

# **Counseling God's Way**

## **II. God's Way in Counseling**

### **Lesson 4 - Counseling and Sanctification**

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[Matthew 10:8](#)

## What Counseling Is

We've been looking in our previous session about counseling and discipleship and saw how it cuts right head-on against the self-esteem counseling movement that dominates the world. This is now by far the preponderant way in the church world that counseling is done. People who should be disciples now go to churches and the counselor gets them more into self, which means less into discipleship. It's hard to believe that those who name the name of Jesus are now helping guide Christians away from Jesus, not closer to Him! That's how serious this is.

A brother mentioned at break that they were watching a television program in which the pastor publicly said, "I preach the Gospel of self-esteem." And at least he's honest, because he certainly does. But that's no excuse because that's deadly; that's another Gospel. If anyone preaches another Gospel, an angel from heaven—or Paul said, "If I came back with a different Gospel, let him be accursed."

It's amazing in our American church world, what we'll put up with in our desire to be tolerant. A book some years ago, I think it was back in the '80s. The title is a chilling one and if we were in the Contending for the Faith class I'd read about twenty or thirty quotes out of it. And the book is called *Self-Esteem: the New Reformation*. His point in the book is that as much as the reformation of Luther and all those guys was important and used of God in getting us back to the Scriptures and justification by faith, now this reformation, the new one, will be even more important. And it's all about "every person's sacred right to self-esteem." The book is all about that. And it's been circulated to Christian leaders all around the world.

A major proportion of American Christians don't even know that book has ever been written, let alone that it influences Christian leaders all over the world where this man conducts his worldwide church leadership seminars. To many of us he is kind of like an anomaly or kind of like an overly dramatic grandfather that's on TV. He has an interesting flair and an amazing voice and all that and is Mr. Positive himself. But the message that he has put out has been one of the most deadly to the American church in the history of the Church. The self-esteem Gospel, it's deadly. And that book is deadly.

And again, I don't know where that man stands with the Lord. You know, I'll praise God if I look up, shocked in heaven some day and there he is. I'll say, "Praise God. God is merciful." I shouldn't be there either, you know. I'm not going to be upset at that. I hope he is bound for there [heaven]. I know the message that he proclaims does not make disciples. I know there are some believers there. I actually did a wedding and I can tell you a long list of places I've done weddings and here's my conviction on it. If the people are qualified before God to be married, I'll marry them any place that I have total freedom to preach anything in the Word of God that God lays on my heart. And I tell you, from the first wedding I did in the late 60s up until the last one I did January, my passion has been to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and preach Christ as our hope and our life and the head of the home. To me, a wedding is a place to preach. There is no long line for me to do weddings, but the Lord has blessed the weddings He's let me do.

I met a staff member who knew and loved the Lord at this and we had a little fellowship. He had a robe for him and a robe for me and he came up and I'm thinking, "Oh Lord, deliver me, please." And he said, "One of these is for you. Would you like one?" And I said, "Well, you know, not really." He said, "You know, I really don't either." He just kind of threw them down.

I thought, boy, there's hope here! There's hope here! Then we talked a while and I could tell this brother knew the Lord and loved the Lord. And I'm a little perplexed why he's there, you know. But obviously he had freedom and liberty to touch lives.

And he said, "You know what?" He said, "I'm not going to hang around for this wedding." He said, "I'm just going to introduce you and cut out." He said, "You know what you're doing here in the Word of God."

The self-esteem Gospel, it's deadly. And that book is deadly.

Our textbook that we're using, one of them, is Ed Bulkley's, *Only God Can Heal the Wounded Heart* is a very powerful book. That main story that gets woven in and out of the counseling sessions, some of it sounds so fanciful that you almost think, "Couldn't you make a better one up?" The amazing thing is that is a totally true story. And I know the husband well and have spent time with him. He's a tremendous brother. I just love him dearly. He is a very godly man. He would certainly not say that he is perfect, but he did seek the Lord through all that and still is because that story isn't finished. But that wasn't made up, that's a true story. They're deeply involved in a major counseling clinic on the other side of the country. So none of that is fanciful, that's all right out of the trials and heartaches of the American church.

