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Responsibility Counseling

Biblical counseling in the local church

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Faithful Men

PlymouthBrethren.org · KEE Philippine Missions

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“The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2)

Chapter 1: The Growing Demand for Counseling

Since the fall of man, when sin entered into the world, growing numbers of human beings have been beset by fears, conflicts and unresolved problems. Although believers have not been rendered immune by the Lord from these ills, they seem greater in those who are unreconciled to God. The many causes, which certainly include sin, are not some recent development of a complex society or strife-torn world. In Ecclesiastes 1:9 we are assured that: “There is nothing new under the sun.”

In attempting to deal with these problems, men have invented an impressive array of diagnostic terms, or psychological labels, with multiple therapies to deal with each of them. Some of these therapies may seem to have a changing effect, but many are more harmful instead of helping. Only a very few kinds of therapies are accepted today as helpful even by psychotherapy researchers but they are not with total agreement. Patients’ reports about positive changes after such treatments often prove to be superficial. Some must be judged as totally wrong according to Scripture. Ungodly ways, may lead people away from the truth which alone is to be found in Christ Jesus. An unbiblical, humanistic life view is the basis of all recent therapy. The truth about men which God has revealed to us in the Scriptures doesn’t play a role in these therapies.

It is obvious that when any counselor, secular or Bible oriented, exhibits sincere concern, understanding, warmth and a listening ear, they are much more effective. They create

trust, they encourage. On this basis, even a friend can provide such help as well as a professional. Some professional therapies may seem to succeed on this basis alone.

God's people were told long ago that, "Man's steps are ordained by the Lord. How then can man understand his way?" (Proverbs 20:24) The Psalmist asked, "Who can understand his errors?" (Psalm 19:12). These and other like verses seem to indicate that troubled people require clear spiritual guidance to be helped in a fundamental way. We certainly need a higher wisdom to guide us in thinking and acting correctly. The Lord is that Wisdom. He is the Wonderful Counselor we all need (Isaiah 9:6). The Lord is the One "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). He is the truth (John 14:7), and truth about ourselves is what we need to understand.

The majority of counselees have a spiritual problem in some way, even if it is only one of attitude toward difficulties. The starting point of discussion ought to be the counselee's relationship with God rather than his relationship with others, especially in the earlier years of life. Most counselees claim to have some kind of relationship with God, however remote it might be. If this is not true, they need to be regenerated. It is an essential part of the solution. Otherwise, they may need to examine the quality of their walk with God and the degree to which this corresponds to their profession of faith in Christ. This is the work of a spiritual counselor, grounded in the Word, not a secular type of advisor. So-called emotional problems may be spiritual problems under another name.

What about chemical changes in the body, or other physiological problems in troubled people? It may be that

some people need to see a medical doctor for a thorough examination. There are various factors such as cancers, hormonal imbalances, deficiencies of various kinds, even simple exhaustion, which can affect the mind and soul of man. Medications can and do help some people. We would not deny this in any way. But counselors are not in the business of practicing medicine where such is needed. Even doctors have begun to recognize the value of prayer and spiritual comfort in such places as hospices for the terminally ill. As believers, we should be utilizing prayer as the major weapon in our spiritual warfare, whether the doctors believe in it or not. It is an accepted proverb in many quarters that doctors may treat but only God heals.

Because God is invisible, or because of our lack of faith, the Lord does not seem to be quite sufficient for most people. We desire to have intermediaries, human counselors or helpers, to show us the way. So we seek a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 24:6), not all of them either wise or godly. God is prepared to grant His guidance to those who fully trust Him and who are ready to accept His counsel. The person most easily helped is the one who is genuinely willing to listen and to act upon good counsel. God's counsel is most often given through those who are in touch with Him and act as His channels. He could, of course, speak as a voice from heaven, or in a dream or a vision. Yet it appears that God uses people for this mission, especially those who rely upon His Word. Counsel from God is according to His Word, and never contrary to it.

The local church has been swamped by a growing number of individuals seeking some kind of counseling. The numbers are

so great that no one person, or even two, could attend successfully to so many. They can overwhelm a gifted teacher or sympathetic elder and thus consume all of his time. Many churches have resorted to referring people to outside professionals and “licensed counselors” who usually charge a substantial fee. Is this method the only alternative for God’s troubled people? Is it His revealed will to bypass those within the church who ought to be able to help? Are there none wise enough or competent enough among us to render this assistance to Christ’s sheep (1 Corinthians 6:3-5; Romans 15:14)?

It would seem that the local church ought to have the primary role in this ministry of counseling, just as would be the case if the believer was suffering from a temporal need, such as food or housing. Some of the believers in the church ought to be set apart to participate in this ministry. Every believer can help to some degree, but not all have the necessary gifts to do the job well. We will deal later with some desirable qualifications. Some people may rush in too quickly to give ready advice which is not really of God. Others, who might be more helpful, are hesitant because they feel inadequate or because they have not had special training. Most counseling or advising is done by non-professionals such as relatives, friends, acquaintances or peers. This advice may be helpful or not. It may be divinely inspired or misguided. This volume is written with the hope that it will help ordinary spiritual believers in the church to think through some principles that may be of practical assistance. We offer some workable, simple ideas that are within the boundaries of Holy Scripture.

We must not rely upon merely human techniques as major keys for successful counseling. What is needed is the transformation of human lives, beginning in the inner life. This is particularly the work of the Holy Spirit in a yielded vessel. The prophet wrote, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6). The Lord Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

The key principle of this book is that of responsibility. By this we mean that we insist that each individual must assume personal responsibility for his or her own actions, attitudes, decisions, and responses. We should stop blaming others, past or present, for things we are not happy about. We should stop thinking of ourselves as victims. Blame-shifting and making scapegoats out of other people or of societal forces usually leads to bitterness, hopelessness and helplessness. The beginning of this fruitless practice is first seen in the garden of Eden (Genesis 3:9-13). It is notable that God paid no attention to their efforts to blame one another. By taking needed action ourselves we can improve most situations. By changing our attitudes, forgiving others, accepting graciously what is painful, being broken in self-will before God, we can make progress.

Profound life changes must start from the inside first, the inner being of man. In the Bible this is called, in figurative language, “the heart of man.” The prophet Jeremiah writes, “The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). The tendency to deceive ourselves, and to deceive others, is a hindrance to successfully solving life’s problems. Honesty is essential, with God, with others, and with the counselor. Spiritual

discernment by the counselor is important in listening and questioning those seeking help. This is what takes us to the core of matters, beyond the superficial and the obvious. Inner change ultimately requires both sincere openness by the counselee and the supernatural help of God. Such counseling calls for prayer. The actions of all must be anchored in genuine faith which perseveres. This is not formal, ritualistic requests to God.

The godly counselor must deal sensitively with those seeking help. Like the ministry of the Holy Spirit, working within God's people, you and I must see ourselves as the ones alongside, the helpers (John 14:26). We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit to do this (Ephesians 5:18). When we listen perceptively and carefully we can see what others might miss. When we use the Word of God at appropriate times, we are using a powerful tool of spiritual challenge (Hebrews 4:12). When we are motivated both by the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14), and a love for others, rather than personal gain, it is manifestly apparent to others. It strengthens their confidence and their willingness to respond. It is in particular the one who is spiritual who can best restore others (Galatians 6:1).

Long ago the Lord Jesus challenged Simon Peter as to whether he truly loved Him (John 21:15-17). He said that he did, although his word for love was a weaker one than what Jesus had used. The Lord then commanded him three times to demonstrate this by taking care of His sheep. Taking care of people in a spiritual way is an essential ministry of the body of believers. The purpose of this book is to help believers meet this responsibility in the best possible way.

Questions: The Growing Demand for Counseling

1. Why do you think so many people today, as compared to previous periods of history, are seeking counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists and help from “support groups”?
2. There is a strong tendency today to explain behavioral problems in people in terms like “chemical imbalances”, or attribute them to past negative experiences going all the way back to the womb. Do you feel that in the majority of cases, these factors are the major cause of so-called “psychological problems”? Explain your answer.
3. If local church leaders or spiritually mature people in their assemblies are to be of greater help to troubled people, what do you think needs to be done?
4. Why is it necessary to make the acceptance of *personal responsibility* a keystone of the counseling process? If not, what then is necessary?

Chapter 2: Confusion from Integration of Secular and Christian Thinking

Titles like “Christian Counseling” and “Biblical Counseling” are commonly used today in the church. But what is the definition of these terms? Usually, it means that the counselors profess to be Christians and seek to counsel from this perspective. What many of these people do however, is to integrate or merge the principles of secular psychology and the Bible. Reliance is placed mostly on the secular. They are running more on the worldly track of thinking, rather than inductively developing their approach strictly from Biblical principles. Since they write and speak as Christians, backed by their secular degrees and experience, their views are accepted as authoritative by many within the church.

The attempted integration of the secular and the Biblical ways is quite amazing, considering who strongly influenced the secular way. One of the main areas of psychotherapy is psychoanalysis whose founding father is Sigmund Freud. He dismissed religious doctrine as an illusion, and compared religion to a narcotic, which was swallowed only by neurotic people. Gary Collins, a Christian counseling teacher from Trinity Seminary, says, “To put it mildly, psychology and Christianity have never been very good friends.” The most influential teachers, whose methods and “insights” guide the thinking of current Christian counseling leaders today, are Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. These two men are considered to be the founders of the humanistic psychology movement. The former is an apostate from Christianity who was involved in the occult. The latter was a defector from

Judaism. Yet today, anyone who criticizes current trends and influences, which come from these sources, is considered to be a troublemaker and a backward thinker. Psychology, in its massive invasion of the church's thinking, has become something of a sacred cow, held high by many and immune to criticism. Most impressive objections to secular psychology, and its parent, psychiatry, comes from its own ranks of professionals, not from the Christian community.

Bernie Zilbergeld, *a professionally trained psychologist*, is brutally frank in his assessment of the profession of which he is a member. He asks, "...whether or not professionals produce better results than those without special training. The answer, hard as it may be to accept, is that they don't."¹ He adds, "The evidence simply will not support either the idea of therapeutic uniqueness or professional supremacy."² He quotes psychologist Joseph Durlak, "Professionals do not necessarily possess demonstrably superior clinical skills, in terms of measurable outcome, when compared with para-professionals."³ Zilbergeld marvels that those who have spent so much time and money on "therapy" are unwilling to admit to the lack of results. They seem to go from specialist to specialist, program to program, counselor to counselor, without questioning the ineffectiveness of the advice and counsel already given. The only benefit is that the patients seem to feel better at the time, especially when someone listens sympathetically.

Of course, it is true, as Zilbergeld states, that some people may need medications. But these can only be prescribed by medical doctors, not by psychologists or counselors. We have already stated that, when needed, you can refer people to doctors for

physical examinations. The medication called lithium is helpful to many people who have been diagnosed as “manic depressives.” Others may need prescriptions to calm hysteria or excessive agitation. Some may be helped by what are called anti-depressant drugs. Yet it should be remembered that these drugs only help to treat or manage the symptoms. Wise doctors prefer the word treat to the word cure. These medicines are not cures. It is the work of counseling to deal with underlying attitudes of the mind. In this area, it has been estimated that there are as many as 250 different approaches or methods of psychological or psychotherapeutic treatment. None of them unquestionably stands above all others or has universal acknowledgment. Extravagant claims are made for the success of this or that method by those who espouse them. However, the difficulty is in proving that clear, measurable results can be duplicated by others using the same method.

One of the problems in this field is the use of the term mental illness to describe what is wrong. In this way, mental or emotional problems are considered to be in the same category as influenza or other diseases of the body. This is called the medical model. Finding the cause of these mental problems by laboratory tests has proven to be quite difficult, despite strenuous efforts. It was the eminent psychiatrist Dr. Thomas Szasz, of the State University of New York, who was the first outspoken professional to say that “mental illness” was a myth, without true scientific foundation. He linked the traditional ideas of psychiatry with things such as astrology and called it “pseudo-science.”⁴ He said, “Mental illness might have been a useful concept in the nineteenth century. Today it is

scientifically worthless and socially harmful.”⁵ There are a number of doctors with advanced degrees in this field who agree. Certainly there are others who would not agree. A medical doctor is fine for someone with a genuine medical problem having a physiological basis. With that statement few would disagree. There have been strong efforts by proponents of the psychological field to try to intimidate pastors and other believers from attempting to function in this field, saying that they could do great harm. This leaves the impression that professional counselors can do no harm.

The abandonment of what might be called the Moral Model in counseling (right vs. wrong) for the Medical Model (misconduct is sickness) is a complete turnabout in thinking about behavior over the past hundred plus years. This is strikingly true in the church. It was a non-Christian psychologist, Dr. Hobart Mowrer, of the University of Illinois, who asked, “Has evangelical religion sold its birthright for a mess of psychological pottage?”⁶ In Mowrer’s treatment of mental patients he insisted on their taking personal responsibility for their actions, not blaming others. It was the renowned psychiatrist Karl Menninger, head of the famous clinic in Topeka, Kansas, who wrote a book called, *Whatever Happened to Sin?* He challenged the church’s contemporary failure to confront sinful behavior and their willingness to accept excuses.

It is just this tendency to accept questionable excuses for misconduct that seems to be a feature of counseling with a secular orientation. Beginning with Freud, there was a relentless pursuit for alleged causative factors, going all the way back to a person’s birth. The counselee was viewed as a

victim of these factors, but not personally responsible. Religious or moral standards were considered harmful because they were the cause of guilt, a major culprit. If you get rid of these standards, then you get rid of the guilt, according to this thinking. More recently, the idea of addiction was expanded from things like heroin or cocaine to food, sex and other areas of abuse. If one is addicted, so the theory goes, then there is no blame to be assigned. That would cause guilt. This idea conveniently ignores how people get started on these “addictions”, as a matter of free choice, despite all the warnings and dangers. There has been an intensive search for genetic differences or chemical imbalances to further weaken the idea of personal responsibility. Then the sociologists blend in such things as racism, poverty, and poor environment. There is very little attention paid to the many people who overcame these negative factors to develop constructive lives as a result of their own choices. In addition, the secular thinkers have no place in their schemes for such things as the power of the Holy Spirit in regenerated and yielded lives to achieve dramatic transformations. The latter is often seen among prison inmates, drug addicts, and other types of people notably resistant to efforts by psychologists, social workers and others working in rehabilitation. Their failures have brought the reluctant admission that there is no such thing as rehabilitation in prisons by their methods. God, through His Word and through human instruments, can achieve what the secular systems cannot do.

It was precisely these deficiencies that brought a thoughtful and honest psychiatrist, William Glasser, to see that, “something is seriously amiss with contemporary psychiatry

and clinical psychology.”⁷ In Glasser’s book he not only indicated a total break with conventional psychological wisdom, he provided statistical, proven evidence to demonstrate the failure of traditional psychotherapeutic methods. Glasser indicated in chapter two of his book that there are six postulates or presuppositions in the standard approach practiced throughout North America by both psychologists and psychiatrists. Glasser found that the approach was a failure in treatment effectiveness. The standard presuppositions are:

1. Mental illness is real.
2. There must be exploring and reconstruction of the past.
3. Transference is used as a therapeutic tool; this means that the patient is allowed to transfer in his mind attitudes about people in his past to those in his present, such as the psychiatrist.
4. The unconscious mind must be plumbed to gain understanding.
5. Psychiatry scrupulously avoids the problem of immorality. Deviant behavior is considered to be the product of mental illness and the patient should not hold morally responsible because he is helpless to do anything about it.
6. Teaching people to behave better is not considered an important part of therapy. “The patients will behave better once they understand both the historical and unconscious sources of their problems.”

Glasser’s treatment stressed reality (your present situation, not your past experiences), responsibility (for your own

decisions), and right vs. wrong (not situation ethics). These ideas were completely opposed to the standard thinking among Glasser's colleagues. This section is in no way intended to endorse his book as a Christian form of counseling, but to point out significant criticisms made by a recognized psychologist. Many will object to these characterizations, of course.

Those who are called Christian counselors still use at least in part, the foundations of the secular system (largely Freudian). They sometimes admit to problems in this system. Larry Crabb, one of the most popular writers and teachers of the Christian psychology movement, admitted this in his book, *Effective Biblical Counseling*. He said, "Psychology grows out of a set of presuppositions which are violently antagonistic to Scripture."⁸ However, he thinks you can take the best of psychology's "truth" and blend it with Scripture in some integrated form. He calls his approach, "spoiling the Egyptians"⁹ This is an example of Crabb's very questionable exegesis of the Bible when attempting to integrate Scripture and secular psychology. He thinks that psychology has some useful insights, "...though often based on wrong assumptions."¹⁰ Thus the Egyptians (referring to the account in Exodus 3:21, 22) become the psychologists. The Israelites who borrow from them are the Christians. The gold which is borrowed from the Egyptians comes from the insights of the psychologists. Of course, none of this is even remotely true or faithful to the Bible. Crabb's use of Scripture to justify connections between psychology and the Bible are so bizarre that they would strain even the imagination of most Bible commentators. He suggests that Galatians 2:11-13 shows the

need to be who you are (Rogers), Genesis 1:17-19, 28 shows that we are subject to environmental influences (Skinner). The only thing that we can say is that Crabb's *Biblical Counseling* is far from Biblical.

