

**Introduction:** We have covered several topics in this series, including an overview of what biblical counseling is (the use of the Word of God to help change us into the image of Christ), a comparison with other counseling philosophies, and then 3 messages on spiritual growth (or the doctrine of sanctification). In my last message I addressed the issue of the heart followed by Mark Mann's message on the idolatry of the heart.

- This week we come to some general principles by way of methodology in how to help people. What I mean by this is some of the nuts and bolts of how to counsel others. When I speak of method, I am talking about a set of principles or procedures. In this we have moved into the realm of wisdom. This is not an exactly spelled out method by Scripture, but general principles that have been developed and applied by those known as "nouthetic" counselors. It is a specific approach. But what I would not want is for you to think of this as mechanically or automatic.
- I feel one of my challenges is to take material that is more geared for a more "formal" counseling situation (pastoral counseling, a counseling room) and apply it to all of us, some of whom may never use it in that kind of setting. Nevertheless, I believe there are biblical principles that are very helpful regardless of the setting.
- Remember that counseling, or admonishing one another, at an informal level, is something that all of us who are Christians are capable and called to do in some way. We see this from a passage like Romans 15:14. It would be a tragedy to me if you came away thinking that only the pastors or specially trained experts could do this.
- I intend to convey that that these things apply to all of our relationships as we seek to help one another as fellow Christians, as parents raising our children parenting, in our relationships with our extended family and even unbelievers.

## I. GATHER INFORMATION

### A. The Necessity for Gathering Information

- For us to help others, we must understand the problems they are facing. People are not machines, and their problems and struggles are individual. We must always deal with people in that way. Biblical counseling is not to be handled with a few Bible verses mechanically applied to a situation. Rather, we are to see people as created in the image of God, and worthy of individual attention and love as we seek to help them.
- If we are to really help people, we must seek to understand what the issues are. By this, I mean really listen. There are two key passages that direct us in this. The first is Proverbs 18:13. We see that what is necessary not to be foolish and shameful is to give an answer before we actually hear the matter. In other words, to assume too much and fall into the error of responding wrongly. In doing so, we actually can make matters worse, and not help the person at all. If we look at Proverbs 18:15, we see that it is the prudent (discerning) person acquires knowledge and seeks knowledge. This means that it is pursued.

### B. The Method of Gathering Information

#### 1. Asking Questions

- This is called, in counseling language, data gathering. It is to ask questions to get enough information to be able to judge the situation accurately. One of the reasons that this is so necessary is that things are often not what they appear. Jesus calls is in John 7:24 to not judge according to how things appear, but to judge righteous judgement. This isn't speaking about being "judgmental" (harsh, shallow, or insensitive), but making a right judgement about the situation. This takes effort. People are not helped by premature or shallow evaluations.
- Proverbs 20:5 tells us that counsel in the heart of man *is like* deep water. Here the word "counsel" here means purpose or plan. In other words, how they view things. The passage goes on to tell us that a man of understanding will draw it out. The picture is of a deep well, and the pursuit of drawing out what is deep down, not just what is on the surface.
- So this means asking many questions. Follow threads of things. It is finding out what they did, what they were thinking, what led up to their particular response. This takes time and patience. It must be done with an attitude of concern, not of interrogation.

#### 2. Watching Non-Verbal Communication

- This gathering of information includes not only what people say, but also watching what they are communicating non-verbally. In counseling language this is called "halo" date. This is necessary because we don't communicate as machines, but with our whole being.
- As we ask questions, we must notice how they respond visibly. Does someone get agitated when we ask them questions about themselves? Assuming we are asking compassionately, are they defensive, do they get agitated?

#### 3. Hearing Both Sides of the Story

- Another important thing to keep in mind is to gather information, as much as possible, from all those involved. Proverbs 18:17 tells us the importance of hearing both sides. One of the reasons this is necessary is because of what Proverbs 21:2 tells us, that all our ways are right in our own eyes. People will (again, purposeful or not) view things only through their own perspective. If possible, we must hear both sides of the story (especially in marriage, parent/child problems, or fellow Christians).

## II. DISCERN THE PROBLEM

### A. The Necessity for Discernment

- We must understand that our responsibility goes beyond just hearing. The biblical view of helping isn't just being a listening ear. Our desire isn't just to hear people vent, an idea that comes from Rogerian counseling. You may remember that this view sees the counselor's primary duty being just listening and letting the person spill out their feelings and frustrations. We want, in need, to give answers. That is what counsel is. Hearing the matter, then applying the Word of God to the situation.
- This includes addressing the person's response, was it good or bad? Are they thinking biblically? Are they responding biblically? What should they think and do in light of their problems.
- 1 Corinthians 6:2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?
- One reason that this is needful is that people will sometimes (purposefully or not) cover up the real issues, and give a “presentation” problem. Sometimes that is not the real problem, only the effect of the problem. For example, if someone is in trouble with the law, the problem isn't primarily that, but what led up to that behavior.

### B. The Standard for Discernment

- As we consider people's situations, we remember that we do so by the standard of the Word of God. In seeking to give answers, we look to Scripture. We do not use arbitrary opinions or feelings, but rather ask the question “What does God say about this?”
- We see this example in Jesus Himself when he said “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me.” John 5:30. Even the Son of God judged by the standard of the will of the Father, now revealed to us in Scripture.
- In doing this, here are three principles
- In this, it is important to use Biblical labels to describe problems. We live in a culture that is saturated with psychological labeling of problems, labeled as mental illness or sickness (more in later class). Identify problem using biblical terminology. Examples: call things sin, not “tendency, weakness, or disposition “call an “affair” adultery; call “addiction” bondage, enslavement.

### C. Patterns for Discernment

- As I have already stated, people are individuals. Nevertheless, we should understand that our experiences and our struggles are not unique. 1 Corinthians 10:13 tells us that there is no temptation (or test, something that draws out the character) except that which is common to man. While the circumstances are unique, the issue itself is not. For this reason, we can also see things that certain kinds of people generally struggle with. For example:
  1. **Children** – parent/child relationships, peer pressure, handling difficulty
  2. **Older Children and Singles** – above, as well as sexuality issues, opposite sex relations, communication, life purpose, school/work
  3. **Older Singles** – resentment regarding marriage, loneliness, bad habits, immorality, disorganized life schedule
  4. **Married People** – husband/wife relationships, parent/child relationships, in-law relationships, work schedule, finances, sexual intimacy, communication problems
  5. **Older People** – loneliness, physical limitations, self-pity, fear of death, wasting time
  6. **Handicapped** – resentment, loneliness, self-pity, depression, sense of uselessness, manipulation of others
- Essential to this process is listening for wrong theological beliefs. Do they have a biblical view of God? Do they have a biblical view of humanity? Do they have a biblical view of salvation? Do they have a biblical view of trials and suffering?
- There must also be an identifying of heart questions. Who are they living life to please? What is the motive of their behavior?

## III. ESTABLISH INVOLVEMENT

- With most of us, there will already be some involvement and relationship established. Often people will come, wanting to tell us their problems. One of the things that may be appropriate to ask is “what would you like me to do?” Don't assume that people want change. Sometimes they want to vent.
- In this we must establish compassion in what and how we say things. We must demonstrate sincere concern for them.