All right let's press on in our study. What counseling is—number one, it's the Lord is Counselor. If we don't anchor our thinking on that, we're off base. All the rest of the way through, no matter what arena we go to, because either God is the counselor or man is the counselor. Now God loves to use instrumentality. He'll use us, but only to the degree that we're committed to the fact that He's the counselor using us.

And then we saw that when the Lord counsels unto discipleship. Not solving problems. Not just removing needs, but making disciples. Now if the Lord wants a problem solved, disciples find them solved. He wants to meet needs. And He basically does though He allows some problems at times. Ask Paul. Ask Job. He's aiming at disciples whether the needs are met or not or the problems are solved or not, He's aiming at disciples. And problems that remain and problems solved, can both contribute to disciple-making because it drives us to follow the Lord Jesus Christ which is what discipleship is all about.

Now here's another definition of what counseling is from God's perspective. And that is, sanctification. Psalm 32:8 reminds us who the Counselor is and how He counsels. Psalm 32:8, NIV, God is speaking to His people through this Psalm of David, He says, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with My eye upon you." He will guide you. This is God as the instructor, teaching as the Counselor. And He does it in the way we should go.

Man wants counseling but finds a way that works for him, something he likes. He finds something he can live with. No, the Lord says, "I'll find something first you can die with, that you might find new life in Me." No to self. Death to self. Take up your cross daily and follow Jesus.

The way you should go is the way God counsels and that's the path of discipleship. God's counseling is not just for relief of stress or making you comfortable. Praise God, He's a great comforter. He's the "God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). But that doesn't mean every moment in life is comfortable. If we ever doubt that, just take one more look at the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one whom we're following. And if His life was not always comfortable, ours won't always be either if we're following His path.

In 1 Corinthians 1:2 it says, "To the church of God which is at Corinth to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus..." We are being sanctified in Christ Jesus. Sanctification has to do with being set apart for God's intended use, for God's glory, for God's purposes. That's what sanctification is. Set apart for the glory and use and purposes of God.

There are three aspects to it: past, present and future. The past is already accomplished. Some call it positional sanctification. That's what this is, 1 Corinthians 1:2. To those who are sanctified, it is past tense—an already existing condition. Already set apart. How? In Christ! "Who are sanctified in Christ Jesus." Set apart by being in Christ instead of in the world and in Adam. Now in Christ, we are set apart unto God.

Future we will be sanctified fully, which is yet to be. It is also called glorification. The past sanctification is positional, in Christ. The one to come is ultimate and it is where we are headed.

But primarily related to counseling and the counseling ministry is the present process of sanctification. It is on-going sanctification, progressive sanctification. And that's where we'll concentrate now and that's the primary sanctification issue, when it comes to the counseling ministry.

Now sometimes in counseling it's important to remind a person they have been sanctified. They're set apart because they're in Christ. And they're headed toward ultimate, full glorification. God wants to sanctify us. But so often it's today, the next step, this issue, my walk. He wants day by day, step by step, more and more to set us apart for the glory of God, for the use of God, for the purposes of God. That is progressive sanctification.

So let's think for a few minutes in our next heading about progressing in sanctification and the next Scripture you see there. 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-5. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification..." Now are we talking about past, future or present sanctification? "...that you should abstain from sexual immorality..." Well, there'll be none of that to worry about in heaven, so we're not talking about future. Past? No. Just being brought out of Adam into Christ doesn't mean you'll never be tempted or stumble maybe into sexual immorality. So we're talking about ongoing, present, progressive sanctification, a sexual purity more and more, day by day.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5,

...that each of you should know to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

This is sexual purity ongoing day by day. In our culture of sexual impurity, this is often a specific issue in ongoing sanctification.

