw for a while to focus on a pressing need or to correct some serious flaw. However, for most, it would serve everyone the best if they would just recommit themselves to strengthening that which is weak and correcting that which is flawed.

Jerome was an energetic, devoted, and multi-skilled leader. However, he was brusque, too plain spoken, and often insensitive. Without even being aware, he hurt people of all ages. In a church reaffirmation process of its leaders, there were wide-spread complaints by a sizable number of people. Jerome tendered his resignation because of all the complaints. He loved the church and wanted only to serve the people well. The other elders well understood the gravity and validity of the complaints. However, they proposed a six month renewal period in which Jerome, remaining an elder, would work on growing in the areas of complaint. Included in the proposal were Christian counseling and attending several seminars dealing with the qualities in which he needed to grow. He spoke to the church, thanking those who had expressed their concerns, and committed himself to work at transforming those hurtful qualities into virtues. He endeared himself from the start with his honesty, sincerity, and love for the church.

Leaders are human and still growing. By being transparent and honest, they close the frequent gap between leaders and the people. Leaders are selected because of “. . . *the outcome of their way of life and . . . their faith*” (Hebrews 13:7), not because they are perfect.

Lesson Nine: When leaders and good men are in conflict it is urgent that peace be restored.

Because of differing personalities, differing giftedness, differing visions and purposes, and differing ages and genders there will be conflict. Properly managed, conflict can lead to stronger commitments, greater fruitfulness, and unity. However, conflict left unmanaged leads to serious loss of ministry resources, fraternal alienation, and church division.

In the midst of exploding church growth there arose a stubborn conflict between two ministers, the **pulpit minister and the youth minister**. The pulpit minister, more experienced in ministry, was relentlessly critical of the younger, youth minister. Some observations were accurate, but others were seriously flawed. Instead of going to the youth minister directly, the pulpit minister poured out his complaints repeatedly to the elders and insisted that something be done. Counseling took place with the youth minister to correct some flaws in his personal life and ministry, but that did not stop the complaints. Finally, the elders mandated that the two meet together and work on their differences. Those sessions consisted mostly of the pulpit minister telling the youth minister to get his act together. He would not recognize any fault or flaws on his part, neither in regard to the youth minister or in his flawed relationships with the elders. In the end, the youth minister did profit from the scrutiny and improved his life and ministry remarkably. However, the pulpit minister could not bring himself to be open to criticism or improvement and was regrettably dismissed. In his dismissal, the church lost an otherwise capable and dedicated worker and an incredibly good family.

The lives and ministries of countless preachers and church leaders could change if they were more open to counseling and eager to be transparent, along with a recognition of a need to grow. A resistance to opportunities to examine oneself will leave a person unchanged and often bitter and resentful for what seems unfair treatment by church leaders.

Lesson Ten: No greater blessing can gladden a church than to have elders who are alive, mature, and growing.

Growing in the likeness of Jesus, following the truths to be found in the nouns and verbs describing a church leader and longing to be the leader pictured in the letters to Timothy and Titus will multiply winsome, exemplary, capable and dedicated elders. Among the richest resources of a church is the ability to produce leaders at their biblical best.

The **Northside church** had not produced elders in its thirty-five years history. This was a sad commentary on the sterility of the church. It had not been an environment where men could grow tall in Jesus nor one where men wanted to stay and become leaders. A new preacher came with a different perspective. From his counseling training and experience he knew that an unhealthy church could not produce a regular flow of mature leaders. He began carefully teaching the lifestyle of Jesus, the beauty of His life, and the longing of the Father for growth among His children. This teaching stirred the hearts of people to be open to other growth initiatives that included testing measures, group and private counseling, and targeted seminars in wholeness. Within a few years, men began emerging with the life qualities, abilities, and desire to lead the church to horizons of spiritual service that it had never experienced.

Churches which are healthy regularly produce healthy fruit. One of the best measures of the spiritual maturity of a church is the quality of Shepherd/leaders it produces and the number and quality of effective preachers it contributes to the global task of the Church.