We do not have the space to define and explain the many terms now being used by so-called Christian counselors and pastors who preach psychological themes in their sermons. Almost every one of them originates from the secular world and not from Scripture. Chief among these themes is self-esteem, which is another term for self-love. All kinds of ills are laid at the door of the supposed lack of this virtue. It is also called the lack of self-acceptance. If self-love is a healthy virtue, it is difficult to understand why it is listed among the evil practices of men in the latter days (2 Timothy 3:2). In Scripture, Christians are taught to love God and to love others, but never to love self. Jesus taught many times that we are to deny self. The model of self-sacrifice and others directed ministry is the Savior Himself. Self-actualization or self-fulfillment, NOT self-denial, is the secular theme. The plea for unconditional love and acceptance is a theme of humanistic psychology. Yet the idea is now attributed to God in the sense of accepting misbehavior without reproach. God's love for the sinner does not imply any approval of wrong behavior or actions. He calls for them to repent. This call is usually shunned by these preachers. If there is any mention of repentance by some, it is redefined.

Christian psychology or if you prefer, psychotherapy, now freely employs such techniques as hypnosis, visualization (creating reality out of imagination), and group therapy (counsel and instruction springing from the group). All of these

methods are from the thinking of the world, not from the Lord or His Word. There is nothing Biblical or Christian about any of it.

The church has been seduced into accepting much of secular psychology's thinking, when combined with selected verses from the Bible, because it gives the appearance of being both scientific and spiritual. If it is truly scientific, then it must be true, they think. The question is, whether it is truly accepted as science by most of the eminent minds within the field itself. In their book, *Psychoheresy*, Martin and Deidre Bobgan have made the case that psychology and psychotherapy have not been able to meet the requirements for being a genuine science. They tell us that,

“In attempting to evaluate the status of psychology, the American Psychological Association appointed Sigmund Koch to plan and direct study which was subsidized by the National Science Foundation. The study involved eighty eminent scholars in assessing the facts, theories, and methods of psychology. The results of this extensive endeavor were then published in a seven volume series entitled Psychology: A Study of a Science. Koch describes the delusion from which we have been suffering in thinking about psychology as a science: ‘The hope of a psychological science became indistinguishable from the fact of psychological science. The entire subsequent history of psychology can be seen as a ritualistic endeavor to emulate the forms of science in order to sustain the delusion that it already is a science.’”^{[11](#)}

The answer to the issue in this study was negative. Psychology is simply not a science, nor does it truly use the scientific method of carefully controlled, objectively monitored, with experimentally repeatable verification of its conclusions. That the conclusions are constantly changing is proof of this. Only among the Christian counseling “professionals”, as they call themselves, is it accorded this standing. A large number of learned academics have confirmed the lack of any valid basis for regarding psychology as scientific. It is mostly a collection of constantly changing opinions, influenced more by culture and opinion than by any scientific facts. It is highly subjective and has acceptance mainly in the United States. However we do not question the sincerity of either the originators or practitioners of these counseling systems.

In summary, we can only observe that, at best, psychology or (psychiatry) even in their “Christian” form, are neither truly Biblical nor effective in terms of lasting changes. It can divert people from essentially Biblical prescriptions and remedies, such as self-discipline, unselfishness, centering on Christ, and considering others before self. At times the secular notions are clearly anti-Biblical and harmful. They tend to perpetuate costly treatment in months of endless sessions which may lead people to feel better and delude themselves into believing they are being truly helped. In the end however, controlled studies have indicated that often they will be no better off, as a whole, than those who received absolutely no treatment at all. Certainly, a more Biblical approach, in the hands of spiritual people, can do better than this.

Questions: Confusion from Integration of Secular and Christian Thinking

1. Why should we not accept, without criticism, the views of all those who call themselves “Christian counselors” or “Christian psychologists”? If they are Christians and are trying to help people, can we not trust them?
2. What are the objections to a sincere effort to integrate (merge) principles or insights of secular psychology with those of the Bible to help people? Is not “all truth God’s truth”?
3. What is meant by the term “medical model” in describing what is wrong with people who are said to have psychological problems”? Do you agree or disagree with this model and why?
4. Briefly, what are the observations of the following professionals (non-Christians) about the psychological profession?
 - a. Zilbergeld
 - b. Mowrer
 - c. Menninger
 - d. Glasser
 - e. Koch

Chapter 3: Fundamental Principles of Biblical Counseling

The Christian faith is concerned with the transformation of lives by the power of God. At least that is the Biblical picture. The Scriptures do not intimate any dependence upon human wisdom or techniques to achieve this transformation. It follows, therefore, that Biblical counseling should differ from secular-based counseling.

It is surprising, then, to read frank admissions of those who attempt to blend the two systems. They place a greater reliance on the secular than the spiritual but they see little difference between them. The Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) is a group of psychologists and psychological counselors who are professing Christians. In June of 1976, these members met in Santa Barbara, California and this statement was made: “At the present time there is no acceptable Christian psychology that is markedly different from non-Christian psychology. There is not an acceptable theory, mode of research or treatment methodology that is distinctly Christian.” Seward Hiltner of Princeton University uses the phrase “pastoral counseling” for Christian counseling on the premise that most counseling in the church is done by the professional staff. In his book, *The Counselor in Counseling*, he affirms the same belief set forth by CAPS. “In terms of basic attitude, approach and methods, pastoral counseling does not differ from effective counseling by other types of counselors.” He suggests that only in terms of the setting in which it is done (the church), the religious resources which are drawn upon (whatever that may mean), and the

“dimension at which the pastor must view all human growth and human problems” (another somewhat murky phrase) “is there a mild difference.” Essentially, he believes there is no basic difference. Both of these statements are much more honest than those made by advocates of integration of the two systems who want to convince us that there is a major difference.

It may be true that no major work systematically sets forth clear and fundamental principles in which Biblical counseling does differ from secular-based counseling, or at least ought to do so. What would these principles be? We suggest that they should include the following considerations:

1. The Word of God is foundational – This basis must be set forth in a forthright and unequivocal way. The Bible is authoritative in the sense that believers cannot appeal to any other authority in the same way. Nothing can be admitted by Biblical counselors that contradicts or minimizes any statement or principle of Holy Scripture. Certainly this contradiction cannot be allowed from unregenerate and even anti-Christian sources, including secular academics, however learned, or humanistic psychologists.
2. God requires acceptance of personal responsibility for our actions, words and attitudes. Therefore, we will take the same stand in counseling. We cannot accept blame-shifting or excuses for misbehavior, bad attitudes and wrong choices, no matter how plausible they may seem. It has been wisely observed that reasons differ from excuses. A reason provides a logical explanation as to why something occurred. An excuse, in contrast, attempts to

justify an action and releases a person from responsibility. The two are often confused. Moreover, a reason given may in reality be an excuse stuffed with a lie. The difference should be detected by the wise counselor. Theories as to the cause of psychological problems abound. These include (1) social and economic oppression by those in power, as voiced by Marxists, sociologists, psychologists, social workers and others; (2) environmental influences (parents, deprivation, racism, etc.); (3) medical (chemical changes in the body causing “mental illness”); (4) social (lack of healthy relationship with others); (5) personal attitudes (low self-esteem); (6) educational (lack of schooling or job training). This list can be expanded almost without end. It can include such things as “lack of a healthy birth experience”, blocked emotions from the past, negative thinking, excessively high moral standards producing guilt and a need to plumb the depths of their “unconscious” world. All such theories seek to release counselees from any sense of personal responsibility for their conduct. They ignore the significant numbers of persons who, despite many disadvantages of the type suggested above, press ahead in life and overcome obstacles through self-discipline and right choices. Overcomers refuse to take the place of “victims.” This is particularly true of those who became regenerated believers, energized by God’s power. A number of them become outstanding examples of those who overcome drug addiction, long standing criminal behavior, imprisonment and broken families. These are areas of the significant superiority of spiritual over secular approaches, despite the entrenched power of the latter in terms of

professional control, paid staff and bureaucratic supervision. As to hard core drug addicts and repeated criminals, the professionals are almost total failures.

3. Biblical counseling relies upon God to transform people from within. This means those people who are willing to surrender His will. This requires faith in what God says in His Word, not just faith in faith as some abstract principle, or faith in yourself. It is the Holy Spirit, not man, or human technique, or “mind power”, that effects spiritual change within. It is conceded by most counselors that inner change and real personality transformation is very difficult at best. Therefore, it requires supernatural power working in a yielded vessel. This is something completely beyond secular psychology.
4. Counselors, just as counselees, need to be controlled by the Holy Spirit in the process. They need to be channels in God's work since God appears to use people in this ministry. Those who can humbly take the place of channels will best possess the wisdom and discernment necessary in determining both needs and remedies. This would certainly disqualify unregenerate counselors. It would also seriously hamper believers who are not walking in the Spirit. Christian counselors may think it is necessary to know and push some supposed “magic button” in order to see change in others. Thus they find themselves frantically seeking some key to unlock the puzzle. The real key is a connection between counselees and the power of God to change them. That is as true in problems like discouragement as it is in sinful behavior. The counselor

best views his or her own role as that of an instrument or “coach”, not some psychological magician.

5. The tools or “weapons of our warfare” are spiritual, not carnal (2 Corinthians 10:4). We trust in the power of believing prayer. As we beseech the Lord in fervent intercession, we believe it “avails much” (James 5:16). We also believe in the power of the Word of God, appropriately used, to touch hearts and consciences (Hebrews 4:12). This does not mean “clubbing people over the head with the Bible”, as some have suggested. It does not mean facing people with the Word and “commanding change.” Whether they change or not does not depend upon our command but upon the power of the Word in a heart touched by the Spirit. There should be some influence by either, or both, the counselor as a spiritual model and the congregation of believers as a loving and healing community. The passage in II Timothy 2:24-26 is helpful as a guide: “...be kind to all... with gentleness, correcting those who are in opposition, and perhaps God will grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil...”

6. Our model is the Wonderful Counselor, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It certainly is not some noted psychologist, especially an unregenerate one, and his human techniques. The Lord was, and is, compassionate, kind and willing to listen to those who come clamoring for help. Those who came to the Lord, according to Scripture, often were outcasts by society. They included the poor (who could pay him nothing), the handicapped and the unwanted. He was willing to be scorned for taking time with these people. He

was not afraid of being disliked because he spoke the truth in love. He wept over many who rejected His words (Luke 19:41). On the other hand, He did not hesitate to warn people of the danger of eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46). One cannot think of a secular psychologist, or many Christian counselors, who use a different model, doing such a thing.

7. We admit our limitations. We can help only those who are willing to listen to God or receive His words through us as the Lord's servants. No amount of time invested by us will overcome the lack of yieldedness to God and willingness to change according to His Word.
8. We should not fear being classified as "judgmental", a favorite word of secular psychology, if what they mean is that we uphold the absolutes of God's Word concerning behavior. We can rightly call others to accountability to the Creator's standards of right and wrong. The words of Jesus, "Judge not, that you be not judged", are far too broadly interpreted in some quarters. We are told to "judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). We are not to take the place of God or to compare ourselves to others in a way that is favorable to us, unfavorable to them. Other people are not the true standard. Jesus is. At times, discernment, which is most important, is confused with "judging" others. No one could hope to help others without some degree of godly discernment. Admonition, rebuke and even discipline, where needed, are commanded by God of His servants. Such verses as Colossians 1:28 ("admonishing every man"), Colossians 3:16 ("admonishing one another"), Romans 15:14 ("admonishing one another"), Titus 1:13

("reprove severely"), II Timothy 4:2 ("reprove, rebuke") are but a few that certainly call for corrective words that might be deemed "judging" by some.

There are some things that Biblical counselors should seek to avoid, it seems to us. These include the following:

1. Prolonged or repetitive counseling sessions, often for months or even years, are an evidence of failure, not success. Those who counsel for monetary fees, of course, profit from this. However, the Lord's servants cannot afford to expend endless amounts of time on those showing limited or no objective evidence of progress. One of two things is true. Either the counselee is not heeding or applying what is being suggested, or the counselor is simply not being effective in what is being done. The counselee may feel better, as is often claimed, and even want to keep on talking endlessly about problems. Yet there is no fundamental change in the situation. This is evidence that the sessions should at least be put on hold, if not suspended entirely. There are many people who like to talk about their problems but do not wish to do what is needed to resolve them. They can devour the time and sympathies of others as much as they are allowed. This is not good for either party. This does not mean that we cease to care for them and pray for them, or that we have "written them off." It means that we are not getting anywhere and more such sessions are not likely to help. A suspension might wake them up.
2. It is not helpful to allow them to blame God, or others, or even you, the counselor, for their troubles. Neither is it good to be a receptive listener to their complaints or

grievances about others (Proverbs 11:13, 25:19; Matthew 18:15). Their problems probably did not begin with others. In any event, a successful solution or improvement can most likely come about through a change of attitude or constructive action on their part. Final responsibility for resolving problems rests with them, not with you. By the same token, we should not accept credit for improvement in their situation. Give God the glory for any real transformation of another person's life. We are at best poor instruments for His Spirit. We can give credit to the counselee for listening and applying certain principles. Only a minority will do this in a conscientious manner. One of the major problems of counselees, is not being willing to take heed.

3. We are not morally neutral. Our standards are those of the Word of God, not those of humanism or secular psychology. We are willing to listen, as patiently as possible, to even the most outrageous things. However, we will not assume the burden of playing God. The counselees are responsible to God as their Creator and Savior, not to our human judgments. The Word must always be between us and them. However, when the time comes to "speak the truth in love" we should do so. We should not be silent about evidently wrong behavior or immorality where God is not silent. Truth makes men free, not just silence or acceptance of that behavior in the supposed interests of love. Our response to such acknowledgement is not that of the "non-directive" counselor who does not want to appear to be judgmental. We do not consider guilt about wrong behavior as being harmful. When you are not feeling guilty about something evidently wrong, you are nearing the

possibility of more serious trouble. If the guilt is imaginary and misplaced, we ought to correct that thinking through the Word. Many sensitive people suffer from this.

In summary, let us say that there should be something distinctly different in comparing Biblical and secularly influenced principles. If this is not true, then why should you bother to do it? Just refer them to the professionals, as some would recommend. If there are distinctions, we ought to be clear in our own minds as to what they are. Then follow through with consistency. This chapter ought to alert us even more to the clear conflicts between the secular and humanistic approach on one hand, and Scriptural principles on the other. It means that we should also be alert to the dangers of syncretism, historically a deadly influence upon the Christian church. This malady is the device of fusing concepts from opposing systems into a new whole, to the detriment of the original system. It is designed to make something more popular or acceptable. It has been a major source in the introduction of paganism in many forms into the Christian faith. Therefore, read with caution the writing of self-proclaimed Christians who use the Worldly terminology of unbelievers or mask them with Christian labels, sprinkled with verses that are out of context.

Questions: Fundamental Principles of Biblical Counseling

1. How should Biblical counseling differ from secularly oriented counseling, in your opinion? If so, how do you explain the statements of Christian psychologists in CAPS and Steward Hiltner of Princeton University?

2. What excuses have you heard made on behalf of the behavior of some troubled people? Did you accept them and why?
3. What does a counselor really need as a believer to be effective in helping others?
4. There are at least three things we need to avoid in counseling. Why? Can you think of any other things?

Chapter 4: Favorable Qualities for Biblical Counselors

Virtually any spiritual Christian ought to be able to give helpful advice when opportunity presents itself. By doing this, they not only help others, but lessen the demands on overworked gifted people. Not everyone needs a gifted or professional counselor for every problem situation, even if enough of them were available. Helping one another is one of the privileges of friendship. It is the calling of all believers. Scriptures such as Colossians 3:16 speak of teaching and admonishing one another in the context of the entire body. Moses was advised by Jethro to appoint people to handle lesser matters. The more difficult cases could then be brought to him. Among us however, there is no need for special appointment to function at this level.

The Apostle Paul asked the question, “Is it so that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren?” (I Corinthians 6:5). This introduces the idea that there should be more than one person in a body of believers able to settle conflicts or attend to more difficult questions. What qualities should they possess?

1. Evidently, they should have the confidence of other believers. This will be based upon factors as a godly walk, a well-managed household, a discreet tongue and a well-deserved reputation for being available and helpful. Such helpers will not be “busybodies” or meddlers (II Thessalonians 3:11, I Timothy 5:13), running about to intrude uninvited into other people’s affairs. They will not be giving unsolicited advice or inquiring into matters

which are none of their affair. This is more harmful than helpful. Possible immorality or scandal, affecting the church, is a matter for intervention by the elders, whether it is invited or not. In general, it is better that you allow others to seek you out, rather than the reverse.

2. It is apparent that discernment is a major requirement for effective counseling. Spiritual discernment is the special ability, given by God, to see beyond the obvious and beneath the surface of things. It is also called being perceptive. Ordinary observers hear words, see appearances and accept things at face value. For example, most people readily accept the counselees' explanation of what's wrong and why. A discerning person, on the other hand, is able to evaluate situations in a way that cannot always be explained or proved. It could be that they sense things by spiritual intuition or by much experience. This applies to detecting lies or "cover-ups." It may be that some people are simply deceived themselves. Believers who are quite spiritual in many ways can still lack discernment. They can be quite naïve. Perhaps it is because some always want to believe the best about others. Discernment is not something that can be taught in a class. Believers can improve their limited powers of discernment by making a diligent effort to lessen their naivety. You should carefully study and meditate upon the "wisdom books" of the Bible such as Proverbs. You can read a chapter of this every day. You can learn much by meditating upon the ways, words, and questions of the Lord Jesus, the wisest man who ever lived. Experience also is an excellent teacher, "but the tuition is high", meaning it is a costly way to learn.