A couple years ago in Ft Lauderdale we did a Counseling God's Way blitz and had me out there at their church for five days every day Counseling God's way. We had meetings with the staff, meetings with the leadership, on counseling God's way—God's Word in Counseling. And we had fantastic seminar and all other kind of blessed meetings of the Lord on this subject. When we touched on this verse and they told me later that God has done such a revival work there. At that time there were 4,000 adults there. That year just before I came a thousand adults had come to Christ. And they told me, they said, "Bob, you know, a lot of our counseling is with young Christians to come out of the sexually impure world." And this is one of the big issues they face. Progressive sanctification has increased purity in their sexual thinking and behaving and relating and less of the ways of the world.

"This is the will of God, your sanctification:" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). That's the broad issue. It's God's will that we be set apart more and more, day by day, for His glory, for His use, for His purposes. And here's one specific application area, sexual purity.

God's counseling is unto sanctification. Man's counseling is to make you feel a little better about yourself. God's counseling is, "No, I want to change your life and let you know I love you and can transform you."

2 Timothy 2:21, progressing in sanctification,

Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

If anyone cleanses himself from the latter, things of dishonor, things of iniquity, he'll be a vessel for honor, sanctified, set apart and useful for the Master and prepared for every good work.

Picture of believer's life being increasingly cleansed from wickedness and iniquity. That is how they are being sanctified, more useful and a more equipped vessel. This is progressing in sanctification day by day.

We have more Scriptures than our hours will allow, but we have left those there for reference for your own reading. Another way to talk about sanctification is to call it developing in godliness.

Titus 2:11-12,

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.

Verse 11, speaks of the grace of God that brings salvation. And that grace has appeared to all men. Christ came offering salvation to whosoever will, may come. And that salvation, that rescue from the consequences of sin, that deliverance out of bondage and death to freedom and life, God's salvation by the grace of God.

But notice these two verses are really pointing, not at the grace of God just for the saving grace of God, but for a new life day by day. This is one of the places in the Growing in the Grace of God class that we kind of land and spend some time, because it's verses about God's grace, not for justification only but for sanctification as well. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." But look what the grace of God does. It does more than bring salvation. It also teaches us. God's grace teaching us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly righteously and godly in the present age."

The grace of God instructing us. A similar Greek word here for instruction or training could be translated, and often is, discipling. The grace of God not only is how we start out as a disciple, the grace of God coming to bear on our lives as a resource, a power, an impact, a work of God in truth and love and change that lets us walk in newness of life. It instructs us, teaches us, to deny ungodliness and worldly things and to live righteously and godly. This is to live God's way. It's the grace of God that forgives our ungodliness and calls us away from it and even moves us in a path of godliness.

Developing in godliness is another way to speak of sanctification. And 1 Timothy 4:7-8 also speaks of the same.

But this must be the big picture for Counseling God's Way. We want to offer a counsel from God that's in accord with the message and purpose of God, and that is our sanctification. God saved us not just to forgive us, but to set us free from the ways of the past. To let us develop in godliness or we might say, grow in Christlikeness. That's what sanctification is.

Another way to think about this matter of sanctification is growing in holiness.

1 Peter 1:14-16,

As obedient children not conforming yourselves to the former lusts as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'

We're not to be conformed to our former lusts, our former worldly, fleshly, self-centered cravings. Rather we're to be holy, to be godly. What's the reason? It's because our God is holy. We're to be holy because He is holy. We are to walk with Him as His children, to fellowship with Him. God wants us growing in holiness that we might grow in fellowship and likeness with Him. And it says in all your behavior, in all your conduct. Not just public church life conduct or Bible college conduct or street witnessing conduct, but in all of our behavior.

Then Hebrews 12:9-11 says that God disciplines us that we might share in His holiness. He increasingly disciplines us, He disciplines us. He increasingly disciplines us to this end: that we might share in His holiness. He disciplines us. He works in such ways that He makes us more and more of a disciple. Calls us to say *no* to self and *death* to self, and works in us that training. And even, when need be, chastising when we're unwilling to walk that path. Why? So that we will follow Jesus and find in Him the holy, godly life we need. He disciplines us that we might share in His holiness.

We have no holiness of our own. We looked at that much in the Growing in the Grace of God class. The law says be holy. But the law can't make you holy. So He disciplines us, disciplines us, works on us, in us, with us, that we might share in His holiness, that we will look to Him alone for the holiness we need. If we don't share in His holiness, we'll never have any holiness to walk in.

