

Counseling God's Way

VI. Counseling Session Guidelines

Lesson 24 - Questions and Final Exhortation

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Matthew 10:8

All right, let's continue to look at Counseling Session Guidelines. We have looked at three so far. We have looked at prayer, listening, number two and then number three, asking the question and praying, “Is this person saved?” I think that is an important question. It keeps the priorities sorted out in the counseling ministry. And the Lord can use us so much in that kind of a situation to let the challenges or opportunities of life be the avenues to lead to the presentation of the Gospel and offering of Christ as Lord and Savior.

Very closely related to that is another question that I believe is Biblically correct to be asking and I have personally developed more and more of a habit in this arena, as the Lord has worked in my life. And that is, even if in sharing with that person we have strong indication they are a disciple of the Lord, there is another question to be asking. Let me put it another way. Maybe you know that person and you are quite certain from long standing relationship that they know the Lord, that they are a disciple of Jesus Christ. Well, here is another question that is very appropriate and fits in the same realm of thinking. As we are listening and praying, praying and listening, and say we are quite certain of their saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ—another question I like to ask while I'm praying and I have put it in these words—Saved, but? Yes, they are saved, however—yes, they are a disciple of the Lord, but are they living as a disciple? Are they following the Lord? Are they pressing on after the Lord? Or are they just coasting or drifting or getting into self? And in this day and age a lot of Christians that are seeking a word of counsel on the formal or informal level are (on their own flesh's inclination as well as the encouragement of many other Christians often) they are very much into their own flesh.

Which reminds me of a comment. Why is it that there are so many of these self-help books, self-help groups and all of that in churches? How is it that in the Christian publishing community there can be tons of books that are self-centered instead of Christ-centered? Well, one reason is there is so much fleshy carnality in the American church and there is an automatic market for it. All this stuff feeds the flesh, appeals to the flesh, entrenches people in the flesh. And often Christians, real disciples in the sense that they do know the Lord and have followed Him some, when their crisis comes, when their problem comes, they are sort of into self. Hey, help me. Protect me. Fulfill me. Actualize me. I will assert me and all of that....

So here is another great question to be asking: “Saved, but? But how are they walking?” Are they pressing on to know the Lord? Are they following hard after the Lord? If they are not, there is the next priority.

The Lord doesn't just want to speak into their perplexity. He doesn't want to just restore a comfort zone. He wants to use whatever they're wrestling with to get them moving on down that path of discipleship. It is just like He wants to use the issues of life to get us on the path of discipleship by coming face to face with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel. So those who have met the Lord, who are drifting or into self or sliding back, He wants to use whatever they are struggling with to let them encounter the Lord again in a fresh new call to move them on down that path of discipleship.

And the Scriptures on that from Luke 9:23, “If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” Verses like that are very appropriate. I've turned often through the years to a verse like that when discipling someone in counseling that I was quite sure was already a believer.

Two other great verses are, Romans 12:1- 2.

...By the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice...*which* is your *only* reasonable service. And not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what that *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Those are great verses to share with a believer who knows the saving, forgiving grace of God, but is not living by the sustaining, liberating, maturing, freeing, transforming grace of God.

How can you tell in listening to a person that you know, most likely, most certainly is a Christian, how can you tell if they are pressing on as a disciple or if they are into self? Well, as I have put it before, if you hear them talking all the time about the unholy trio, the unholy trinity, “me, myself and I,” that is the tip-off number one. “Well, I don’t like this. Well, they’re not treating me right. Well I, I, me, me and mine.” Just on and on and on it is “me, myself and I.” It’s like trumpeting out,” I’m into self.” I am sitting before you, walking according to the flesh. Now counsel me, you know. That’s kind of what is happening.

And often that is the situation. We are all vulnerable to that, being susceptible and temptable. But especially in our day and age and our church culture and just people who live as citizens of our country, there is so much self-ism and me-ism and self-exaltation and self-serving. And it is all sort of given a validation by the ascendancy of the psychological counseling profession. The experts in me-ology, and self-ology. They are experts at it and all the theories are built around self basically and they are very self-serving.

And so, people get a lot of encouragement not only from within but from without. Their own flesh is crying out, take care of me! “Bless me. Protect me. Give me.” And many, sometimes well intended Christians are “amening” them. Yeah, you need to do this for yourself. You have been giving too much attention to your kids and your husband. You need to do this for yourself. And just start gearing you away from the Lord and others into self. Then they come for help and they want you to help them help themselves!