3. The ability to have a warm, sincere interest in people, even those who may not be entirely lovable or admirable, is most important. We call certain ones “people persons” because they are able to relate readily to others. This seems evident in the Lord Jesus whom the common people admired and “heard gladly.” Those who are inclined to be quite “private” and uncomfortable in discussing personal things, are not likely to be good at getting close to others in terms of trust and sharing. With effort we can, and should, do better at being honest with one another. Until we do learn this, we will not likely be able to function effectively in a counseling role.
4. Emotional self-control is essential if you are going to be of help. Problems can be worsened without this. Conflicts move toward resolution when we handle circumstances in a self-controlled manner. Anger is an example. There are many reasons why we become angry, even good ones. But Scripture says, “the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God.” The Proverbs are full of warnings about a quick temper (Proverbs 15:18, 22:24). Impatience is another example. God is “long suffering” toward us. How grateful we should be that He is. How badly do we reflect His character when we are not patient. The tendency to be moody or depressed can be turned into the joy of the Lord by a change in attitude or a fresh application of the Word. If the Lord does not bring joy into our lives, how can we help others enjoy this? The lack of self-discipline, which is a fruit of the Spirit-controlled life (Galatians 5:23), may be evident. Make your own list of negative and positive qualities.

5. Biblical counselors, almost by definition, must be saturated with the Word, in heart as well as mind. They are “rooted and grounded” in it. It is present on their tongues, as they speak to others, because it is written in their hearts. In counseling, we should refer frequently to the Word. Invite counselees to read the Scriptures, in context, and comment on their meaning. Do not just decorate your ideas with verses, or glibly quote them, or “beat people over the head” with them. Discuss the verse or passage in the context of the whole of Scripture. Invite personal application. Determine if there is real understanding, brought about by the Spirit. Has it sunk down in their ears, as Jesus said? Is the light of conviction or spiritual discernment beginning to dawn in their minds? It is not a matter of intellectual grasp of something that you seek, although that is important. You want to get beyond this to the point where they see the truth as it applies to their lives. This will usually take more than one conversation, but you need to be moving in that direction.
6. The question needs to be asked of the would-be counselor, “How effective have you been to date in helping others?” Of course, people may enjoy coming to you so that you can listen again and again to their recitation of unhappiness. They may tell you that they feel better after talking with you. But to what degree have they objectively overcome their difficulties of attitudes and actions? Is it that they want you to change someone else, or their own circumstances, as is often the case? Do they realize that God is not so much interested in changing our circumstances as He is in changing us? Sometimes counselors rush around, bubbling with enthusiasm, talking

about how many people they are seeing. Yet the objective changes seem few and far between in these lives. If the counselor was successful, would more and more meetings be necessary while the problems persisted? But the counselees are enthusiastic, we may say, even though there is little evidence of change. That is their tendency. It is difficult to get a counselee to speak negatively about a psychologist or psychiatrist or self-help group, according to Zilbergeld. Enthusiasm about the practitioner of some system usually outweighs any objective evidence of his or her success. Others usually cannot duplicate their work. Often we are too enthusiastic about our methods. The wise and successful counselor will give glory to God where there is real transformation.

7. Counselors need to have a well-balanced life consisting of many other elements other than counseling. A steady diet of dealing with troubled people can lead one to think that virtually everyone is a troubled soul. At times the counselee's very attitudes and character traits can "rub off" on you. That may be one reason why many psychologists and psychiatrists seem a little "weird" even to their own colleagues, as well as the general public. Many jokes abound over the habits of these "shrinks", a short term for "head shrinker." The suicide rate for these people is the highest among their fellow professionals in the "mental health" field. These professionals are also high on the scale for many other problems such as family breakdown and divorce. To keep a good perspective on life, to be spiritually healthy and joyful, it is important to have a good family life, recreational times and social interaction with

those living more normal lives, without frequent ups and downs.

Psychology classes in college and professional training centers seem to abound with students who showed an interest for a surprising reason. They will confess, when asked, that they took the class or entered the profession out of a desire to better “understand themselves” or solve their own problems. This is probably not the best reason to take these classes. In fact, such students may become, and often are, even more confused at the end. A young friend of mine who aspired to the ministry was advised to take psychology at a nearby college in preparation for this calling. The only course available at the time was one in which the most disturbed cases were studied. When asked by the teacher, every student except my friend acknowledged that they themselves had similar problems as those whom they were studying. He was astounded, of course.

Those people who are still trying to work through their own problems, whatever they may be, are not the best people to be doing Biblical counseling, at that point in their lives. If, for example, a person has completely recovered from the sin of drunkenness through the power of God, then he or she would be an excellent choice to help those with similar problems. If you still have struggles in your own marriage, you would not be wise in undertaking to be a marriage counselor to others. To try to undertake to help others when you have not had a solid period of clear victory in an area is foolishness. An example of this is the oft-repeated instance of the temporarily successful drug abuser who is out helping others. In a short time he is back on drugs, a bad model for those he sought to

help. Be sure you are victorious for an extended period of time before undertaking to help someone else with a similar problem. Be less eager to get involved in counseling until you are better aware of the demands of the calling and your own weakness. James 3:1 has an interesting warning: “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment.” If you substitute the word “counselor” for the word “teacher”, you may better understand the importance of this statement.

All of this is not said for the purpose of discouraging those who might be qualified and interested in the field. It is designed to lend a touch of realism to what might seem a glamorous calling, which it is not. It is simply a warning as to what is involved. We need more believers who are able to accept this responsibility in the local church, at least at some level of participation. However, you need to think very clearly about what you are doing and why you are doing it. You certainly ought to have a basic set of principles on which you propose to operate, as we have already outlined. Your motivation for doing this is an important issue. Consider the Lord Jesus and His example of sacrificial self-giving. That is an excellent start. He did not go about helping people out of a desire to understand His own problems or to profit Himself. He was the One who loved and gave Himself, not just an allotment of time on a periodic basis.

Questions: Favorable Qualities for Biblical Counselors

1. What do you think you need personally to effectively give counsel to others in at least the most basic situations? Why?

2. What comment would you make about your own abilities in discerning what is wrong and what action is needed? What hinders your powers of discernment?
3. How would you evaluate your own past efforts to counsel or advise others? Why were they successful or unsuccessful?
4. Do you think that because you have had problems yourself, especially in certain areas, you will automatically be able to help others in these areas? If so, why? If not, why?

Chapter 5: Diverse Situations Encountered in Counseling

No two counseling situations are exactly alike. They can be as different as people themselves. This makes counseling interesting and not predictable. Our fundamental approach should remain the same, grounded upon a firm grasp of our principles. However, we can make some modifications in the way the situation is handled. We reject the “salad bar” method, or eclectic approach, of using whatever seems to work, without regard to whether this agrees with Biblical principles. By not doing this you will avoid the common practice of chasing the latest fad in psychology, often called, “pop”, or popular psychology. The assumption that a newer idea is always a better one is wrong, especially in the field of human behavior.

Ask counselees to state, as succinctly as possible, why they came to seek your help, in case they do not come to the point themselves. This is called, in some quarters, “the presentation problem.” It may or may not be the most important problem, but it should not be ignored. What people think is the problem can be an important part of your evaluation.

Three questions can be useful in getting the situation out in the open for discussion. You can rephrase these questions in various ways, but the substance should remain the same.

1. Where are you now?

In other words, as they look at their situation, what is happening? What concerns them about it? How do they evaluate it? What other people are involved, if any? What is

good or bad about it, as they see it? This can be the occasion when you probe deeper into whatever background is important to their understanding of the problem. When did all this begin? Was it ever right? What seemed to you to be the reasons? It is not necessary to go all the way back to the womb or to plumb their unconscious feelings, as some have suggested. Remember that what now is more important than all the supposed whys. You cannot undo the past.

2. Where do you want to be?

If the situation is not what they want it to be, what needs to take place, especially in terms of their handling of the situation? Remember that you as counselor may not be able to meet other involved people. You cannot personally change their circumstances for them. Where would the counselee like to be in their relationship with God, to their family members, or to others? Most people, when asked what they really want in life, will say, "To be happy." But what will it take to make them happy? This is a great place for counselees to define what they seek in terms of walking with the Lord.

3. What can I do to help?

Have them state what they seek from you in advice or practical assistance. It helps them to think more clearly about why they came to you in the first place. Do they only want someone to listen while they talk and complain endlessly? Are they just collecting opinions, yours being one among many? Do they want sympathy or support in their ideas? Hopefully they came with the idea of listening, with a willingness to change.

We believe that the greatest issue to be searched out is that of a person's relationship to God. It can be very useful to ask

someone a very general question about their early religious experiences or church background. Most people you encounter will claim to be Christians in some sense. They may profess to have been saved or to have accepted Christ. You should take particular interest in their description of how and when their profession of faith took place. Often you will hear a story of a childhood experience, or of prayers to the Lord, as the basis of their assurance of salvation. Then you may ask, "What happened after that?" Did a change take place in their life, turning from a sinful lifestyle and harmful relationships? Was there a measure of continuation in this new lifestyle, or did they return to the same sinful life and habits? If this included the practice of immorality, use of drugs and alcohol, and other destructive habits, then you ought to consider having them turn to certain passages in the New Testament for consideration and possible application. Such verses may include 1 John 2:3-5; 3:4-10; Matthew 7:21-23. Ask them how they can be confident in their conversion experience if they have been practicing lawlessness rather than practicing righteousness. The Bible tells us that we should, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Examine yourselves." (2 Corinthians 13:5). The warning of the possibility of deceiving yourself is repeated to us several times in the Scriptures (Ephesians 5:5,6; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10).

Usually there is the objection that no one is perfect, often with some appeal to the experiences of David and Peter. Of course, this is true. But we are not talking about sinless perfection. We are discussing the practice of sin, especially such lawless acts as cited above. In 1 John we read that the children of God and the children of the Devil are obvious. In what way? By the way

they live, or do not live, according to the Scriptures. Jesus said, “By their fruits you shall know them.”

All of this is not to say that we can infallibly determine whether someone is saved. We do not possess an advance copy of the Lamb's Book of Life, containing all the names of the redeemed. All we can do is to tactfully get them to re-examine the reality of their profession of faith in Christ. This is a more loving act than to blindly accept every profession as a true one. How can one build a true Christian experience upon the foundation of an empty profession? How can one live a genuine Christian life without the power of the indwelling Spirit? This is a vital issue. It needs more consideration than it usually gets.

Those professing to be Christians, with at least some evidence of reality, can be questioned about the closeness of their fellowship with God. Are they active in their church? Do they regularly pray and read the scriptures? Do they walk in the light as followers of the Lord Jesus? These are important conditions for receiving God's fullest blessings. Grace, which is the undeserved favor of God, is not a license to live as we please. Many of God's blessings, including that of answered prayer, are distinctly conditional.

There are many types of counseling situations. Not all of them involve sinful behavior. For example, some people seek guidance in making important decisions. Some need hope and encouragement due to bereavement, abandonment's, grievous disappointments, and tragedy. Romantic matters can be a crushing experience for some. Some may need technical or specialized help, which can be obtained by making an appropriate referral. These general situations can be illustrated by the

following categories, with some examples and guidelines for each:

I. SUPPORTIVE COUNSELING – To undergird and stabilize troubled people; to help them gain strength in order to deal effectively with severe trials.

A. Sample problems: Deaths; serious illness; break-ups of engagement or marriage; etc.

B. Counselor's role: Reassurance, comfort, guidance, listening and helping them to lean on the Lord through prayer and the Word. An objective view of the situation, meaningful activity, and facing the facts are also helpful.

C. Dangers for the counselor: Over-dependency by the counselee on the counselor; prolonged, excessive grief.

II. CONFRONTING COUNSELING – Forcing a person to face and deal with sin or difficulty. This involves confession, restoration, and the development of good patterns, which will prevent similar problems in the future.

A. Sample problems: Immorality, or other scriptural violation. This may include poor attitudes, factionalism, unresolved grievances, unwillingness to work, and financial irresponsibility.

B. Counselor's role: Face the counselee with the evidence of his/her sin to bring him/her to admission of same. Encourage confession, restitution, and responsible change. Stress God's willingness to forgive and our need to do these towards others. Help them to grow spiritually through Christian fellowship, the Word, and prayer. Help them learn self-discipline and sound life patterns.

C. Dangers for the counselor: Dealing with counselees arrogantly and with a spirit of “one-upmanship”; rejecting them personally because of their actions and speaking in a self-righteous manner; not helping them specifically in changing their behavior where they desire to do so.

III. INFORMATIONAL COUNSELING – Assisting others to obtain the necessary facts in making decisions; showing them how to discern God’s will and how to arrive at the proper decisions; supplying necessary information or source materials to make necessary changes in actions; preparing for future changes.

A. Sample problems: Job information; premarital counseling; Bible questions and confusion on various courses of action.

B. Counselor’s role: To provide opportunity for full discussion; recommend suitable sources of information. Praise good attitudes and their genuine desire to do God’s will, if this is true. To make suggestions or ask questions to help them think through a course of action. Be alert to hidden issues.

C. Dangers for the Counselor: Over-dependency; imagining that the information will necessarily bring change; manipulating or dominating the counselee rather than helping them to make the necessary decisions; having an inflated view of our own expertise.

IV. PREVENTATIVE COUNSELING – To anticipate problems before they arise, or to prevent the worsening of existing problems.

A. Sample problems: Intense relationships between persons which may lead to sin or unwise marriages, or the polarizing of factions in a dispute; medical, marital, job, or church crises;

major changes in life such as college, military service, or retirement.

B. Counselor's role: To remain alert to potential problems and dangers, and to warn people of danger areas. To be tactful in discussing various aspects of the potential problem; do not pretend to be one who is all knowing; review alternative solutions.

C. Dangers for the Counselor: Waiting too long while problem becomes more serious; over-dramatizing the situation and making it seem worse than it may be.

V. SPIRITUAL COUNSELING – Leading people to find the solutions to life's problems; dealing with meaning and purpose in life; helping them to learn the proper way to grow through walking with Christ.

A. Sample problems: Leading people to Christ for salvation; teaching people how to grow spiritually; dealing with lack of assurance, unbelief, emptiness, wrong doctrinal understanding, or other points of confusion about Biblical issues.

B. Counselor's role: Encourage open expression of their problems, concerns, doubts; be honest and avoid superficiality; be willing to discuss, raise issues and confront; use the Scriptures and prayer; point out spiritual needs and teach the facts of the new birth, spiritual growth, or other needed truths.

C. Dangers for the Counselor: Generalizing with clichés like, "Just learn to trust the Lord"; failing to deal with the genuine concerns in a thorough manner; theological questions may

tend to hide other problems; all problems may not be assigned automatically to the category of sin.

VI. REFERRAL COUNSELING – Use of specialized or more experienced sources for helping persons.

A. Sample problems: Those who need medical care or examination, legal advice, financial assistance, or similar problems. Those whose problems seem beyond your ability to assist, or for whom you may feel a dislike for any reason.

B. Counselor's role: Be familiar with sources of specialized help and know how to contact them when necessary. Help the counselee to see the value of referral and not to feel rejected; be tactful.

C. Dangers for the Counselor: Failing to refer when you do not have the particular ability or time to handle the problem; referring too quickly, or in a manner that implies rejection; failing to give the spiritual help you could have given; needlessly meddling in the affair after referral has been made.

VII. MARITAL COUNSELING – Marriage problems are very common, even among believers. Detailed consideration will be given in a later chapter, but here is a brief statement.

A. Sample problems: Threatened separation or divorce; arguments over debt and financial matters or the handling and discipline of the children; strife over involvement with in-laws; communication difficulties in the settling of disputes; dissatisfaction in the sexual relationship; emotional immaturity; unequal yoke between a believer and an unbeliever; role reversal or lack of knowledge of Biblical function in roles of husband and wife.

B. Counselor's role: Thorough questioning, even in sensitive areas such as sexual relationships, and getting both sides of the story; determining the major items of conflict. Do both parties want the marriage to survive? Find the motivation for both persons to work on their problems in a serious way.

C. Dangers for the Counselor: Not penetrating to the real issues; proposing superficial measures which will not bring about fundamental change; not utilizing the spiritual measures which can help effect a change.

In determining the truth in any situation, we must accept the fact that some counselees lie, distort, or exaggerate matters. Therefore, it is most important to emphasize the need for complete honesty if you are going to be helpful. The counselees expect honesty from you. For the same reason they must be honest with you. Discernment as to what is true is needful for counselors.

Questions: Diverse Situations Encountered in Counseling

1. List the three suggested questions in seeking to find out what you need to know about a troubled person. Say what you expect or want to learn from each question.
2. What are the problems involved in trying to determine whether a person is a true believer, really saved?
3. Name the type (or types) of counseling which might be most difficult for you. Why is this so? What do you need to learn in order to overcome the difficulties?
4. Of the various "dangers for the counselor" what might be the most likely problems for you? Why?

Chapter 6: Self-Love or Self-Sacrifice

One major area of difference between Biblical counseling and secular-based counseling centers around what is called self. At the simplest level self is what we have in mind when we use the pronouns “I” or “me.” Another common word for self is ego. This gives rise to such terms as egocentric (self-centered), egotism (conceit, exaggerated sense of self-importance) and egoism (the doctrine that self-interest is a valid motive for all human actions).

In the New Testament the word *psuche* is translated as life or soul. It is the term from which we derive the word *psyche*. This in turn gives rise to the term *psychology*, the study of the behavioral characteristics of the individual. The soul or self is the seat of what we call personality, consisting of will, emotions and mind or reason. The soul is the center of self-awareness, the you which is a part (together with the spirit) of the inner, invisible person. The soul, the spirit and the body, then, make up the tri-unity of man’s being (I Thessalonians 5:23).

Secular psychology has identified self as its primary project for promotion or up building. It theorizes that lack of self-love or low self-esteem is the major cause of almost every kind of maladjustment, including everything from criminality to sadness. In the minds of some, it is the national “illness” of this country.