As Paul said in Romans 7:18, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells..." But the Lord works in our lives, on our lives, that we will look to Him to share in His holiness.

And God wants us to grow in holiness. Our counseling should have that flavor in it. A message from God that when it is shared in the name of the Lord, by the work of the Spirit, develops godliness in people's lives, and calls them to grow in holiness. It lets them see they're to share in God's holiness. They're to live by it, draw upon it, stand in it, and grow in it.

This is part of God's counsel. Remember Psalm 32:8, "I will instruct you in the way you should go..." What is that way? The path of holiness, the path of godliness, the path of Christlikeness, the path of learning to share in His holiness that we might walk godly, in Christ Jesus.

Now there is another way to look at this matter of developing, growing and progressing in sanctification. We'll spend a little more time here. This is such a critical one and it really catches up all of the others together.

Philippians 3:10-14 speaks about getting to know God. Sanctification can be related to getting to know the Lord, because it's getting to know the Lord that makes us like the Himself. Of course, getting to know the Lord can be related also to the other issue we looked at, the path of discipleship, because it's in following after Jesus that we get acquainted with Jesus. So this is a fitting summation really, of what the Lord's pointing at when He counsels. He wants His counsel to allow people to get to know Him better. He wants His counsel to make it clear to people what it's all about is getting know the Lord. Not feeling good about ourselves. Not reestablishing a relative comfort zone. Not being declared no longer dysfunctional, but maybe somewhat well adjusted. No. Those aren't the goals of the Lord.

We're seeing the things God talks about, they're so much higher, so much bigger. Progressing in sanctification is developing in godliness, growing in holiness, that's what the Lord aims at in His counsel. It's so heavenly. It's so lofty. It's so life changing,

Sadly, there are folks in Christian therapy that have been in it for two, eight, ten years. Now, if it was producing godliness and Christ-likeness and growth, well, okay. There must be something really good there. But in many such situations there's no evidence of these things taking place.

A situation comes to mind when I was still pastoring up in Irvine, one of the men in the church that seemed to be fruitful in teaching, thought he was not what he needed to be and couldn't function in the home as he needed to be or in work and all. He was already a young millionaire and the brother was a blessing and his wife was precious and they had godly kids. But no, he seemed to think that therapy was needed. And he started going once a week. He went to one of the two major so-called Christian counseling centers in Orange County. They assigned him to a woman counselor, which flabbergasted me. I pled with him just to find what he needed in church life and discipling. No, this was a professional matter. What a bill of goods that is! I'm not saying God can't ever use a professional, but to think that God doesn't have His resources in the Word and His remedy in His church, just totally underestimates what God has said and done. And the counselor suggested that this man separate from his wife because he needed to "find himself." Well, he didn't need to find himself except on the cross. He just needed to say *no* to self, *death* to self (Luke 9:23), and have one option left, to follow Jesus. No he had to separate from his family to establish his life, then he could get in there and do right in his home. It's absolutely earthly, worldly, self-centered, a psychological theory unto death.

It wasn't long before divorce came and he was interested in another woman. You know what's happened since then? Here's the thing that's changed. Instead of getting therapy once a week, he now gets it three times a week. Sure, he probably had some problems, some needs. Who doesn't? But he traded a little measure of a problem for a gigantic problem. And the gigantic problem was the supposed solution to his minor problem.

Boy, self has an appetite that goes out of sight. There's no greater addiction than to self. And many people going to so-called Christianized integrative therapy in the Christian counseling clinics, getting self-esteem counseling, self gets fed, fed, fed, pumped up, built up, gets stronger and stronger. And its appetite is insatiable. And what maybe started out a small problem or an insignificant problem, gets displaced by a bondage to self-centered therapy. Some can't live without it anymore. But they aren't living with it. They're dying every day. Not in a healthy way, by death to self that they might live in Christ, but through dying by self-indulgence.