Appendix

- ▣ Training Programs in Christian Counseling
- ▣ Discussion of the Sunset Servant Profile
- ▣ Frequently Used Testing Programs
- ▣ Questions to Test a Counselee's Readiness to Commit to His Growth
- ▣ Christian Counseling Bibliography

I. Training Programs in Christian Counseling

There are many on-campus training programs in Christian counseling among which are graduate programs at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, TX and Harding University in Searcy, AR. There are many distant learning college programs among which are Bethany College and Theological Seminary in Dothan, AL and Liberty University in Decatur, Georgia.

There are some well produced, self-study programs that will serve as introductory studies for general, para-counseling needs among which are:

- ▶ AACC Video Series consisting of a growing number of video topics.
- ▶ AACC Certificate Program for Biblical Counseling consisting of thirty lessons divided into five sections of study.

II. Discussion of the Sunset Servant Profile

The basis of much counseling is knowing the ministry gifts of the counselee. Having failed to discover, develop, and employ one's giftedness is the source of many counseling problems. One's needed sense of well-being, competency, belongingness, and value can be strengthened with the knowledge of God's gift to every person. Sunset has developed a program, "The Profile of a Servant," that helps the counselee discover his passion, potential, and approach in ministry. It exists as a seminar.

- ▶ The gift of passion is the knowledge of the kinds and circumstances of people one is drawn to serve.
- ▶ The gifted potential of a person is seen in the discovery of his primary gifts to be developed and employed in serving others.
- ▶ The gifted approach to ministry determines how one best can serve the needs of others.

When one has a knowledge of his servant profile and finds the means to develop it and the freedom to use it in

serving others, a sense of purpose and fulfillment gives one the strength to be faithful and fruitful.

III. Frequently Used Testing Programs

Verbal exchanges with the counselee, closely observing one's responses, knowing what to look for, and employing mature insight can often get to the core of the counseling problem. However, a problem can be more objectively understood and sooner through the use of testing programs.

- ▶ The Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (T-JTA) and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator have been available for years but require certification to administer and interpret (Psychological Publications, Inc. 290 Conejo Ridge Ave. Suite 100, Thousand Oaks, CA 91361-4928).
- ▶ The most comprehensive and easily accessible testing tool is the DISC offered by the Institute for Motivational Living (#1-800-779-3472 [for U.S. only]—www.discinsights.com/counseling).
- ▶ The Arno Profile System is a certification course to equip the Christian counselor to accurately identify counselee problem areas. (www.apsreport.com — #1-914-951-6834).

IV. Questions to Measure a Counselee's Readiness to Commit to His Growth

The best counseling results come when a counselee chooses to invest in his own growth. In the pre-counseling sessions the Christian counselor needs to determine how committed the counselee will be. How the counselee responds to profiles being taken, how he communicates openness in the early discussions, and the replies to specific questions assist the counselor in knowing if the counselee is ready to begin the counseling experience. Some questions could be:

1. “So far, what seems to be the causative problem that has brought you to request counseling?”

2. "Have you been able to understand its origin and the risks of leaving it unaddressed?"
3. "How does the problem compromise your relationship with valued people and with God?"
4. "Will a biblical solution address the problem better than any other you have tried?"
5. "What part will prayer serve in the counseling experience?"
6. "How often and how regularly can you meet to work on the problem?"
7. "Do you see the value of assignments like reading, writing, and visiting with others?"
8. "With help, do you want to change what is necessary to achieve wholeness?" "What do you mean by change?"
9. "If the desired changes occurred, what would you see and would you like what you saw?"
10. "Would you see the value of the changes enough to make permanent changes in your thoughts and behavior?"

It will be important to listen intently to the choice of words, to the tone of the words, and to the body language in every response. Eye contact and eye content will be especially important and revealing. The importance of having a verbal commitment by the counselee of wanting to resolve the problem so much so as to participate willingly and faithfully cannot be overstated.

V. Christian Counseling Bibliography

The publishing of Christian counseling materials has exploded with many good books and programs. Almost every counseling need is addressed by recently published books. Current publications can be considered through the catalogue of the American Association of Christian Counselors (#1-800-526-8673). The bibliography that follows will cover only some of the proven introductory materials that are available.

Christian Counseling Bibliography

Pioneer Classics

Adams, Jay E., Competent to Counsel. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970. (Adams has been a prolific writer championing the nouthetic counseling approach. He has produced an impressive library on introductory themes.)