This diagnosis does not lack for challenges. David Myers, a teacher of psychology at Hope College in Michigan, has written in his book *The Inflated Self* that pride and self-serving bias far exceed any evidence of low self-esteem. A

number of studies support this. A college board asked high school seniors to compare themselves with others of their own age. In leadership ability, 70% rated themselves above average and only 2% scored themselves as below average. Of 829,000 students, zero percent rated themselves below average and 25% saw themselves in the top one percent! Other studies demonstrated that people regularly overestimate the accuracy of their beliefs or judgments, accept more responsibility for success than failure and overestimate how desirably they would act in a given situation. There is no clear scientific evidence to demonstrate that low self-esteem is as prevalent as claimed by most psychologists or counselors. However, they are doing an excellent job of convincing the public that it is true nevertheless.

The idea that lack of self-love is a major problem or causative factor for poor behavior includes four major theorists. These are Erich Fromm, Rollo May, Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, according to Paul Vitz in "Psychology of Religion, the Cult of Self-Worship." Vitz states that Ludwig Feurbach, an influential enemy of Christianity laid the groundwork for later humanistic concepts of self. The liberal Protestant preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick and Norman Vincent Peale became popularizers of these self-theories before the present group came along. It has been called "the perfect consumer philosophy, ideally suited for those with money and leisure," thus readily accepted by millions.

No modern writer or speaker has done more for this theory than T.V. personality Robert Schuller, pastor of the famed Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, which has regularly packed in audiences of 10,000 each Sunday at his

church. In his book *Self-Esteem*, the New Reformation (certainly a grandiose title), he lets out all the restraints in portraying the evils of low self-esteem. He says, “Sin is any act or thought that robs myself or any other human being of his or her self-esteem. And what is hell? It is the loss of pride that naturally follows separation from God—the ultimate and unfailing source of self-respect...A person is in hell when he has lost his self-esteem.”

John H. Armstrong, writing on “Must I Love Myself”, says: “According to the spirit of our age, it is no longer man’s failure to glorify God but rather his failure to esteem himself that is his problem.” Armstrong examined the pivotal text (Luke 20:25-27) so often used to justify Biblically this idea. This includes the phrase “love you neighbor as yourself.” Proponents of this view argue that a person cannot love someone else before first learning to love himself. Of course, neither the Lord Jesus nor any other Biblical writer ever commanded us to learn to love self. Rather we were commanded to love God first and then love our neighbor. Armstrong argues that to take the verse in Luke 20 and argue that it teaches “love yourself” is grammatically impossible (no command is there to love self), linguistically impossible (agapao means sacrificial love, and it is meaningless to sacrifice oneself to serve oneself) and theologically impossible (directing service to self is a sin, not a virtue).

According to Martin and Deidre Bobgan, the vigorous advocacy of self-love has spread like a cancer through the church through well-known Christian communicators. They include James Dobson, Bruce Narramore, Robert Schuller, Charles Swindoll, Norman Wright, Josh McDowell and many

others. This is astonishing when one reads the words of earlier advocates like Fromm. He wrote, "Modern culture is pervaded by a taboo on selfishness. We are taught that to be selfish is sinful and to love others is virtuous." The Bobgan's commented that Fromm blamed theologians such as Luther and Calvin for emphasizing love of others at the expense of loving self. He did not have the slightest understanding of the Bible, Luther or Calvin. "He saw the God of the Bible as a cruel dictator who drove Cain to murder Abel." To him, God was evil and Cain a helpless victim. Think of such an ungodly root for the self-love idea, which Fromm frankly equated with selfishness.

Don Matzat in *Christ Esteem* has quite clearly defined the issues for those who wish to counsel from a Biblical perspective. "Modern humanism considers man himself to be the measure of all things, standing against bringing him to the knowledge of sin. We are being taught to feel good about ourselves", a most agreeable thought to modern man. The latter is more interested in personal fulfillment than in forgiveness for sins and salvation. Bruce Narramore is quite frank about how to appeal to modern churchgoers. He says, "Many individual Christians look to psychology for new insights that will relieve personal discomfort or despair. They hope that psychology will provide answers to questions not specifically addressed in Christianity." Please note this last phrase. The Lord Jesus, or God's Word, is not adequate to meet the issue of despair, according to this thinking. You must have psychology to do this.

The issue before us is "What does the Bible teach?", not "What does Psychology teach?" Does the Bible teach that we should focus upon self in order to improve our self-image? Of course

not. To be absorbed in self rather than upon God or the needs of others is harmful, not helpful; nor is it helpful to think about self as bad. Continuing to be occupied with self at all is not good. Introspection, which is the practice of constantly examining your own thoughts and feelings especially in some critical way, is not recommended for a healthy outlook. Self-pity is worse. Getting your mind off yourself and on to something or someone else, in a constructive way, is what is helpful. Biblically guided self-examination is recommended. This enables us to deal with the sins of bitterness and an unforgiving spirit in the light of scripture. See Matthew 18:21-35 on the subject of forgiving others, for example.

This brings us to what the Bible really teaches about dealing with self, or the self's life mode of thinking. If we begin properly with the example of Jesus Christ, then we see very plainly that He lived in a manner completely opposite of that recommended by the "love yourself" crowd. He loved the Father and He loved others. He gave Himself for others. He suffered and died for others. His life was the perfect model of sacrificial love, not self-love. He did not come to be served but to serve. He lived to please God not to please Himself. Even on the Cross, in dreadful pain, His thoughts were for others, not self. He prayed for His persecutors and murderers, "Father forgive them." It seemed that He seldom gave a thought to His own needs, nor was He worried about what others were thinking about Him. He was the incarnation of unselfishness and others-directed living, rather than self-centeredness. Who could improve on the example of the Perfect Man?

The teaching of the Lord on self is quite clear on this point and quite at variance with any idea of self-love. In Luke 9:23-24 He

said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me, for whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake is the one who will save it.” Life here is the same word upon which we have already commented, *psuche*. It is the soul, the personality (the will, emotions and mind), or what we call “I.” When the Lord says, “If anyone wishes to come after Me”, He is including everyone who would claim to be a true believer. When He says, “deny himself and take up his cross daily”, He states the condition. To deny self is not to deny our existence, our humanity, our personality or any like idea. He is talking about putting our own interests aside in order to follow Him. When He says, “take up your cross daily”, He is talking about death (the meaning of the Cross) to what we want in order to do what God wants. When He says “daily” he means that it is something that is not done once for all or is involved only in our conversion experience. If you want to save your life (get the most out of it for yourself), you will lose it. If you want to lose your life (give it up) for Jesus’ sake to serve His interests, you will gain it, in the sense of eternal reward and making your life count.

In John 12:23-25, the Lord makes even more clear the idea of self-sacrifice, not self-love. In verse 23, He speaks of His impending death for the sins of the world (“the hour has come”). He gives a principle from agriculture. “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains by itself alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” Unless the wheat grain gives up its independent life, then it will not provide multiplied life or be fruitful. Of course, this would connect with His own self-sacrifice on the Cross. But it is also applied to the lives of His followers, as we see in the next verse. “He who loves his life

loses it, but he who hates (loves less) his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal.” In other words, unless you are willing to sacrifice your life for Christ in this world in order to make it count eternally, you will lose it. The Lord then follows this with a reminder on serving Him. “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me, and where I am, there will My servant be also.” Therefore, to serve Jesus means to follow Him and to emulate His example. This includes the life of sacrificing self, taking up of our cross daily. Now, how could anyone interpret this to mean something like, “raise your self-esteem”?

Let us consider some other verses in this same vein:

II Corinthians 4:10-12

Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body; for we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Philippians 2:5-8

Have this attitude in yourself which was also in Christ Jesus who...emptied Himself...He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Luke 14:26-27

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate [love less] his own father and mother and wife and children and sisters, yes, and even his own life [psuche], he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be my disciple.

All of these verses teach a life of self-sacrifice for Jesus’ sake, not a life of loving self and seeking self-fulfillment.

We will deal in the next chapter with the principle of exchanging our self-life for the life of Jesus flowing through us as channels. However this chapter should turn us away from seeking the answers to our difficulties, meaninglessness, lack of proper identity and general unhappiness by means of the secular route—seeking greater self-esteem. Rather, it will show us the answer is in Christ. It will be our growing esteem of Him, not self, that will mark the right path. We will find our portion, power and satisfaction in letting Him live His life in us, not in living for ourselves or thinking about ourselves.

Questions: Self-Love or Self-Sacrifice

1. What can you say, for or against, the concept of “low self-esteem” (self-love) as a counseling problem? Consider either what you have read or experienced?
2. From the Bible, write down your understanding of what is the soul or self. What does the Lord Jesus teach about self? Use Scripture. What did He mean, in your opinion?
3. Contrast these Scriptures with those of Robert Schuller, or Erich Fromm. How could you explain the support of the self-esteem doctrine by Christian spokesmen like Dobson, Narramore, Swindoll, Wright and McDowell?
4. In what way do such Scriptures as 2 Corinthians 4:10-12, Philippians 2:5-8 and Luke 14:26-27 help our understanding on the subject?

Chapter 7: The Exchanged Life

Any book on Christian counseling should address the issue of how to enjoy a life of satisfaction, inner strength and fellowship with God. Materialistic acquisitions, pleasure-seeking and a concentration upon self are not leading people where they need to go. What people need is communication with God and a life characterized by joy, love, peace and related blessings. This is exactly what is offered by the Lord Jesus to those who follow Him and His teachings. Jesus said, “I have come that they might have life and might have it more abundantly (John 10:10). Abundant life is rich and overflowing. It pertains to the present, not just the future.

Of course, this life begins when Jesus becomes Lord and Savior of those who believe the gospel message, centered in Him. But beginning will not insure the enjoyment of this life. Many believers do not experience this promised life after they profess faith in Christ. Why not? There are several possible reasons. They may be discouraged by past failure. They say, “I have tried all this before and it has not worked.” But God has not failed and His promises are still true when claimed by faith. Some of these people may not be saved, despite some earlier prayer to God. They say, “I asked Jesus into my heart.” Many will be stunned when they face the Lord after death and hear from Him, “I never knew you” (Matthew 7:22-23). They may remain content with a low level of spiritual living, despite being a professing Christian. Perhaps no one has shown them how to have an abundant life in Christ. Your counseling objective should be to help them understand now.

There are some initial steps or attitudes that are important. Make sure the counselee makes a start by grappling with these issues. Use this paper as a study guide.

1. Do they thirst, or deeply desire a life of close fellowship with God? (Matthew 5:6). If shallow or mediocre lives are sufficient for these people, then the rivers of living water will never flow out of them (John 7:38).
2. Do they recognize that spiritual life and vitality come from fellowship with a Person? (I John 5:12). Daily awareness and yieldedness to that Person is necessary for Him to be revealed in believers (II Corinthians 4:10). You cannot have abundant life without closeness to the Lord Jesus.
3. Believers need to appropriate the strength and sufficiency of Christ into their inner beings if they are to live unto His glory (Ephesians 3:16). They must daily draw nourishment from the True Vine in order to bear fruit (John 15:4). It has been said, "We often stop at admiration when we need to go on to appropriation." Blessings and promises must be claimed and God's conditions met (John 15:5-7).
4. Believers should present daily their lives to God for His holy purposes, not their selfish purposes (Romans 6:13, 12:2). If we make ourselves available to God then we are consecrated to Him.
5. Finally, they need to walk (live and act) as those who belong to God (I Corinthians 6:19-20). When people walk in love (Ephesians 5:2), in truth (II John 4), by faith, not sight (II Corinthians 5:7), then they walk according to the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

Another important step in enjoying the abundant life is to saturate yourself with the truths of Romans Chapter 6. This is a good passage to assign for intensive study. It lays out the essential steps whereby believers “having been freed from sin (its power) and enslaved to God” may derive the “benefit, resulting in sanctification” (Romans 6:22). The normal Christian experience should be that “sin shall not be master over you” (Romans 6:14). “Having been freed from sin, you become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:18). How can such blessings come to any believer? The answer is to be understood by a few key words in Romans Chapter Six:

1. KNOW that the old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away (made powerless), that we should no longer be slaves to sin (Romans 6:6). This scripture teaches that when the Lord Jesus died for us on the cross, He did more than pay for the penalty of sin. He also broke the power of sin over those who have become united with Him (Romans 6:5). He defeated sin and death, so now His people are able to overcome the power of sin in daily living because we are no longer “slaves to sin.” As far as sin is concerned, the Lord Jesus is the “double cure”, saving us both from its penalty (death) and its power. Sadly, most believers seem to be totally ignorant of this fact. When a believer stops thinking that he sins because he “can’t help it” and realizes he is no longer weak and powerless when dealing with sin, then he can experience victory. However, he must know the basis of this victory. It is that Christ once and for all broke the power of sin over us. We may still be living in a body of weakness and will surely be tempted, but through our union with Him, we can have the benefit of His victory by claiming it daily.

2. “CONSIDER yourselves (or reckon yourselves) to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11). This enables us to enjoy daily victory over sin by an attitude of mind that brings Christ’s victory into our personal experience. The fact of being “freed from sin” must be translated into daily experience by daily dependence and reliance upon it. Scripture truths need to be brought to bear upon the way we live. We must first learn about the varied aspects of God’s provision for living a “saved life.” Then we must claim these truths for ourselves and put them into practice by faith. People are often more inclined to trust past experience and human observation to tell them what is true. We are on much safer ground by believing and obeying God’s Word. Knowing that He is One who cannot lie, we do not need to let sin reign in our mortal bodies that we should obey its lust (Romans 6:12). We should consider ourselves each day to be dead to sin and its power.
3. “PRESENT yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Romans 6:13). This is the next important step in having daily victory. This makes clear that there is a continuing daily necessity to present our bodies to God for His control and use. We must become available to God each day and not rely upon some past act of dedication. Romans 12:1 states, “Present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (or reasonable) service of worship.” The Lord owns us. We are not our own. We have been “bought with a price” (I Corinthians 6:20). That price is “the precious blood of Christ” (I Peter 1:18-19). Ownership must be translated daily

into practical, dedicated and totally available control of the Spirit of God.

4. “PUT TO DEATH (mortify) the deeds of the body by the Spirit” (Romans 8:13). The victory Christ has won, and on which we must depend, does not mean that we are free from temptation, spiritual warfare and actively dealing with sin by the enabling of the Spirit. We must deal with the “old self” and put on the “new self” (Ephesians 4:22-25). We must lay aside falsehood, unrighteous anger, wrath, malice, slander, abusive speech and lying (Colossians 3:8-14). We must “put on the new self” who is being renewed. This will include compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. When by the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body we manifest the life of God. This daily warfare is not intended to be some futile struggling of fleshly determination. Victory is to be enabled by walking “according to the Spirit”, not walking “according to the flesh” (Romans 8:4). In this warfare we need spiritual weapons such as prayer, faith, and the Word, taking up “the full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11-17). Spiritual victory comes out of daily warfare when we claim the promises and enablement of God.

One final element in living a truly redeemed and transformed life is the importance of the cross in the believer’s life. In stating terms for His followers, the Lord Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). Here is something that needs to be done if you want to become a follower of Jesus. Most of us might wish to avoid this or “explain it away” so that we do not need to face the issue. The cross was the

instrument of death, as anyone in the Roman world knew. It is something that needs to be taken up daily, according to this verse. The parallel expression is used just before, saying, “let him deny himself.” In verse 24, the Lord speaks of being willing to “lose his life for My sake.” The meaning of the believer’s cross then is to yield or commit your life, or soul, daily to death to its own wishes in order to do the will of God. To lose your life (soul, psyche or self) is to surrender it to the Lord in order that you might truly save it with a consequent eternal benefit. H.G. Bosch has written this: “To participate in the life of Christ, one must first be identified with Him in His death—continual dying of the self-life, the willful, sinful inclinations, must be a daily experience.” Such a person can truly take his stand with the Apostle Paul’s stirring declaration in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live. Yet it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me.” The picture presented in this verse is of one who allows Christ to live in him in a controlling way while he is yet here “in the flesh.” It is “no longer I” (the self life) controlling but Christ. We are not called to lose our personality or individuality or to be non-persons. We are valuable to God because He has chosen to count us as valuable in His sight. We are called to crucify daily “selfism” and its occupation with “me.” We surrender the assertion or defense of our will, our rights, our personal desires to the will of the Lord.

The Lord Jesus exemplified this kind of life during His own pilgrimage here. He said, “Not My will but Thine be done.” This surrender led Him to the cross for the sake of others, according to the will of God. There can be no following of

Jesus without taking the same path He took. Life, victory and the unleashing of power come by way of the cross, not by bypassing it. Fruitfulness depends upon it. “Truly, truly I say to you, unless a corn of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). This statement precedes a repetition of teaching about losing your life—in this world—in order to keep it eternally.

These major areas of Biblical teaching point the way to abundant, fruitful, and effective living. It is the way the Scripture prescribes, not the way of “popular Christianity.” A truly Christian counselor, therefore, should familiarize himself with these truths. Indeed, he or she must experience them to some degree in order to clearly teach these truths to others. To do otherwise is hypocritical. Few indeed are the counselors who lead those who come for help by these means. May the Lord help you be one of those few.

Questions: The Exchanged Life

1. What, in your experience or observation, has been the underlying spiritual cause of a troubled and unhappy life with some? What is needed?
2. Of the *five* initial steps or *attitudes* needed for a life of close fellowship with God, what in your experience has been the greatest need or needs?
3. Review the major principles of Romans 6 (plus 8:13) for a victorious or overcoming life. List any that you either do not understand or have had difficulty in applying (acting upon). What is the difficulty?
4. Why is taking up the cross daily important to victorious life? What does it mean to you?