I like to be praying, “Lord, use me to get away from this issue with them that they are harping on, that they want to comfort, protect their own flesh from or in, and help us get right down to discipleship.” Again it is because I found so often that if we even can go beyond the limited issue to the bigger foundational issues, we are helping people not only get through the struggle they are in, but they learn how to walk through and face all kinds of challenges and struggles. And discipleship is what it is all about.

Another unfolding aspect in counseling session is: Early, Appropriate Use of the Word from John 14:16.

Before we read that verse, let me tell you another brief story. One day my buddy Pastor John and I were coming out of a counseling session that I had again invited him to sit in on. And after the folks left the first thing John said to me was, “Bob, you sure get people into the Word of God in a counseling setting a lot faster than I do.” I thought on that just a minute and I said, “John, you know, I get people into the Word a lot quicker than I used to.” And I have seen through the years that there has been a kind of a tightening of the gap from the starting to share together to the time we are in the Word together.

And I’ll tell you, that is what my heart is beating for, praying for, and crying out to God for the most. That is a chance to open the Word of God and directly let the Wonderful Counselor start counseling. I really see that as our primary role in Biblical counseling. It is to be an instrument

through which the Lord can work in such a way that His Word can actually be opened and let Him speak directly right into the situation. That is what I'm always aching for and looking for.

I may have shared before, but years ago when I'm praying and listening, I used to write down a lot of details about it, and not that that is invalid or forbidden, but through the years I have gotten away from that. I noticed people getting kind of edgy, you know. As they are pouring out their heart, you're writing. It is like, “What are you going to do with that? Where's that headed? Into the Sunday bulletin? And as more time went on I just stopped writing. But I did and still do like to have a Bible, a pen and at least a little piece of paper in my Bible or in my pocket. But the only thing I generally write on it anymore is Scripture verses because when I'm listening and praying I'm saying, Lord, what do You want to say to this person? And when the Lord brings to my mind a Scripture passage, I count that a direct answer to prayer. It's like the Lord saying, “Here is what I want to tell them.” And I just write it down. And then when that moment comes, as it so often does, sometimes sooner or sometimes later, when the person says, “What do you think, or what should I do, or does God have a word for me?” Whatever they say, I want to just grab the Bible. Well, let me tell you what I think. What I think is what this verse says. Here is what I think the Lord would want me to do and you to do. Whatever they say when they are looking for help, just turn it right to the Scriptures.

That is the most significant moment, I believe, in the counseling situation. I mean, that is where things, in an amazing way, really start popping and happening. It is because the Word is living and sharp and quick and powerful and used by the Spirit it's as though the Wonderful Counselor Himself is right there just ministering to that person.

The reason I like to use John 14:26, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit....” By the way, that word “Helper” could also be translated Counselor or Comforter. It is one of those two Greek words that can be translated counselor or comforter.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

If we are going to use the Word of God in counseling—which we must if we are going to do it God's way—we've got to be letting the Word be planted in our hearts. I believe it is right to desire an early, appropriate use of the Word of God. I think both of those words are significant, early and appropriate. As early as we can by looking for the opportunity, but also appropriate; not sitting there with our Bible in hand as they come in and we're ready to just jump all over them. Now I am not saying that God would never do that. That may be just what that situation needs. And sometimes in the most unusual ways, a way you would never apply maybe in a thousand other settings, but it can be just what God wants to do there. Early, but appropriate. Early, you are looking for that chance. But being appropriate in that you are not ramming it down their throat. And you have time to show you care. You listen. You want to learn. And you want to pray. But I believe an early, appropriate use of the Word of God is pleasing in the sight of the Lord, to be pressing toward in prayer, in our heart, in our thinking, in our desire.

Now this is an overstatement, but so often I feel like up until that moment, a lot of it is almost like it would be waste. That overstates it. I know God is working between hearts and on hearts and of all that. And I don't want to be misunderstood, but this moment from the Word is so significant, that the other is kind of like, that was just so this can begin to happen. That's how important I think it is.

And again, we want to speak the truth in love. We are not ramming the Word down people’s throats. We are not laying the law on people, unless of course if they are very rebellious we better be ready to lay the law on them. Because the law is for the rebellious and the insubordinate according, to 1Timothy 1:7- 9.

Early, appropriate use of the Word. But if we are going to be used that way, what needs to be happening? We need to be taking the Word into our lives. We need to be letting the Holy Spirit, teach us all these things of the words of the Lord—“He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit is teaching us the Word and then bringing it to our remembrance when it is needed.