Collins, Gary R., Christian Counseling. Waco: Work Books, 1980. (Following this pacesetting publication, Collins continues to be a frequent writer and leader in the counseling field.)

Crabb, Lawrence J. Jr., Effective Biblical Counseling. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1977. (Crabb was one of the earliest pioneers in introducing counseling as a Christian ministry and continues to add rich materials to the field.)

Kirwan, William T., Biblical Concepts for Christian Counseling. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987. (Kirwan's brief study is on most reading lists for students of Christian counseling.)

Narramore, Clyde M., The Psychology of Counseling. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Co., 1960. (Narramore was one of the first and most used introductory publications in counseling training and practice.)

Oates, Wayne E., Introduction to Pastoral Counseling. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959. (Oates wrote early and through the years has contributed greatly to making counseling more Christian.)

Ward, Waylon, The Bible in Counseling. Chicago: Moody Press. (In assigning homework, Ward's book

has been used for a long time and other similar programs have resulted from this work.)

Wright, H. Norman, *Marital Counseling*. San Francisco: Harper and Roy, 1981. (Wright has been one of the early and most respected biblical and practical authors of counseling materials covering a wide range of topics.)

Christian Counseling Series

Clinton, Timothy Ohlschlager, George, *Competent Christian Counseling*. Offered by AACC Counseling Library: Call #1-800-526-8673 or go to www.aacc.net for a catalog of the growing list of publications. (The American Association of Christian Counselors provides the most current selection of books for Christian counselors. Subscription to the periodical, *Christian Counseling Today* will be helpful.)

Collins, Gary R., Ed., *Resources for Christian Counseling*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1986—continuing. (The most current and exhaustive counseling library of over thirty volumes written from a fundamental, biblical perspective.)

Kennedy, Eugene; Charles, Sara C., *On Becoming a Counselor*. New York: Continuum, 1990. (One volume of an extensive, secular series on counseling that is basically sound and practical.)

Meier, Minerth; Wichen, Ratcliff. *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993. (The Meier and Minerth Publications regularly excel in helping non-clinical students of counseling understand the medical side of counseling.)

Add to *Introduction of Christian Counseling and the Basic Thoughts in Christian Counseling* by Dr. Ken Wilson other counseling courses and publications on pre-marital, marital, parenting, personal development, crisis counseling,

and clinical counseling by various authors. The obvious must be stressed: the best book on Christian counseling is the **Spirit inspired Word of God** — the inerrant and divinely revealed Bible. Most of the good that is written in the growing counseling library finds its origin in the mind of God as revealed in the always relevant Word.

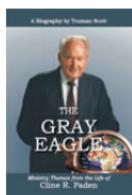
Truman Scott, PhD.

Dr. Truman Scott has served more than fifty-five years as an evangelist, a missionary, a congregational minister, ministry trainer and Christian counselor. He received his undergraduate degrees from Freed Hardeman and Harding Universities. His graduate work and doctoral studies are from Harding University and Bethany Theological Seminary. His counseling experience is extensive and ongoing. He has authored study courses on counseling and conducted multiple seminars on leadership and marriage.

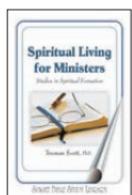


Until his retirement he served as a Dean at Sunset International Bible Institute. He is now engaged in consulting work, planning and writing. He is on the Graduate Faculty of Sunset International Bible Institute. He is married to Ferne White; they have three children and nine grandchildren.

Other Books by Truman Scott



The Gray Eagle, A Biography of Cline R. Paden. This is the story of the founder of the Sunset School of Preaching in Lubbock, Texas. Cline Paden was a missionary and preacher with a passionate heart for reaching those outside of Christ. As a result, thousands have been trained to share the gospel, and untold numbers have been brought into God's kingdom!



Spiritual Living for Ministers: Studies in Spiritual Formation. Truitt Adair says, "*In my 40 years of ministry, I have not observed a greater need among those who serve in church ministry than the need for personal spiritual development. Authenticity in ministry is vital to real influence and credibility. Most of us in church work have felt the spiritual strain and drain of constantly giving of our lives and resources without a purposeful plan to replenish the spiritual supply. Good news! This book can help.*"

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