Chapter 8: Recognizing Root Causes and Symptoms

The omniscience of the Lord, together with His wisdom, enables the Great Physician of our souls unfailingly to diagnose the condition of the human heart. From the heart “flow the issues (springs) of life” (Proverbs 4:22). God searches and tries our hearts, referring to our inner being. He detects what would be missed by the superficial observer. He knows that our hearts are deceitful and wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). God can never be deceived. Unfortunately, human counselors can be mistaken in their analysis of people. We need every bit of help the Holy Spirit can give us. We need keen discernment as we listen to people. We easily can see the outward signs or symptoms. We may miss the root causes of problems. One major cause is that something may be lacking in their relationship to the Lord.

There are certain major things to keep in mind as you begin a counseling session. By doing so, you will have a better chance of determining root causes.

Things to Do

A. You need to listen carefully in order to determine the facts and thus properly understand a situation. Probe to find out the less obvious factors.

B. Help them to understand not only where they are but where they are heading. Your questions can and should clarify any muddled thinking on their part. Are they seeing things correctly? Is the way they are handling the situation beneficial?

C. Determine if they are willing to make changes. Often counselees are seeking your help in changing someone else or to change their circumstances. This most likely is beyond your powers. The point is, are they willing to make changes that might help the situation.

Things Not to Do

A. Do not press advice on the unwilling or unteachable. This is a waste of your time. You can pray that the time will come when they will be willing, with God's help.

B. Do not assume their responsibilities or make their decisions.

C. Do not be a complaint department for charges or grievances involving third parties, or gossip or slander. (Proverbs 11:13, 25:8)

D. Be careful to pay attention to these persons:

1. Those who want help on their own terms. You should not be a party to this attempted manipulation.
2. Those who say they want to be accepted for themselves, but in reality are seeking acceptance of irresponsible behavior. God loves the sinner, but He certainly does not love their sins, which only harms them.
3. Those who want to talk endlessly about themselves or their problems, but who are not making a serious effort to act on counsel given. Talk without commitment to change should not be continued.
4. Those who make commitments but fail to act as agreed. This includes those who are consistently late for

appointments or who cancel. Flimsy excuses for these incidents should be unacceptable.

5. Those who repeatedly use the vocabulary of evasion.

Phrases such as: “I can’t”, “you don’t understand”, “that’s too difficult” or “that’s just the way I am” are an indication that they are not seriously willing to make an effort.

How You Can Help

A. Give verbal or practical assistance according to God’s Word. This includes encouragement, guidance, arrangements for help, correction of wrong thinking and suggestions for reading, listening and study.

B. Assistance, structure, follow up or accountability (under God’s direction) are vital to successful change. Without this, it is more difficult for those with problems to become overcomers.

C. When reminding them of God’s Word, let them read the verses in context and tell you what they mean.

D. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Both are necessary.

Your Goals as You Begin Counseling

A. Determine why they are coming to you. Are they seeking counsel, sympathy or just support for their own predetermined course of action? Have they consulted others? If so, what was the advice and did they follow it?

B. Establish personal rapport with the counselee. Win their trust by such things as warmth, sincerity, careful listening, compassion, patience and wise words. Use their names when speaking personally. Do not try to win them by compromising your principles or acting in some hypocritical manner.

Remember that your eyes, mouth, facial expressions and body language will be noted.

C. Be true to God's Word and your principles. The truth may hurt, however unintentional. You should not expect or seek to be popular with everyone. Are you pleasing God?

D. Verify your facts. Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "On the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed." Do not make a decision after listening to only one side (Proverbs 18:17). Do nothing in a spirit of partiality (1 Timothy 5:21). Be fair to everyone. Treat others as you would want to be treated.

E. Be as helpful and practical as possible in your counsel. This will help others make a major change in their attitude, perhaps even a complete spiritual transformation. Seek progress, however small. Do not continue to have mere conversational exchanges.

F. Remember that you cannot do for others what they can only do for themselves.

G. One more time...Do not accept their efforts to blame others, past or present, for their attitudes and actions.

Pray at the beginning of your time together. You need God's help to succeed and they need to see that. While listening, in order to keep track of things, you may want to make some notes. If so, reassure them that you are not trying to keep some kind of dossier or private file with confidential information in it. It's just to help you keep in mind all the relevant facts.

You can classify the information you are getting in several ways. Among them are these:

1. By Problem: There may be several of them, all in a tangle. You need to break down a big mess into its smaller components. If there is an immediate crisis on medical treatment, paying the rent or taking care of the children, see that some action is taken. Long-term conflicts or disagreements may be faced later. Define the major issues, especially where there is a real crisis situation. Try not to be superficial. Go beyond the obvious, such as, “We are not getting along in our marriage.” We want to know why and what needs to be done.
2. By Needs: This does not refer to the secularly defined need areas such as would be defined by Maslow. We are talking about Biblically defined needs beyond the obvious ones of food, water, clothes and a roof over your head. Biblical needs start with a right relationship with the Lord. There needs to be a proper understanding of the character of God. When this is distorted in the counselee’s mind, then they cannot get things properly straightened out. A good question is, “Tell me what you think God is like.” The answer may stun you. Wrong concepts about God distort people’s thinking. Start their thinking and yours with God’s perspective on true needs, not man’s wants. Nothing in the Bible suggests that we must aim for Maslow’s “self-actualization,” another word for the Hindu idea of “self-realization.”
3. By Applicable Scripture: Consider the Biblical principles that apply. Select the verses which apply in the clearest way. Ask yourself questions as you listen. Do they need to forgive someone? Make something right? Admit wrong?

Forget the things that are past? Accept what cannot be changed?

There are other questions that you might consider as you listen.

1. Are they dealing with “the way it is” (reality) or the “way they would like it to be (wishful thinking)?
2. Does the way they speak, act and live correspond with what they say they want to be? Is there hypocrisy to some degree or is there sincerity?
3. Is there a lot of talk about their “feelings” without dealing with responsibilities or duties? Some people simply cannot talk without saying “I feel” several times in two or three minutes.
4. Is there “excuse-making” or “blame-shifting” as a major part of their personal account?
5. What motivational appeal can you make to bring about needed action? Is the good of their children enough to keep them working on a difficult marriage? Do they want to please the Lord, even if it is costly? Unless you find a strong motivational key in certain difficult situations, you may not succeed.

After this you can decide what are the real root causes, distinguishing them from the symptoms. Now you can discuss what may be needed as a radical (root) measure to correct the problem, rather than trying to apply what is called a “band aid” (superficial) measure. Now you can see if there is a willingness to bear the necessary personal cost in order to be an overcomer. Now you can cry out to God for His supernatural

intervention—for the convicting work of the Spirit—in order to see lives changed for His glory.

Questions: Recognizing Root Causes and Symptoms

1. Listed in the lesson are three things to do and four things *not to do*. The last one has four warnings about people. List the things which are, or might be, a difficulty for you. Where have you *erred* in the past? Is there a reason?
2. *Seven* goals in counseling are listed. Which ones have you omitted to keep in mind or you might find difficult to pursue?
3. How have you tended to *classify* information and determine problems in trying to help people? Have you been missing anything in your approach and why?
4. There are five suggested questions that you might consider when dealing with counselees. Which of these has been either a new thought or neglected consideration in dealing with people?

Chapter 9: Encouraging Change Through Counseling

If you were willing to accomplish for others what they should do for themselves, the Lord probably would not allow it. It is one aspect of your limitations. What is their responsibility, must remain their responsibility. Many passages in Scripture make this clear.

1. You cannot be saved except by your own faith (John 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-9, I Peter 1:9). Even parents cannot believe in a substitutionary way to secure their children's salvation.
2. You cannot live in a way that pleases God without living by your own faith, not someone else's faith (Hebrews 11:1). You cannot pray effectively, witness effectively, or live effectively without faith. Four times the statement is made in Scripture, "The just shall live by faith", that is, their own faith.
3. You will be held responsible for your own life choices, words and actions. "Each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). Whether it is for sins at the Judgment of the Great Throne (Revelation 20:12) or for life and service at the Judgment Seat of Christ (II Corinthians 5:10), you alone will give account to God. God will not allow you to evade the responsibility for your own life.

How then can you help someone else? Primarily by helping them change the way they think about things. Thoughts precede actions. That is why the Lord considers lust in the heart as sinful as the act of adultery (Matthew 5:28); or inner anger sinful since it might lead to hatred and violence. People

consider matters in their mind before taking either a helpful or an irresponsible action. Lingering thoughts of resentment, bitterness, jealousy and unforgiveness are like poison to the soul. In the matter of personal holiness, it is in the thought life that we often offend God, precipitate evil and damage our own consciences. Unless undesirable thoughts are exposed in counseling, or by confession, you will not be able to deal with root causes of problems. Sin begins in the heart and mind. This is where changes begin.

If you do not discern the errors or harm in someone's thinking, you will not be able successfully to deal with their problems. That is why you must probe, thoughtfully and tactfully, the thinking pattern which lies behind most human behavior. By perceiving this, then considering the appropriate Scriptures, you will be able to take the next step. That is to help them see how these thoughts or inner attitudes are hurting them. It is not enough that you see it. They need to see it quite clearly. How can you do this?

1. Establish with them, by patient questions and discussion, exactly how they are thinking in the areas that bear upon their present behavior. We do not need to explore their lives all the way back to the womb, as some secular psychologists or psychiatrists are accustomed to doing. Remember that you want to deal with the here and now, not the past which cannot be changed. An unforgiving spirit is a good example. We need to deal with that now.
2. Help them see from Scripture, if possible, what the Lord has to say on a subject which has to do with their thoughts. This may, at times, take extended discussion. It should not be without limits. People sometimes have a

difficulty in seeing that their thinking is harmful, even if it seems humanly justified. Hatred is an example. Having suffered at the hands of others, it is certainly understandable to have bad feeling toward someone. It is amazing that Jesus could pray for those who tortured, mocked and spat upon Him. Of course, we may say, "But He was the Lord." Yes, and we are called to imitate Him (I John 2:6).

3. We ought not to give the impression that we are treating lightly the pain and suffering of those to whom we are listening. We certainly can agree that terrible experiences like abuse, molestation and abandonment would cause bad feelings in anyone. We should not attempt to justify wrongdoers but rather prefer to leave them to God's justice. Vengeance belongs to Him (Romans 12:19). However, if we do not resolutely put behind us what is past, beyond anything we can change now, we will continue to suffer inwardly. Part of our problem is the need to forgive others in our hearts and commit them to God (Luke 11:4, Ephesians 4:32). Forgiving must start with the will, not the emotions. How otherwise could we ever love our enemies and persecutors? (Matthew 5:44)

4. Consider if their present way of thinking is of any real help.

These questions may help others change their way of thinking:

PRACTICAL... How are things working?

-If you continue just as you are, what will happen?

-If you continue handling relationships just as you do now, will they get better?

-If you continue your same habits, what will happen?

-If you hope things will change, how will you change to help bring this about?

SPIRITUAL... How does the way you live now reflect your professed relationship with the Lord?

-What is your present relationship to the Lord?

-Are your actions, ethics, and morals consistent with this?

-What must be changed to bring these into some internal consistency?

FUTURE EVALUATION... What changes are needed?

-How can you change the way you are handling things?

-What are the potential dangers if things remain as now?

-What would be the most helpful thing you can do now, if you take the long-term view?

Your goal is to help others change their viewpoint, when that is necessary. We mean by viewpoint the position they take in evaluating their situation. This involves their general perspective, which may have been warped by extended periods of thinking “in a rut”—endless repetition or reflection, called “going around in circles.” The result is to finish each cycle of inefficient thought at a dead end. Perspective means the appearance of things to our minds, whether or not it is accurate. Sometimes this has degenerated into what is called “mental set”. Such thinking has acquired a fixity that says something is true or unresolvable even if that is not the case. Without this being altered, there will be no progress. Defects in thinking produce defects in conduct.

Often people are completely unaware of this hindrance to fresh, creative or Scripturally inspired thinking. Stubbornness and pride are also factors. Distortions of perspective may be supported by any of these tendencies:

1. “Gun Barrel” or “Tunnel Vision”—This assumes that all there is to a problem is what we see through one narrow end. Surely there may be more than this!
2. Short-Term Vision—Instant gratification or immediate relief of some distress becomes the major principle of action. What happens long-term?
3. One-Way Vision—Seeing only what is good for me as all that matters. Do others matter?
4. Biased Vision—You can see one side of a matter, that which you favor. What about fuller consideration, which includes the other side?
5. Hurry-Up Vision—Impulsive decisions, lacking careful evaluation, often ignore various consequences. Can the decision wait a while?

It may help you to think in terms of what has been called the five stages involved in problem solving. The purpose of reviewing these stages is to see that there is a long road between recognizing a problem and making necessary changes as a part of your life. Here indeed you need the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

1. Recognition—Do they really understand the basic problem or condition? Is it clear in their mind about what you are discussing?

2. Acknowledgement—Do they accept that they really have a problem in this area, that it is lying squarely at their doorstep?
3. Consideration of Consequences—Make sure they are clear about the possible consequences if they do not make a change; also the difficulties that may be involved in making a needed decision. If it was all easy, it probably would have been done by now.
4. Choosing to Change—Are they willing to go beyond the talk stage and make the necessary moves? When? Will they be accountable to someone that this really happens?
5. Integration of the Change—This means that it must be worked into a regular practice, where required. There can be no such idea as “I will try it out once” or for a few days, if you wish to succeed. Will they persevere or give it up after a brief effort? We are talking about being convinced to the point of committed perseverance.

It is always a sensitive matter to deal with someone who has been genuinely wronged, rejected or made to feel worthless. Still, negative feelings need to be overcome. We have all been wronged at some time in our lives. The Lord Jesus was terribly wronged in His earthly life. We must put these wrongs in this perspective as we discuss the matter. Are they willing to commit those who have wronged them to the Lord and forgive them in their hearts? It will be vital to their own healing. Have them read Matthew 18:21-35 and identify themselves in the story. Remember that the Master called the unforgiving person “wicked.”

Does it really matter so much when other people scorn or reject us, if we realize that the Lord Jesus, who was Himself “despised and rejected,” can accept us? Think of yourself as one of God’s dear children, accepted fully “in Christ,” God’s beloved One (Ephesians 1:3-9). What else really matters if this is true? It is because we love God’s dearly beloved Son that He loves and accepts us completely. Our personal achievements, appearance and intelligence, even our past, are irrelevant to this acceptance. It is important to forsake self-centered thinking in favor of Christ-centered thinking in order to have real peace and joy. Try giving yourself to others out of love for Christ and see if there is not an indirect benefit to you.

If you, as counselor, establish the right to be heard by the counselee through patience, kindness and careful listening, your counsel will be more closely heeded. If you appear to be condemnatory and harsh, this will be most unlikely, if not impossible. You can give very tough, but needed, counsel if the counselee feels that you really care about him or her as a person, not as a project. Difficult and painful things can be faced, although with tears. If you speak at the right time and in the right way, as one who cares, then you will make progress. Pray that the Lord will give a listening ear and a yielded will to the counselee. If the Wonderful Counselor is working through you, then be sure that you, like Him, will “do all things well.” The key is that you are an open channel to the Lord, and the other person is a yielded vessel for His supernatural work.

A final reminder: The most important change that we need to encourage in others, and ourselves, is to improve our relationship or fellowship with the Lord. Is the life of Jesus being manifested in our “mortal bodies?”

Questions: Encouraging Change Through Counseling

1. In the past, *how* have you attempted to help people change in their behavior in order to help them? How well did these methods succeed?
2. In trying to help people change their way of thinking, what suggestions seemed most helpful to you? Why?
3. In the *five stages* of problem solving which ones have you tended to omit in trying to help others? Why do you think you omitted them?
4. What do you need to remember to do in order to *win the right to be heard* by those you would like to help? What errors do you detect in your past efforts in this area?

Chapter 10: The Importance of Repentance

Everything we seek to do successfully in Biblical counseling requires the enabling power of God. The Lord Jesus said, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Without the power of the Spirit, how could we expect to see lives transformed and problems solved? It is evident from Scripture that the enablement of God is available only on a conditional basis. The major condition is yieldedness and obedience to His will. One critical issue in this area is repentance where it is needed. We are referring to repentance that is genuine, not shallow or incomplete.

What is repentance? There is some dispute on the meaning and widespread misunderstanding among ordinary believers. We ought to be clear on what we are talking about in this paper. In Scripture, the word means “change of mind.” Unger’s Bible Dictionary defines repentance as “a fundamental and thorough change in the hearts of men, from sin and towards God.” This thought is expressed by the prophet in Isaiah 55:7: “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord.” John the Baptist, the great preacher of repentance, affirmed the same idea. He demanded that they give evidence of the desire to fully change their lives (Matthew 3:8). The same thought is in Jeremiah 18:11, 35:15. The Lord Jesus said in connection with salvation, “Unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:3, 5). The warning was repeated many times in Acts 3:19, 11:18, 17:30, 20:21, as well as in the Pentecostal message of Acts 2:38. All true repentance will not only have a “change of mind” but such a change as

brings about a transformation of behavior from bad to good. Unger writes, "Repentance contains as essential elements: (1) a genuine sorrow towards God on account of sin (II Corinthians 7:9-10, Matthew 5:3-4, Psalm 51); (2) an inner repugnance to sin necessarily followed by actual forsaking of it (Matthew 3:8, Acts 26:20, Hebrews 6:1); (3) humble self-surrender to the will and service of God (Acts 9:6).