When God counsels, He counsels to these things: discipleship, godliness, Christ-likeness, and holiness. It comes around to this—it's all about getting to know God.

In Philippians 3:8-14 Paul said, “That I may know Him...”—knowing God, that's what it's all about. In verse 8 Paul said, “Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...” The New American Standard here translates it, “...for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord....” There's one value that surpasses every other one. Everything is subservient to this, and that's getting to know the Lord, building a relationship, developing a friendship with Him. Jesus did call His followers friends. Not buddy, buddy and the good man upstairs kind of theology. He's still Creator-God and we'll always revere Him and walk humbly before Him. But we're still His friends. And He wants us to build a friendship.

My kids always had a kind of a reverence toward dad. Well at least until they were teenagers. But man, they never hesitated to run and jump on my lap when I held out my arms, you know. We were buddies and still are. They're at the other side now, they're in their mid-twenties. Praise God, there's life after teens.

Knowing God, that's what it's all about, “that I may know Him.” How do we get to know Him? Well, obviously the foundational way, the revelation of Himself through His Word by the Spirit. But He applies that to us in our walk day by day. So it comes out like this—“That I may know Him and...” sort of that is to say and this is how you get to know Him. Three ways: “...the power of His resurrection”—certainly spoken of in the Word, but it's to be experienced. Knowing someone is a relational experience not a catalog of facts. It should be based upon factual reality. We want to know the truth about God, but we want to know Him, get acquainted with Him.

Here's how it happens. We experience the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, even being conformed to His death. We taste of His resurrection power. That's the first acquaintanceship really. We're born again, raised from the dead! When dead in trespasses and sins, we call on the name of the Lord. God raised us to a resurrected new life. That's where we first meet the Lord. What a way to meet someone! “Hello there, young man. I just raised you from the dead. I'm your Lord.” “Oh Lord! Thank You, thank You, thank You! Oh this is glorious!” And you're just on *hallelujah* turf for who knows how long the honeymoon lasts. You're saying, “Oh isn't the Lord good?” And we just learn to love Him on that resurrection ground. The power of His resurrection. Boy, everything is just *hallelujah* for a while.

A lot of us didn't know that there was another matter coming called, “the fellowship of His sufferings.” Most of us, when that started to hit we thought we'd lost faith or failed God or—isn't it supposed to always be “glory hallelujah”? There is a smile that wraps around and touches in the back all the time. I must be doing something wrong. I mean, this is starting to hurt. Well, there's more to God than resurrection power. Sure Jesus was raised from the dead. Take a look at His life though. He was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). No one ever suffered on this earth like the Lord Jesus.

If we're going to get to know Him, there's going to be some suffering. Not suffering that we cause, but suffering that is caused for doing righteousness, but suffering for His sake. Pleasing Him and others not liking it. Pleasing Him and not a blessing but a cursing comes. Pleasing Him and instead of them giving you a trophy, they want to nail you. “Wow, Lord. This is what You went through, isn't it? Oh Lord. Whew, thank You! You went through this to come after me? But

Lord You went through it so perfectly. Help me, Lord. Let's get acquainted together through this, you know. Show me how to do it." The fellowship of His suffering, that's part of getting acquainted with the Lord too.

Then here's the least selected option of the three, when left up to us, "...being conformed to His death" (Philippians 3:10). Sometimes it's like we're dying. And we're not talking about rebellion here, which brings deadness of spiritual walk. We're talking about getting to know God, conformed to His death, the death of the Son of God. Where our walk gets conformed, shaped to the kind of dying He went through. Committed to pleasing God and all that seems to come is more death from it. This is deadness and impossibility, until you're just buried maybe in helplessness and hopelessness.

Maybe you're crying out, "My God, why have You forsaken me?" He hasn't. But it feels like it. He hadn't forsaken Jesus really. Yes, He turned from the sin that He knew would raise His Son forevermore. He won't leave us in that deadness. But oh, how we get to know Him. "Oh Lord! You went through this, didn't You?—far beyond what I am going through." Oh, the acquaintanceship that comes from that!