Where is repentance most likely needed among counselees that we may see? It not only applies in what we think of as a major area, like immortality, but it may extend to attitudes of the heart. This includes unbelief, resentment, self-pity, complaining, pride and a lack of love. The response of repentance needs to be discussed, Bible in hand. It needs to be understood, acknowledged and acted upon. Incomplete repentance is that which will not be sustained. If repentance is needed, you will not be able to succeed until the counselee takes the appropriate action. This is true with respect to salvation, broken fellowship, or relationship to others. Where we have not done right towards others, we ought to repent and make things right. This may include restitution or restoring to others what they have lost due to any actions on the part of the offender. It may include necessary apologies and asking forgiveness. These must be sincere. Statements such as, "If I did anything wrong..." or "If I offended you, I'm sorry," do not reflect true repentance.

Let's talk about common areas where repentance is clearly indicated.

Immorality

If you are speaking to an unsaved person or one who professes to be a Christian yet practices fornication, adultery or other sex offenses, you ought to show them I Corinthians 6:9-10, Ephesians 5:3-6, Galatians 5:19-21, I John 2:4, 3:4-10. Carefully note that we are not talking about single instance sins (David is often mentioned by counselees). We are talking about practicing lawless sin, knowingly, repeatedly, rather than practicing righteousness. A true believer who sins in this critical area, will experience what David experienced in Psalm 51 and 32, where he felt terrible. After Peter denied the Lord, he felt miserable and certainly did not continue in this. Even if there is only a single violation, there still needs to be repentance. Do not assume a stance of condemnation, but rather of gentleness. God is the Judge and God is the one who requires repentance. Bear in mind that merely ceasing from this particular sin, then asking forgiveness, does not mean there are no consequences. David was forgiven but did not escape consequences (II Samuel 12:7-14). A sinning believer requires divine discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11). That person may also require church discipline (I Corinthians 5) in varying degrees, from private to public.

Where repentance may require, as it often does, ongoing accountability and counseling, make sure that it happens. This could be through appropriate leaders in the church or your own counseling. In adultery cases, many things need to be examined. Is there a clear break between the two offenders? Is further contact ended or now made impossible? Has there been counseling of both parties in a marriage which has been damaged by the misconduct of one of them? The injured or betrayed person may need help with forgiveness or

cooperation in removing obstacles. The offender may need help in overhauling his or her thinking patterns. This may involve both the sexual area and or other considerations. What was the background, in earlier behavior or in thought life, that led to the adulterous offense?

In fornication cases involving singles, the older remedy always required them to get married, whether or not there was a reasonable basis of success. Often, the attraction was purely physical which is, by itself, a poor basis for a lasting marriage. The issue of salvation needs to be examined. The matter of healthy thought life, or even what are called in this country “dating customs,” needs to be aligned with Biblical principles about personal relationships. Any unhealthy situation should be noted and cleaned up. The way of forgiveness needs to be explained and then claimed on a proper Biblical basis. There are many other issues but, this will serve to introduce the subject.

Drugs and Alcohol Abuse

This type of counseling case will require special attention to ensure that the problem is solved and recurrence is avoided. You will need to know what drugs are involved and how long it's been going on. Is there truly a life-dominating sin? Is there a willingness to make a clean and complete break now? If so, they will surely need ongoing counsel and accountability. The counselee will most likely need to attend a Bible-based support group of believers who have had some experience with deliverance. Secular groups may be helpful but typically are not Christ-centered. We want to anchor anything that we do firmly to the Lord Jesus and His Word. There is great danger of relapse in this area of misconduct. It will take great

discernment to see genuine sincerity and firm commitment to change through the power of God. It must be admitted that there were no special support groups for drunkards recorded in the New Testament church. They were to replace drunkenness with being filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Believers came together—not on the basis of their specific former sins, but on the basis of their fellowship in Christ.

Conflicts and Strife

Romans 12:18 puts the issue plainly. “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Sometimes it does not seem possible, but if it is, we ought to try for Christ’s sake, as well as our own good, to refrain from arguments and things that produce conflict. Much of it stems from stubbornness and some perceived need always to be in the right, whatever the cost. One famous proverb among us is that a certain person “always has to have the last word.” We really need to repent of this tendency, to see the sinfulness of motive that often lies beneath contentions. “All the ways of a man are right in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives” (Proverbs 16:2). “By pride cometh contention” (Proverbs 13:10). “Leave off contention” (Proverbs 17:14). “Contentious people kindle strife” (Proverbs 26:21).

Conflicts need to be settled by all the parties, acknowledging that no matter how it all started, they need to stop. We need to repent for any part we had in continuing arguments and thus perpetuating strife. Let the other person have whatever personal satisfaction there may be in feeling “right,” even at your expense. Your goal should be to be right in the sight of God, seeking peace wherever possible. This includes marital strife, endless arguments between children, or between

parents and children. It certainly includes contentions in the local church (and with it, factionalism), disputes at school, at work, or in the neighborhood. The solving of this problem must start with a deep-seated repentance on the part of any who have contributed. Beyond this, we need to “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalm 34:14). “Blessed are the peacemakers,” the Lord taught.

Pride

Repentance is surely needed in this area, considering that pride heads the list of the seven things that the Lord hates (Proverbs 6:16-17). It is called “an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 16:5). It was this sin that was in the heart of Lucifer, leading to his judgment at the hands of the Lord (Isaiah 14:13-15). It is the sin that leads man to give glory to himself and not to the Lord. It is at the root of most conflicts.

It seems to be hard for many to recognize this insidious inner corruption. Despite the many Biblical exhortations to humility or meekness, people generally are not humble. The disciples did not seem to realize the great lesson Jesus was teaching when He washed their feet (John 13). They were indifferent to the need for this obvious and usual service. It was not they but He who took the first step. You will not likely accuse another person of pride and find him readily acknowledging that this is true. Only by questioning with patience a person open to the Spirit’s work will this be confessed. Then repentance can follow. It absolutely breaks fellowship with God to continue in this sin. It may lie hidden as merely self-confidence or an independent spirit, but it is still pride that is at the root. This needs to be uprooted.

Sinful Attitudes Toward God

It is bad to have a sinful attitude towards others; it is worse to have it towards God, our Creator and Lord. It is bad because of who He is and who we are. He is the Potter and we are the clay (Jeremiah 18:1-6). He has a perfect right to deal with us in any way He sees fit, just as the Potter does with any clay. We have been bought with a price. We are not our own (I Corinthians 6:20, 7:23). We need to repent whenever we forget this.

Perhaps the worst of all attitudes is hatred towards God, or even its beginning emotion, resentment towards God. Much of this is not expressed openly in obvious terms. It must therefore be brought out by frank questions like, "Do you have resentment in your heart towards the Lord?" People turn against the Lord out of dissatisfaction or grief concerning the way life has turned out or because of some tragedy that has occurred. They charge God of wrongdoing, blaming Him for allowing certain things to have happened. The cause, however, may be the outworking of sin in their life, or, as seen in Job chapters 1 and 2, may be the instigation of the Devil. The cause may be utterly beyond our ability to understand or trace. Those without even the slightest claim of merit in their walk with God become angry with Him because they do not like some development or consequence of their own choices. It is possible for even a believer to imagine that because they "have always tried to do right," God is obligated to them. He is the God of grace or undeserved favor towards sinful men and women. You can search the records of Heaven and not find the slightest indication of any debt by God to man. Rather, it is true that "it is of the Lord's mercy that we are not consumed."

What shall we say about the neglect of God? People who complain the most are the very ones who often have lived in a way that ignored the claims of God upon their lives. They professed to believe in Him, to acknowledge Him as their Creator, indeed the Supreme Being. Yet they live in a way that is totally independent of His will. They do not consider that the very purpose for which they were created was to give God pleasure. Christ died for us that “they which live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (II Corinthians 5:15). They do not seek His will. Often they do not pray unless they want something or have fallen into some difficulties. They do not give of the first fruits from their earnings to the Lord (Proverbs 3:9). They do not devote their time to any significant degree to His interests. They live for self supremely. Is this not something for which men should repent?

Wrong Priorities

This is closely allied with the above consideration. Jesus said, “Seek you first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). When people, especially believers, do not they are being disobedient, and disobedience requires repentance. Is God first in our time, our material possessions, our service, our love and in our use of whatever He has graciously given us? Then we need to repent and change our ways if we expect His blessing. We need His enabling power to overcome problems and live triumphantly.

Never overlook the need for this corrective action in counseling. If God is necessary to the overcoming life, we need to recognize this principle condition of His work.

Questions: The Importance of Repentance

1. In what way has your understanding of true repentance been affected by this lesson? How would you be able to recognize shallow, incomplete or insincere repentance?
2. How would you go about dealing with a person who needed to repent, either saved or unsaved? How have you failed or succeeded in the past in this matter?
3. Six major areas of repentance are reviewed in this lesson. List each one and say how you would deal with a person in which you either *know* for sure or *sensed* this problem.

Chapter II: Ministering to the Unhappily Married

Marital breakdowns and broken families are one of the most tragic developments in modern society. This trend has made its way into the church. Whereas in the past decades the church was a bulwark against divorce and family disintegration, it has now fallen prey to societal pressures. The result has been to multiply the number of cases in which marital discord has brought professed believers into counseling. Even worse, some marriages break down and the parties simply leave the church without seeking help.

God invented marriage, not man, instituting it with our first parents as recorded in the first chapters of Genesis. It was for man's happiness and good. God plainly set down the way of successful function in His Word. The problem is that man stopped listening to God and went his own way. The Lord said that he hated divorce (Matthew 2:16) and seriously limited the grounds on which it could be pursued (Matthew 5:32, 19:5). He forbade adultery (Matthew 5:27) and warned of its consequences. He told men to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). He told wives to be subject to their husbands (Ephesians 5:24, I Peter 3:1). In these and other matters, God was ignored and many people paid a terrible price.

When couples come to us and seek counsel, we must find ways to help them heal broken relationships, friction and misunderstanding. They do not need our condemnation. They need our help and wise understanding. The general human causes of these troubles are varied. Often there are unrealistic

expectations and demands by one or both parties, putting a great burden on their relationship. There may be a lack of knowledge of what to do. Much of what God's Word teaches, and common sense tells us, is undermined by ungodly and worldly influences. This results in unclear knowledge of how we should function, man and woman, in our differing roles. There is often a lack of sensitivity to the other person. There may be less than ideal pairings of people at the beginning of the marriage. There may be unfaithfulness and broken vows. The major areas of conflict are in the areas of (1) communication or arguments, (2) debt and handling of finances, (3) sexual difficulties or maladjustments, (4) differences over how to deal with children, (5) misunderstandings and resentment over close relatives, sometimes called in-laws, (6) differing conceptions over their proper roles in the marriage.

There are some important questions to ask at the outset of counseling:

1. Do they truly want to heal their marriage and make it work?
2. If not, what is the reason?
3. Is infidelity (cheating) suspected by either party?
4. Is there interference by the job or work demands?
5. What are the major areas of conflict (see above)?
6. Was their marriage ever right, even from the beginning? If so, when did it start going wrong? What was the "fracture point" in their relationship, when it started to break down? What happened at that time?

One assignment that has been helpful to the author is to ask each of the parties, before they return again (as they ought), to list three major areas in which each one would like the other to change. Then, have them write down those areas in which they think their partner would like them to change. Tell them not to confer about their answers, but simply to bring them back to their next counseling session so that you may study and compare them. In most cases, the other party will agree that the assessment is correct. In other words, they knew what the other person wanted changed, but yet they did not do it. Ask why. Make these suggestions into a set of goals on which each person agrees to work in a conscientious manner, if they truly want to make their marriage better. See how well they do. Their goal should be to please God, if believers; not just to please one another. Here are some specific suggestions in each of the major conflict areas:

Communication or Arguments

What are the problems in this area? One way to find out is to give each of them a questionnaire which covers areas such as these:

- What is your definition of communication?
- What is most frequently missing when you communicate with your partner?
- What is your definition of listening to your partner?
- What negative things or barriers frequently occur in your communication with your partner?

Give each partner a list of the following 12 guidelines for improving communication. Then ask them to check what

seems to apply to their own practices. How could those be changed? When do they feel the least desire to communicate? When do they feel most like communicating?

1. Listen quietly, without reaction (Proverbs 11:12).
2. Consider the possibility that you may be wrong (Proverbs 12:15).
3. Restrain yourself from “blowing up” during a discussion (Proverbs 12:16).
4. Speak kindly, not with a cutting tongue (Proverbs 12:18).
5. Be more interested in understanding the other person than in “having my say” (Proverbs 18:2).
6. Hear a matter fully before giving an opinion (Proverbs 18:13).
7. Avoid talking impulsively without careful consideration (Proverbs 29:20).
8. Remember how hard it is to put up with an argumentative person (Proverbs 21:19).
9. Remember the wisdom of such attitudes as humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance in speech (Ephesians 4:2).
10. Ask yourself if what you are saying is truly edifying (uplifting) to the other person (Ephesians 4:29).
11. Remember the reason why we should be loving and forgiving to others (Ephesians 4:32).
12. Quickly clear up any angry episode within the same day (Ephesians 4:26).

It is important to learn both the necessity and means of reducing arguments, especially of the angry kind. The couple must dedicate themselves to have a home environment of patient communication, harmony, restraint and forbearance, for their sake and that of any children. The alternative is frequent, angry arguments, sharp words and lingering disputes. This atmosphere is poisonous. Pride, including self-centeredness, is one cause (Proverbs 13:10). If we are determined to have our own way and be proven right in every matter, no matter what the cost, then we are insuring turmoil and resentment. The partner may be difficult, but it does not reduce the need to deal with this person effectively. One must have the goal of a harmonious home and be willing to pay the price by swallowing our own words and pride (Romans 12:18). Scriptures such as Galatians 5:20, I Corinthians 3:3, Ephesians 4:31, Colossians 3:8, James 1:20, and Proverbs 17:14 make the end of contention a mandate from God. Either an argumentative wife (Proverbs 19:13, 21:19, 27:15) or an argumentative husband (Proverbs 26:21) is an undesirable influence.

Ask the question, after helping them study these verses, what each of them needs to do to reduce the frequency and negative impact of such exchanges. Ask them, "What mutually satisfactory agreements must be reached, even as a compromise, in order to put these issues aside and prevent continuous repetition?" Do not have any serious discussions between the partners until they have calmed down, gotten all the facts straight and sought the Lord's mind prayerfully. Forsake such practices as goading (needling) and nagging to get your own way. As a counselor, you might have to serve as

arbitrator in these discussions over how to reduce these disputes.

Debts, Finances

This area is a frequent source of marital tension. There is much that can be done to reduce the occasion for arguments on the subject. The husband ought to support his family or “provide for his own” (I Timothy 5:8). When he is not working, not being diligent and depending on his wife for income, then you have the ground for trouble. The couple absolutely must heed the Bible’s injunctions about debt. This means to stay out of it. Much tension comes from piling up bills and abuse of credit cards, whether by one party or both. “Owe no man anything” (Romans 13:8). This need not refer to the usual and regular matters of rent, utility bills and matters requiring records. It does refer to the idea of “buy now, pay later,” a philosophy born out of the craving for instant gratification, or “more.” “The borrower is servant (slave) to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7). How true! You cannot help others materially or even help yourself if you are always in debt. What’s more, you won’t be able to give as you ought to God. Those in debt usually do not obey the Lord in the matter mentioned in Proverbs 3:9. “Honor the Lord from your wealth (income, material possessions) and from the first of all your produce.” When you do this, then you reap the promised blessing. “So your barns will be filled with plenty” (Proverbs 3:10). People do not realize that they are robbing God when they do not give properly to Him (Malachi 3:8-10). Then, He says, “You are cursed with a curse.” I Corinthians 16:1 is explicit: “On the first day of every week (regularly), let each one of you put aside (systematically) as God has prospered him (proportionately).”

Finally, teach them how to make up a budget and live within their means, considering God first, necessities afterwards, and then what is left can be considered for optional purchases and savings.

Sexual Differences

This subject is not everything in a marriage, but it is certainly an important thing. Consider first that the Lord made us sexual beings with sexual needs, desires and differing response patterns. The latter point is very significant. One source of misunderstanding is failing to realize that the responses of wives and husbands are significantly different, or at least based on differing patterns. It is the duty of both partners to understand both the biological and personality distinctions of the other and act accordingly. Sensitivity and proper communication on this subject can eliminate most difficulties.

The Scriptural standards are simple and to the point:

1. Meet the sexual needs of your partner. Your body's rights belong to the other person, not you (I Corinthians 7:3-4). Sex is not to be used as a negotiating device.
2. Sexual relations within marriage are righteous in God's sight, not something that is dirty or barely tolerated (Hebrews 13:4). Someone has said, "I will not be ashamed to discuss at the proper time and place what God was not ashamed to create."
3. Seek to understand and adapt with one another your sexual relationship in a mutually cooperative way. You are different biologically, emotionally, mentally and experientially (I Peter 3:7).

A short reminder list of differences might be helpful to some:

1. Men are usually quick in sexual response, often too quick. Women require a longer period of arousal. Remember that. Be thoughtful.
2. Men are stimulated visually while women respond to emotional or environmental factors (nervousness, noise, light, scent, tenderness).
3. Men can be aroused sexually without any personal feelings towards a woman. This is abnormal and incomprehensible to a woman. That's a major danger for men.
4. Men are quickly satisfied sexually. The opposite is true for women. Go slow and consider your duty to see that your partner is satisfied.
5. Men are less complicated, more highly focused in areas of sexual response. Women are sensitive in more areas.
6. Finally, never try to have sex with a woman when she is upset or hurt about something.