Plus the fact that He ends up keeping us. Pretty soon that conformity to His death, where doing His will just bring us to a dead end it seems, in resource or hope or strength or joy or insight. It's helpless. It's like a personal execution. That's what happened to Him when He obeyed the Father. He had to rest everything on the faithfulness of the Father. "Into Your hands I commit My Spirit." We get in spots like that too, experientially. We get conformed to His death.

Not for the reason or to the measure that He did. No. He's God; we aren't. His was a death for the sake of others. The more we die, the more useful we are to others. The less self-hope we have, the less self-help we're looking for—I'll tell you, Lazarus in that tomb wasn't lying there figuring, "How can I get out of here." His only way out was how? "Lazarus, come forth!"

That's what this is about, conformity to His death. The faithfulness of God is the only thing that can pull us through. Usually then it cycles back pretty soon to the power of His resurrection. He comes through. He's faithful. He raises us again to new measures of faith and hope and strength and peace and fruitfulness and opportunity and it's "glory hallelujah" time again. But we won't ever forget what happened. In fact, nothing says it will only happen once.

I've told some of you I've been walking with the Lord thirty years now, last December. I've probably had four major entombments in thirty years. You can guess which one is the scariest of all. The first one because you think it's all over. Faith spent. Hope gone. Strength weakened. Opportunities shriveled to nothing. Disappointments abounding and all you were trying to do was just please God. Not that you did it all perfectly, but that was your basic heart. And you end up buried. Boy, when he raises you though, there's something about it. See, the greatest threat of the enemy is "I'll wipe you out. I'll bury you. I'll kill you." Well, you did once and it didn't seem to work. There's always resurrection, you know. Wow! It puts a whole new hope in you, resurrection hope. You receive a faith in a God who raises the dead, not only in the end, but whenever needed. It changes everything.

Paul said, in that cycle of "know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means [if by all these ways] I may attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:10-11). Literally the "resurrection from the dead," contextually, linguistically and Biblically in its theology, this cannot be talking about the final resurrection. He wasn't trying to achieve something in life now that—oh no, I'm to be

resurrected at the end. No, that comes with being in Christ. This is obviously a getting acquainted with God thing, a daily growing thing.

Verse 12 says, “Not that I’ve already attained, or am already perfected...” See, it’s all about maturing in the faith. I haven’t got it all, but I press on. Why? To grow in more of it, “...that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.”

Verse 11, I think is all about this. Paul wanted to get to know the Lord so well in all these means that he might increasingly live a resurrected life in a dead, self-centered world, “if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from this deadness that is all around.”

Verse 12 Paul says, “Not that I fully live that way yet...” Paul says that he doesn’t yet know the Lord well enough that he responds to every situation in this perfect resurrected way. But he keeps pressing on. That’s what I’m aiming at. I want a resurrected life in this dead world. I don’t respond that way. There are some dead responses, he’s saying. I love this humility after he’s walked with the Lord some thirty years, probably at his point.

Philippians 3:13, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended.” I haven’t totally arrived in all God wants to do in my life. But look at this, “but one thing I do.” What’s the one thing he did? I thought he did forty-seven things, this guy. He was a man of a hundred hats. Apostle, part time pastor, part time tent maker, traveler, adventurer in the name of God, evangelist, counselor, disciple maker, leader, equipper. And when things went bad with him and they locked him up—“Fine, I’ll just sit down and write the Bible,” you know! The man did everything. And even the worst moments turned out to be some of the best things he ever did in his life. Right out of prison, the Spirit of God was writing things that still touch our lives today. But when he speaks he says, “One thing I do.” He could boil his whole life down to one issue.

What is it? It is knowing the Lord, getting to know the Lord. “That I may know Him” is pursuing that one great value of life. How did he do it? “...forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

What is the goal that he’s pressing toward? Knowing God. What is the prize that he’s anticipating? It’s all the benefits that continue to accrue and collect from getting to know God. What is the upward call of God in Christ Jesus? The heavenward invitation, “Come get to know Me. Come follow Me.” It’s all about knowing God.

Our counseling should aim in that direction. Knowing Christ makes us more like Christ and we live more like Christ.

There’s another umbrella cliché that comes up here, another one of these sheltering, protecting, sayings that lets humanistic, man-centered, psychological, theoretical thinking influence the life and counsel of the Church. It goes something like this: “People’s problems are all rooted deep in their past. You need to learn to help people go into their feelings and back to their history. Or at least get them to a professional that can root these things out.”

Inward and backward goes the counsel of the world. And it makes such perfect sense. Hey, it’s your life. What’s going on in you? How do you feel? Tell us. Come on, let’s get it at it. And you start to dump it out. And the basic therapeutic response today is, “Oh my goodness, that’s going on in you? Whoa, we better trace back where you’ve been. Find out who or what made you like

that." So in and back runs the therapy of the world. And we've brought it heavy-duty into the Church.

In and back are the two opposite directions of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God, right here in this passage, is revealed as forward and upward. Pressing forward, looking upward. You want to add other verses? Colossians 3:1-3, "Seek things above not the things that are on this earth." Forward and upward, that's where the kingdom of God develops. That's where life grows in Christ. Follow Jesus, looking heavenward for the revelation of Himself, His values, purposes, and resources. Forgetting what lies behind, I press forward for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. That is forward and upward.

Counsel that goes inward and backward is humanistic, man-centered, and self-centered counseling. It doesn't matter if it's done by Christians and called Christian counseling. It's of the world. It's not counseling God's way and there's plenty of it around.

In 2 Corinthians 3:18, there is a similar matter of coming to the Word to behold the glory of the Lord and being transformed into the same image from glory to glory. Getting to know the Lord and being made like the Lord.

Then in 1 John 3:2-3 is the final step in all of that. Someday we'll see Him and we'll be like Him. What will be the dynamic that makes us like Him? "For we shall see Him as He is." The full revelation, the full knowledge and knowing of the Lord will be the final transforming impact upon our lives, and we shall be like Him! But all along the way, we're to be growing in that path, as we get to know Him.

The root problem in people's lives is not that they need to know themselves more and their past better. God can help them forget that and press ahead. The root problem in everyone's life is, I need to know God better. There's no problem I have that won't be dealt with God's way as I get to know God better. Both in what He wants to do and the resources He has to do it. There's no dream, vision, hope or plan that pounds in my heart that can bring glory to God that will get dealt with in a better way than just getting to know God better, confirming what He wants to do, showing me He's the one able to do it in us and through us.

Our last verse in this study, in conclusion is 1 Thessalonians 5:23. Look at this great benedictory prayer. What a great Counseling God's Way prayer for our own lives and each other's and those we counsel. "Now may the God of peace Himself, sanctify you completely...." We're talking about counseling and sanctification. When God counsels He wants to sanctify us, set us part to His glory and use and purpose. Yeah, well how are you going to be made like Christ more and more? Not by grabbing ourselves by the collar and straightening ourselves up. Or grabbing our bootstraps and yanking ourselves up to the heights of heaven. Here's how it happens—by trusting God to do the work in and through us.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; [A prayer that God would do this] and may your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Look at verse 24, you might want to add this, "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it." He's faithful. You put your faith in Him to do this, to carry out the sanctification process, He's faithful. He'll do it. He'll honor your faith. He'll prove Himself trustworthy.

We want to get to know God. Grow to be like Christ, be more godly and walk in more holiness. May God do that to us completely, more and more, day by day. You know, He's faithful. He's reliable to do it if we trust Him to and if we seek Him for it. What a great hope that gives.

Our counseling should be flavored by a message of sanctification. Because not only is the Lord the Counselor, but when He counsels it's for the purpose of discipleship and sanctification. Not "feel-goodism." Not just coping and getting by another day. But rather being changed to be like Christ.

Let's pray together.

*Lord, we thank You for the call of Your Word. It's so heavenly. It turns us toward You and upward and calls us to press on to know You. Counsel us this way as we need it, Lord. And when others come to us for counsel, may we give a discipling, sanctifying word of You and from You that can be used by You and for You, that we'll see lives changed to Your glory. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*