Differences About Dealing with Children

This often settles down to a difference of opinion about what is “too strict” and what is “too permissive.” The point is that discipline is commanded by God in the Word. That is how He deals with us and is a proof of His love (Hebrews 12:5-10). To spare needed correction, even corporal punishment where appropriate, is to show hatred towards your children, meaning that you do not love them enough to do it (Proverbs 13:24). There is much about the rod or punishment in such verses as Proverbs 22:14, 23:13-14. Clearly the Bible teaches corporal (bodily) punishment. However, there is no excuse for child

abuse, brutality or leaving serious marks or injuries on their bodies. In some areas, this can be the occasion for your being arrested and charged with a criminal act, even without serious abuse.

The important thing in disciplining children is to make sure they are made to clearly understand, and see, that your motive is a loving concern for their good, not because you are angry. In fact, never discipline a child while you are angry. Another factor is consistency. It is confusing to them to allow something at one time and let them get away with something which is wrong, then to discipline them for the same thing at another time. Of course, they are going to test you, some more than others. This includes your patience. But you must be consistent. Be sure that both father and mother stand together and work together on the disciplinary pattern on which they have agreed. An excellent policy on which you are divided and about which you argue before the children is not as effective as a less effective policy that is maintained consistently. Children will divide you about this and seek to maneuver one parent against the other. Remember that character development and good habits are what you are seeking for their good. Think in terms of long-term character needs before short-term “peace” needs. Never use appeasement as a tactic. In the long run, it will fail. Do not use ethnic or family background practices as an excuse for not doing what God says.

Relatives, In-Laws

When you marry someone, in a sense you also marry into their family. This means that you cannot expect people totally to put out of their lives their mothers, fathers and other dear ones.

There are some obligations. “Honor your father and mother” (Ephesians 6:2) repeats one of the Ten Commandments in the New Testament. You must determine what this means in practice. At the same time, there is also the “leave and cleave” principle (Genesis 2:24). This means that when you become “one flesh” with another, you must leave your father and mother’s home and establish a new home relationship. In this connection it is well to remember that, in general, it is not good to live with your in-laws under the same roof. That can mean problems. Also, it is not good to be dependent on your in-laws for support, jobs and services. Stand on your own feet. One particular blight on marriages is interference, or the appearance of it, in your affairs by the in-laws, however well meaning. This is particularly true in the matter of critical remarks. Watch out! Be careful not to make comparisons. An example would be, “My mother was such a wonderful cook or housekeeper. Why can’t you be like her?” Or “mother always did this,” or “father always did that,” “why don’t you?” That is explosive.

Differing Conceptions of Your Roles and Responsibilities

In the modern western world, there is a great deal of opinion about marital roles which is utterly against what Scripture teaches. If you take your cues from this source, then you will not obey the Word. The world favors “egalitarian” marriage, meaning that both wife and husband equally lead the home. They “submit to each other.” This line of thinking attacks what is called the “hierarchical” or “patriarchal” teaching of Scripture as outmoded and purely cultural. Of course, the Bible teaches what the world defies. Read Ephesians 5:21-33 and see that this is so. It is important to stress that fulfilling

the role that God has marked out for us, as men and women or wives and husbands, has nothing to do with inferiority. We are equal in Christ (Galatians 3:28). We are “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7). We are “one flesh,” not a couple of individualists. But in roles, woman was made to be a “helper” to her husband (Genesis 2:18), not the other way around. The husband’s assigned role of leadership does not justify tyranny, harshness or an insensitive domination. If husbands were consistent, reliable leaders, providers, decision-makers and the like, wives would be delighted. When husbands default in these areas, they are a disappointment. Men are not to feel sorry because they can’t have babies. That’s not their job. Women should not fret because they can’t do everything a man should do. We are made different physically, psychologically, emotionally and in roles. Stick to the Maker’s Manufacturer’s Manual, The Bible.

Love

This leaves us to ask the great question in marriage, “Do we love one another?” This should begin with another question, “Do we understand the meaning of love?” Often men and women have no idea of the meaning of real love at the time they are attracted for marriage. They have adopted the idea that love is simply an emotion. Much of it is rooted in the physical side. It’s something that you feel, they think. They know nothing of sacrificial love (agape), or constructive love, having in view the good of the other person. Have them put down their answer to a few significant questions. Have them do it separately. Then you can confer with them.

1. What do you mean when you say, “I love my husband” or “I love my wife?”

2. How is this love different from what you experienced before you married, or at the time you married?
3. In practical, meaningful ways, how do you demonstrate love to your partner?
4. How can husbands love their wives (Ephesians 5:25, 33)?
How can wives respect their husbands (Ephesians 5:33)?
How is this taking place in your marriage?
5. Do you expect your husband or your wife to fulfill all your needs, as you define them? What needs can they not fulfill?

Time Together

There should be a place for social and recreational time for husbands and wives. This might be neglected. When and how are they including this in their schedules? Is it all a matter of going to events, taking trips or spending money? Do they have good regular conversation together? (Probably not). Do they develop new friends and contacts that are wholesome? (Probably not). It is important for the husband to set aside time to listen to his wife and to spend time and listen to his children; also to have family outings such as picnics, group activities with other believers. What hinders an atmosphere of joy and peace in the home? Let's draw up a mutual plan to correct deficiencies in these areas, after the crisis has abated somewhat. In fact, let's develop a total plan, in priority order, to which they will commit themselves.

Questions: Ministering to the Unhappily Married

1. If an unhappily married couple (or even one of the partners) came to you for help, how would you begin in

asking questions or seeking to know what were the underlying problems?

2. In the section on communication and arguments, what did you learn that was helpful and usable in trying to assist someone? What have you found to be major hindrances to good communication and harmony?
3. Why are sexual maladjustments and complaints so important in restoring marital harmony? What have you discovered to be the most important problems in this area?
4. Of the other major areas discussed (finances, dealing with children, understanding of roles, expressing love, and time together), what have you found to recur most often? How have you approached these problems, either effectively or ineffectively? What have you learned?

Chapter 12: Premarital Counseling

One of the major areas of counseling needs is with married couples. One of the best ways to lessen this load, as well as deal with singles interested in marriage is by a strong premarital teaching program in the church. Some assemblies offer no special help at all. Couples come for marriage and arrangements are made for the service with little else offered. Other assemblies offer a very limited counseling assistance. What is given may be good but it is not sufficiently comprehensive.

The goals of premarital counseling should consider these questions:

1. Do the singles know each other well enough and long enough to realistically live with them permanently? In many cases, there are some unrealistic expectations and much misjudgment about the intended partners. The fact that both should be believers is not enough. How deep is their commitment to Christ and their maturity level?

Do their ambitions agree, their purpose for life, as well as for the marriage itself? Do they appear to be suited to one another? Has there been an attraction based chiefly on physical appeal or even sexual involvement? This should not be ignored. When this last factor (the physical) is very strong, the outlook for a good marriage choice is greatly reduced.

2. Another goal of premarital counseling is to have them consider the major areas in which there may be future misunderstandings or tension. The time to work on these is before marriage, rather than after. Do they know much

about communication with one another, including how to listen? Have they spent too much time on physical attraction and not enough on the whole person? Do they know anything about how to make up a budget, including what they should give to the Lord's work? How well have they handled their finances in the past? Is either now in debt and for how much? Will both work and for how long? Do they want children and when? What about their devotional lives now and what will they do together? Who are the "in-laws" and other relatives with whom they may be involved? Any potential friction here? Do they understand and accept their differing roles as husband and wife? Finally, do they have a fair grasp of what to do in the sexual area, especially understanding the differing natures of each?

These questions may prepare the way for us to consider the extent of your premarital counseling. Once you have decided what is to be done, and maintained, write it down and set up the necessary sessions. This permits others to consider whether they are willing to do what is necessary in order to have a good marriage.

Here are the areas of suggested counseling. Each should require at least one hour. Often the counseling couple has the counselees into their home for dinner and an informal "get acquainted" talk.

Initial Interview

Put the young couple at ease. Have them relate how and where they met and what attracted them to one another. You can determine by wise questions and keen observation as to their

maturity and suitability for one another. Give them the names and telephone numbers of several counseling couples, each assigned to a different area. Tell them to line up their own appointments at approximately one month intervals. Make the sexual counseling session last. Inform the couples in advance of the names and telephone numbers of those who will be contacting them.

Role of Husband and Wife

This is a place where couples need to be in general agreement and to know their responsibilities. Since there is today a great confusion on proper roles for husbands and wives in marriage, the Biblical standard must be reviewed. The secular, contemporary and egalitarian model of the non-Biblical world has dangerously infiltrated the church and Christian thinking. The Biblical mandates have been called patriarchal, hierarchical and outdated culturally.

Does each partner willingly accept (if believers) what God has laid down in the Word for proper roles? Does the husband agree that it is his responsibility to take care of his wife? Is the wife a “helpmeet” to her husband? Is she to be under his leadership? Subordination does not in any way deny her equal value in Christ or her dignity as a person of worth. If she has differing ideas, this needs to be brought out before marriage. Review Ephesians 5:23-33; I Corinthians 11:3; I Peter 3:1-7; Galatians 3:26; Titus 2:4-5, etc.

The widespread practice of working wives and dual incomes sometimes forces change from the Biblical model. We do not criticize the desire of couples to set aside funds for a home or other needs. This does require adjustments in duties in the

home. It does put greater pressure on the relationship. Here are the major areas, some of which have already been discussed in Chapter Eleven.

Handling Finances, the Budget and Debts

These can be burdensome. Many believers have not learned to avoid debt as a possible trap. “The borrower is slave to the lender” (Proverbs 22:7). Credit cards are a menace, along with installment buying of goods and services, keeping you under a heavy burden of monthly payments.

Debts can also keep you from giving regularly and systematically to the Lord’s work (I Corinthians 16:2). You can “rob God” (Malachi 3:8-10). You can provide luxury options for yourself and not put God first but you will lose in the end.

Teach them how to make and live by a budget, often a totally new idea. Give them an assignment to work this out, providing a simple form to help. Who will handle the payment of bills, the checking or savings accounts, and the monitoring of expenses which can get out of hand?

Gain agreement on an appropriate and sensible standard of living, consistent with Biblical principles. If materialism is a danger, face it now.

Dealing with In-Laws and Other Family Members

When you marry a person, you also must incorporate into your life certain responsibilities each partner has towards near relatives. Certainly one cannot let them be needy or destitute in some way without seeking to be of help (I Timothy 5:16, etc.) There should be reasonable contact or communication with near relatives, not neglect.

Having said this, Genesis 2:24 is very clear on the “leave and cleave” principle. It often is disturbing, in western culture, to have interference, financial entanglements and common living arrangements with in-laws. Before marriage, couples should (as much as feasible) agree on the amount of interaction, involvement and ground rules involving both family groups. Then surprises or misunderstandings will be less likely.

Communication Assistance

This is more than help from a telephone operator. It means how to interact conversationally in a healthy way. It means how to listen. It means how to handle (or avoid) arguments. Discussions help understanding by giving additional understanding. Arguments are contests between people trying to impose their views on others. They are efforts to win, not lose, rather than efforts to understand and be flexible in our thinking. Provide help in the form of suggestions for counseling. Help them to learn how to do this better, if not perfectly. Start to learn now, not later in the marriage.

Determine barriers that may exist and seek to mobilize an effort to reduce them. Typical problems are:

1. One or the other is very quiet or not a natural communicator.
2. Unwillingness, especially of the man, to show inner feelings or attitudes, with the partner.
3. Differences in background or culture.

Discuss how to resolve conflicts or grievances peacefully and not “let the sun go down on your wrath.” Help them to recognize the danger of stockpiling grievances to bring up

later—even years later. Teach them to forbear and forgive and to remember we are all married to sinners, even if saved by grace.

Spiritual Life Together

This means having Bible reading and prayer together. It is important to regularly (daily) pray with your partner, even briefly, preferably aloud so you can hear an “amen.” Commit yourself to work as a team. Forgive one another. Talk about the Word or spiritual matters naturally and frequently. Read the Scriptures briefly together (after evening meals or another convenient time).

The husband is to lead spiritually, not be dragged along by the wife to meetings, or leaving to her the spiritual initiative in the home. Lead means also to set an example.

Sexual Relations in Marriage

Sex originated with God. All that we are physically and psychologically relating to sex is by His design. Therefore, sex is not dirty, within marriage, despite any earlier, defiling experiences we may have had.

Sex is important but does not constitute either the whole or the cornerstone of the relationship. It is a part of the communication and intimacy arrangement of being “one flesh.” The act of sexual intercourse pictures mutual interrelationship.

Proper sexual intercourse is a mutual self-giving, rather than a “getting” for self. The pattern in I Corinthians 7:3-5 suggests that “authority” over our bodies belongs to our partners, not us. Therefore, it is not to be withheld or used as a weapon in

disputes. Regular sexual relations are a preventative against temptation, including lust or mental fantasies.

There must be a clear understanding of the anatomical differences in responsive areas of the male and female. There must also be a clear perception of the psychological differences between men and women in sexual response. There is a great deal of ignorance about the latter area.

There must be sensitivity to people who are sexually untaught or shy. There must be reorientation of thinking in those more sexually experienced who have had worldly, defiled or misguided input. A Christian sexual relationship is unlike a worldly sexual relationship.

There should be proper preparation for honeymoon and post-honeymoon sexual relationships. This includes decreasing unhelpful anxiety or unrealistic, initial expectation. The sex relationship should be a growing thing.

One must also consider the area of having children and their attitudes or preparation with respect to birth control.

These areas of counseling may seem to be too much, but all are very important to a joyful, satisfying, God-honoring marriage. Most marital problems are in the areas listed above. Try to get an early start in working out differences. In later years, this will also have a profound effect on the children.

Premarital Counseling Policy

In our society, the institution of marriage is in a most uncertain state. In 1870, there were 27 divorces for every 1,000 marriages in the United States. In 1972, there were 455 for

every 1,000. Today, 31% of all married couples have been through a previous divorce.

The problem is not with the institution of marriage, but with the people who marry and their attitudes toward the institution. God's attitude is far different. He uses the permanency of marriage to illustrate the indissoluble union between Christ and His church. "For I hate divorce, says the Lord" (Malachi 2:16).

Elders should be concerned that Christian couples have been married without adequate preparation. Much of our counseling has consisted of fire fighting after marriage, instead of preventative counseling prior to marriage.

We believe that our responsibility goes beyond officiating at a ceremony. We believe that our primary ministry is to nurture marriages both before and subsequent to the wedding ceremony. Further, we believe that if a couple is unwilling to make a commitment to nurture their marriage prior to the event, then we should refuse to perform the ceremony.

Obviously, any couple of legal age may get married anytime and at any place they choose. It is noteworthy that the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, along with the courts in many other counties, has required premarital counseling as a prerequisite for obtaining a marriage license by minors. However, by agreeing to perform a ceremony at our chapel we are in effect indicating our approval and that we have done all that is within our power to insure a successful marriage. Therefore, we feel that certain prerequisites should be met prior to marriage (just as in the case of baptism).

We have established the following minimum requirements:

1. The elders should be notified at least six (6) months in advance of the desired wedding date. (The date and their engagement should not be publicly announced until after the first counseling session.)
2. The couple must be willing to engage in a minimum of six (6) premarital counseling sessions, including completion of homework, reading or assigned books, and listening to assigned tapes.
3. The couple must be willing to listen to the counsel of the elders in reconsidering the advisability of marriage in postponing the wedding in order to know each other better to gain greater maturity.
4. The couple must be willing to attend one post-marriage counseling session 3 to 6 months after the marriage.

Variations or waivers of any of the above requirements will be given by the counseling elder only in extreme situations.

A survey of similar premarital counseling programs in active, growing churches has been uniformly good with the following benefits:

1. Lower divorce rates.
2. Some couples mutually decide not to marry or to postpone the wedding.
3. Some couples have come to know Christ as Savior during the counseling.

Marriage is an unconditional commitment to an imperfect person. We believe this commitment is second only to a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. It should be considered prayerfully; it is a commitment for life.

Questions: Premarital Counseling

1. What has been your experience in having any kind of pre-marital counseling before your marriage? What would have been helpful if you had received it? If single, what help would you want?
2. What questions would you ask of those who seek counsel about getting married? What warning signs have you seen in singles going together which would indicated danger if married?
3. What would be the good signs?
4. What do you think should be a reasonable policy by the church leaders for approving marriages in the church? What conditions would you require being met? Are there requirements in the lesson that you think are unnecessary or undesirable?

Chapter 13: Other Counseling Problems

The multiplied problem situations of people are more than could be covered adequately in a single, general study of this kind. We cannot be expected to illustrate each observation or recommendation, as much as we would like to do so. That would take a somewhat oversized volume, or many volumes. Various questions will arise on subordinate issues in which you want to ask, “But what about this?” All of these cannot be covered fully. We have tried to give you an overview of the most prominent counseling areas and a few guiding suggestions with each. In this final chapter we will mention some of these that have not yet been covered. They are the last, but not by any means the least, problems you may encounter.

Worry, Fear, Depression

These might well be the most common of all personal problems. In some ways they are related but we wish to make some distinctions and present the counsel of the Lord Jesus. We also wish to make some suggestions about helping those who struggle with these emotions.

Worry has been defined as mental distress or agitation, accompanied usually by uneasiness over some present or impending outcome. It is not only a negative way of thinking but an essentially useless exercise. It has been called a cycle of inefficient thought, whirling around its center—fear. It is fueled by a vague hope that we are helping in some area of perceived danger. As a habit pattern, it does not stay focused on a single area. Once a danger area dissipates, it is promptly replaced by another one. It is triggered by negative

expectations. It often misreads any real likelihood of what is happening or may happen. Usually the thinking pattern runs in a circle or repeats itself in cycles. There is a certain feeling of helplessness in spite of trying to help by thinking about it. Sometimes it deals with a past which cannot be redone, or an effort to affect either present or future situations which are beyond anything specific we can do.

Fear is closely related to worry. There seems to be a greater apprehension, alarm or anxiety. We are not talking about a concern with an obvious basis in reality in present danger or probable cause of future danger. Rather, it is fear that is exaggerated or illogical. The psychiatric world uses the term phobias for this. This can be with respect to crowds, heights, germs, death or almost anything. One thing that must be done is to help the counselee think through the issue of whether this is a realistic possibility. How can you fear being without funds or means of support when you get old, if you have bank accounts and other holdings stuffed with more money than you will reasonable need? What do you do with a child who is “afraid of the dark”? Certainly, you begin with reassurance that there is no real danger.

We ought to begin with the words of the Lord Jesus. Matthew 6:25-34 covers the subject well. “Do not be anxious (worry) for your life” as to food, drink, clothing, what we would call necessities. These are simply common illustrations. And why not? Because the Lord says that since He provides for even the birds of the air, He will certainly provide for our needs. He asks if we can add anything to our length of life by worrying (vs. 27), with an obvious negative answer. He links the process of worry with a lack of faith in God’s promised provision for those who

put His interests first (vs. 30, 33). He specifically warns against worrying about tomorrow when we have enough to occupy our minds today. This is a short way of saying, “Live one day at a time.” Romans 8:15 precedes a great passage on being secure as believers in Christ in vs. 31-39. It tells us that fear is a form of bondage of the mind. There is a spirit of fear, says II Timothy 1:7, but it does not come from God for the believer. Hebrews 13:6 is quite triumphant in saying, “The Lord is my Helper. I will not be afraid.” II Corinthians 10:5 speaks of “taking every word captive to the obedience of Christ.” Colossians 3:2 calls on believers to “set your mind on things above, not on the things that are on earth.” We can both pray for God’s help and direct our minds in a resolute manner to obey God in this area. We must learn to trust Him, rather than our emotions, in whatever it is that we fear.

There are means, certainly for the Spirit-indwelt believer, to let God control your thoughts. You can (1) reject worry and trust in the Lord; (2) determine to root worry out of your mind, that it might be replaced by joy and peace. How often the Lord Jesus appeared and commanded, “Fear Not.” Would He do this if such were impossible? Look to Him for protection, releasing your fears to Him. Must you always keep looking at the circumstances rather than to the Lord? The hymn writer put it well, “Take your burden to the Lord and leave it here.” This is not the same thing as praying to the Lord, giving it to Him, and then picking it up and carrying it away with us once more.

Depression means literally to be pressed down. It is a continued feeling of sadness, dejection and difficulty in concentration. It is triggered by some crisis. There may be the

loss of a loved one, loss of a job, disappointment in romance or unhappy marriage. There may be a certain tendency towards this during a woman's menstrual cycle. It may be when you are in ill health. There may be a family predisposition. The reaction to any of these things may be to give up, give in, and feel sorry for yourself. To some extent you may be choosing to be depressed, even though people say, "I can't help myself." Even an unbeliever can commit himself to get up off the floor emotionally, rather than to just continue to be depressed. Certainly by the power of the Spirit, the believer ought to be able to claim the enablement of God, the consolations of God's Word, the fellowship of the saints and the opportunity to draw near to God. In all of the above situations, the remedy is quite similar. It is to understand what you are doing to yourself. It is to commit yourself to trust Him and find satisfaction in Him, not in circumstances. For some, you may need to consult a physician to see if there is an organic basis for this problem. These are infrequent. The phrase "chemical imbalance" is often used loosely as a cause for manic-depressive states, as an example. Such "imbalances," and theories surrounding them, remain a subject for debate.

Occultic Involvement, Demonism

This area of human problems clearly involves the supernatural in a direct or causative way. This can lead to dreadful attacks of fear and depression or other manifestations. Occult means hidden or concealed. People deliberately involve themselves in experimenting with unseen powers, which are evil, by seeking guidance, knowledge of the future, healing and communication with the dead. These are deadly activities. Many who are introduced into this world think of it as being

some kind of intriguing game. It may start with the ouija board (questions to a “magical” board for “yes” or “no” answers). It may involve talismans (good luck charms) or amulets which are said to have a magical inscription to protect against disease. Some might use fortune-telling cards or go to a palm reader or a psychic person who is in contact with the spirit world (called channeling). This is plainly spiritism, a direct effort to contact some deceased person through a medium. The voices that answer pretend to be that person and provide information. Many of these same things are involved in certain “New Age” practices.

Some follow the common practice of consulting horoscopes and astrologers for guidance in daily affairs or information about the future. You can be introduced to meditation techniques utilizing the repeating of a certain magic word given by an instructor, called a mantra. The latter word is often associated with a Hindu deity and can involve you with the spirit world. You may be involved in the use of drugs, especially what are called psychedelic (mind altering) drugs which cause hallucinations or visions. Question anyone suspected of such involvement and have them list every instance they can recall, beginning in childhood.

Any of these practices, or a history of them in the family, are exceedingly dangerous. They connect you with the demonic world and constitute a kind of “contract” by which they claim a power over you. Have anyone who has any connection with these practices read Deuteronomy 18:10-12. “There shall not be found among you anyone...who uses divination (trying to foresee future events by supernatural means apart from God)...or a medium or a spiritist who calls up the dead. For

whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord.” Read the incident in I Samuel 28:8 where King Saul contacted a medium and came under the judgment of God. See the strict prohibitions in Leviticus 19:26, Exodus 17:22, Isaiah 8:19, 47:13, Ezekiel 13:6, 12:24 and Micah 3:11 (these people did it for the money). Urge those who have been involved to renounce them in the Name of the Lord Jesus and claim His power for deliverance. Break all contact with such things, repent of them and seek release from the demonic power which works in them.

This brings us to the general subject of demonism. There is no doubt that many groups have become obsessed with the subject, seeing a demon behind every illness, including the common cold, or every temptation of the flesh (as a demon of lust or greed or gluttony). Still, it is wise not to deny or ignore these evil powers. The Lord Jesus spoke much about demons and cast them out of people who were possessed by them. (See Mark 5:1-15 and the man called Legion). Aside from those who are demon-possessed, there are many others, including believers, who are oppressed or tormented in some way. Those who need deliverance from the demonic world are still among us, although more obviously in some countries than others. Demons differ in kind (Matthew 17:21). Some are speaking through men to spread false doctrines about the Lord (I Timothy 4:1). We might call them religious demons. Some are violent or criminal. Some are sexual as seen in the perversity and relentless nature of their acts. Some are more powerful than others. The particular evidence of possession would be a change in the voice, a differing personality from the natural one, supernatural strength and conduct that seems irrational. Dealing with them requires believers who are

strong, who have had some experience or knowledge in this area and who will persevere. Extricating people is often difficult. A special prayer team is better than trying to do this alone. The use of the test in I John 4:1-3 is often made, but this is not beyond dispute. Be alert to the possible working of the demonic in the tormenting of either believers or unbelievers. However, do not try to see a demon under every bush. There are many questionable suggestions in popular “Christian” books on demonism, so be careful. The book *A Holy Rebellion* by Thomas Ice (Harvest House) is worth consulting.

Bereavement, Grieving, Suicidal Ideas

When any of us lose someone we love, we naturally feel the loss. Something would be wrong with us if we did not feel this. It is when mourning, sadness and feeling sorry about our loss is unduly prolonged that it can become a problem. Even with so great a figure as Moses, there was a limit of 30 days (Deuteronomy 34:8). It ought to come to an end, as we see with David when he lost his infant son (I Samuel 12:19-23). Death is something that cannot be changed. We need to get on with life, minister to others, get off self-occupation and accept the will of God. The Lord Jesus is the one who has the keys of death and the grave (Revelations 1:18). For the believer, the prospect is glorious. Absent from the body means to be “present with the Lord.” (II Corinthians 5:6-8). It is called “very much better.” But what of those we think might not have been saved? No matter how remote the possibility that someone was saved, we cannot know for sure. Maybe at some point, even in a dying moment, they might have “touched the hem of His garment” for salvation. In life, be pessimistic. This may be necessary as we witness. When death has claimed someone,

you can be hopeful to at least a small degree. In any event, extended lamentation and grief is not a help and may hinder you. It may become a burden to other members of the family. Let us be like David was and get on with life.

Suicidal thoughts are serious, even if the person is not making a threat with serious intention. They may be using this to gain what they want. An infatuated person might say to someone who breaks off a relationship, "I am going to kill myself." A teenager might say to a parent who suspends his privileges and keep him at home for a while, "I am going to kill myself if you keep this up." We have been told to treat every threat seriously because if it happens, it has a finality. However, you can take notice of something without necessarily believing that it is a genuine intention, not a temporary threat. It ought to be obvious when someone, in a certain situation, is trying a form of emotional blackmail. You certainly should not marry someone simply because they might try to kill themselves if you do not. Only one person is responsible for suicide and that's the person himself. It is not our right to decide this issue. It belongs to God. (See again Revelations 1:18). If any person is intent on suicide in a serious way, that person can succeed, because you cannot maintain a 24-hour watch indefinitely. A short-term vigil by a friend may be necessary. In extreme cases, these people are locked up in an institution for their own good. However, in time, they will be out and can still do it. Remember to listen carefully and be kind. Do not panic. Pray with them and for them, looking for the Lord's intervention. Have a friend stay close and monitor what is going on.

Guidance, Seeking God's Will

This might be the most popular subject chosen when a group of workshops are offered. People seem confused about the subject and want to hear some principles. This is true even when their main problem is that they do not want to listen to wise counsel when it is given. God is more willing to guide people than they are willing to take heed. It has been said that most questions in guidance involve either vocation (what job to take or what course in school) or location (where to live or move). There may be no explicit Scriptures. However, there are guidelines. It is likely that at least 90% of the will of God is written in the Bible in direct commands, principles or examples, both good and bad. When we do not acquaint ourselves with the Word, or take time to reflect on Scriptures, we may pay the penalty for ignorance. We may never have heard the command not to be unequally yoked with an unbeliever (II Corinthians 6:14). However, we will pay the price of disobedience, whether we knew it or not. As motorists know, when cited by a police officer, ignorance of something will not relieve you from paying the penalty. You have a responsibility to know the law of the Lord, just as you do with the law of the land.

People may come to us for counsel in diverse areas. These can include a romantic or marital choice, a job choice, a move, a possible separation or divorce, debt problems, an issue about schooling ("If I should go, what course do I take?"). Or just, ("Where am I going in life? What should I do?"). Certainly, we should not make the decision for them. If the person is not a believer, this is a good opportunity to bring before them the need for a decision to follow the Lord Jesus. If the person is a believer, then the following thoughts need to be considered:

1. Are you committed to do God's will (John 7:17)? Otherwise you may not be happy about what needs to be done. Therefore, you will not do it. Do you fear the Lord's will in some way? Do you think He will delight in sending you to be a missionary where you don't want to go, or sentencing you to some miserable situation if you submit to His will? Is this your concept of God? Do you not realize that His will is good (Romans 12:6)?
2. His ways are not your ways (Isaiah 55:8), so there are things He desires that would never cross your mind. He is willing to guide you. Depend on that, for He promises to do this. However, it may not be your way or on your time table.
3. The Lord says you need to "ask, seek, knock" and continue to do so (Matthew 7:7). The verb tense indicates continuation. Are you willing to wait and not be impulsive? "Wait on the Lord" is one of God's great imperatives (Psalm 27:14). He will test you on your willingness to do this, most likely.
4. Seek godly counsel (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22). The Word is full of this theme. The key word is godly, not just someone who you think will agree with you. God uses people to tell other people what they need to hear in every area, from salvation to life situations. Why is it hard for you to listen?
5. Notice circumstances only after other factors are considered, as listed above. Sometimes the circumstances can make it easy for you to do the wrong thing. Opened and closed doors that evidently come from God are important.

6. After all has been done, do you have peace in your heart about the decision you are making? Has God been a priority in this decision?

Hope and Encouragement

Life has been called “a veil of tears.” It is filled with disappointments. The hymn writer put it well, “Many are weary and sad.” It is important to note that one name for the Holy Spirit is “Paraclete,” meaning “Helper,” sometimes translated “Comforter.” It means literally, “the one along side.” We are surely “workers together with God” when we participate in His ministry. It does not help people to let them wallow in self-pity, “feeling sorry for themselves.” We do not need to say this directly to people but we need to keep it in mind. Our goal is to point them to the Lord Jesus who is forever the hope of the hopeless. We need to think of the Lord as the “God of all comfort” (II Corinthians 1:3). He has been called “the God of recovery.” The Psalms are filled with blessed thoughts of the Lord’s care when His own have fled to Him for refuge. That is one reason why so many people, even unbelievers, are drawn to the Psalms in times of distress. It is good jointly to read the Scriptures of hope, encouragement and promise with those who are despairing.

One word that is frequently uttered in distress is “Why?” Ultimately it will go back in thought to God. Why did He permit it or, as so many seem to think, send it? To read Job’s first two chapters is to help us understand that afflictions do not all come from God. Moreover, we need reminders that God deals with all His creatures in grace, unmerited favor, not out of obligation. God does not owe us anything. We are the debtors. It is important to take the long view of life. This

means that the Lord, far more than ourselves, considers the eternal perspective in His permissive will. Life is the school of God. Character development and how we manage difficulties is far more important than the problems themselves. We want to see our circumstances changed, or the past reversed. God is interested in changing us, from the inside out.

Often in trying to help troubled people, we talk too much. We need to listen quietly, even when people rage about life. The best thing that Job's "comforters" did, at the beginning, was to sit down and be quiet (Job 2:13). It was when they began to talk that they simply added to his distress. God said they did not speak to him what was right (Job 42:8). A troubled believer once said to the author, "If one more person quotes Romans 8:28 to me, I think I will scream." The point is that many times we seem to go to people with what are called clichés or standard answers. We need to listen sensitively and then get their thinking geared to the Word, centered in Christ and His great purposes. "I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare (benefit) and not for calamity, to give you future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11). Our faith and hope must be in God (I Peter 1:21). Disappointing times are opportunities to review our thinking. This may lead to a corrected course.

In conclusion, learn to be an encourager to all. Be a Barnabas whose name means "son of encouragement." If you have no other ministry than this, you will never lack for opportunity to minister. In the most dire of situations, seek to give hope to the one to whom you seek to minister.

Questions: Other Counseling Problems

1. How have you in the past tried to help people with worries, fears, and depressed states? How well did it work (or not work) and why?
2. What did you learn about demons in this lesson, either those possessed or oppressed? What would you do to help them?
3. How would you advise people who say they want to know God's will in some area of life?
4. How would you give hope or encouragement to those in need of it? What is helpful or unhelpful?

Summary: Counseling Outlines

Biblical Counseling Principles

1. The word of God is foundational.
2. God requires acceptance of personal responsibility.
3. Biblical counseling relies upon God to transform people.
4. Counselors need to be spirit-controlled channels of God's work.
5. Our weapons are spiritual, not carnal.
6. Our model is the Lord Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor.
7. We must admit our human limitations.
8. Do not fear being considered "judgmental."

Diverse Situation

1. Supportive Counseling
 - Help them gain strength, perspective
 - Stabilize troubled people
2. Confronting Counseling
 - Get people to face sin, irresponsibility
 - Confess, restore, yield
3. Informational Counseling
 - Assist in obtaining necessary facts
 - Help in discerning God's will
4. Preventative Counseling

—Anticipate problems before they start

5. Spiritual Counseling

—Need of salvation

—What it means to “walk in the spirit”

—Highest purpose for their lives

6. Referral Counseling

—Send to others for specialized help or to those just as capable as you

7. Marital Counseling

—Threatened separation, divorce

—Arguments in various areas

—How to resolve disputes peacefully

Your General Goals in Counseling

1. Find the truth

2. Speak the truth

3. Help them see the truth

As you listen, ask yourself

1. Is there one problem or more?

2. Is there a right relationship to God and a right understanding of Him?

3. What Scriptures come to mind on the issues at hand?

Questions About the Counselee

1. Are they dealing with things as they are (reality) or is it wishful thinking?
2. Is there evident sincerity and consistency in what they say?
3. Do they talk about their feelings or their responsibilities?
4. Is there *any* excuse making or blame shifting?
5. What is your motivational appeal to this person in this situation?

Favorable Qualities for Biblical Counselors

1. They need the confidence of other believers.
2. Discernment is a major requirement.
3. Warm, sincere interest in people.
4. Emotional self-control.
5. Be saturated with the Word.
6. Some indication of effectiveness.
7. Have a well-balanced life.

Notes

1. Zilbergeld, Bernie *The Shrinking of America: The Myths of Psychological Change*, p. 185
2. *ibid.* p. 191
3. *ibid.* p. 187
4. Szasz, Thomas, *The Myth of Mental Illness*
5. *ibid.* p.
6. Dr. Mowrer is referring to the incident recorded for us in Genesis chapter 27, where Esau sells his valuable birthright for a relatively worthless bowl of food.
7. Glasser, William, *Reality Therapy*
8. Crabb, Larry *Effective Biblical Counseling* p.
9. *ibid.* p.
10. *ibid.* p.
11. Bobgan, Martin and Deidre *Psychoheresy* p.28

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To God be the glory.