Some believers, unnecessarily, sadly, needlessly disqualify themselves from counseling ministry too often, too quick, too soon, because they think they don’t have the memory for it. “I can’t remember all those verses and apply them to all the categories. And you know, that’s too much to remember.” I really don’t believe that the counseling ministry is all about memory. Now if you have been given by God a great memory, praise God, He can use it. But I don’t think in any place in the Word of God are we told that you have to have a great memory to be used in personal ministry.

What we need to do is have a growing relationship with the great God and get into this great Word of His and let it get into us, and then be available. If we are not taking it in, letting Him teach it to us, it’s not there for Him to bring to our remembrance. But He is willing to take the role of teaching and bringing to our remembrance. If we let Him teach the Word to us, really make it important in our lives, then in certain situations the Spirit of the Lord will just bring it to mind. I mean, it’s amazing the way that works. Again, it’s such a living, spiritual dynamic. You don’t want to bring it down to some rote procedure. It’s just God at work. But we want to be putting God’s Word in our heart.

James 1:21, “...meekly receiving the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls.”

And Psalm 119:11, “Your word have a hid in my heart.”

We want to be bringing it in and then the Spirit of God will bring it up at the right moments. It is part of His great ministry to us. We can depend on that, count on that, and rely upon that.

The next issue is Needed Response or Action.

The next unfolding aspect of a counseling situation is watching for needed responses or actions. Some are real obvious like Matthew 5:23-24

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

If we are counseling someone and they are into this great service of God, but they are kind of impeded or bothered or hassled in it by this nagging reminder that they have a brother who rightly has something against them, and they come for our counsel. “Well this is going to be a tough one, you know. We might need a year or so of therapy before we ever get down to the bottom of this.” No, you just tell them, “Hey, shift your attention from that project that service that you’re engaged in, not that it’s wrong. Not that you have to leave it forever. Just focus your attention on

straightening that thing out with your brother. And often in counseling situations the Word has spoken so much into that that we can just be watching for those.

Perhaps in some ways if we are watching, we will maybe helping people in one or two times of counseling them whereby the trend in our culture and in our church today is to stretch everything out and on and on. It's like every issue comes with a guaranteed six month, twelve month, eighteen month, twenty-four months of—well, they don't call it counseling, often it's therapy. But a lot of us can shorten a lot of it probably, just by watching for those things the Lord has spoken right into. And when they share and the Lord has spoken, you can just share with them. Hey, there's no mystery here. You don't need to get into your past. Or you know, maybe something you did to your dog caused this. Or that thing you didn't get when you were five years old for your birthday. Look, you want to serve God but there is this problem. A person has something against you. You can't change it, but you be sure you are not the ongoing cause of whatever remains. They might not receive it. They might not respond. That is fine, then you are free to just press on right back with your service and all.

You know, a man comes in and sits down with you and tells you that he's, his life's just in great turmoil because he's been cheating on his wife for twelve months. And he asks you what he should do. You don't have to say, “Give me two weeks to pray on it and come back. Boy, you have been doing that, how long? You need at least three years of therapy before we can even get into any action steps.” It's not that mysterious. You've been doing what, you scoundrel? God have mercy on you. I think right now would be a time to fall on your face before God. Right now. Right now. The only thing better would have been to do it six months ago. And when you are done you probably ought to go home and do the same before your wife. “What?! She might not respond the way I want her to.” Yeah, but she might respond the way God wants her to. And we'll see how God wants to respond. You know, a kick in the pants or astounding measures of mercy and forgiveness. Yeah, but she might not let me back in the house. She might not want me in her life. Well, you know, she actually has that option before God and she can seek God on that. You can't make it happen one way or the other. Either way, that is where you ought to be. And who knows, she might have mercy on you. She might have mercy on you.

I think God wants us to be watching in counseling situations for things God has spoken right into in His Word. It seems like the whole thing in the counseling field now is to make everything a great mystery. It is like you're hunting for hidden clues. So many issues, God has just spoken on them. People are unaccustomed to speaking straight forward to each other. You know it is hiding and restating and redefining and making less of sin and less of righteousness and more of self. And often in counseling, I believe, the Lord wants us to be alert for needed response and action.

I've been with folks in counseling situations that are amazingly gifted at that. And the Lord has made me much more forthright in counseling ministry on things like that than I was when I started out. I was probably Dr. Mealy-mouth when I started out. Hey, we can work something out on everything. But I have been with some who are just astoundingly gifted at it. Or have learned and matured. And they have been listening to God and they see and they just speak. And in the name of the Lord and by the Spirit of God things begin to change rapidly or at least you know exactly where the issues are. And God can use us that way.

So needed response or action, good to be watching for them. Someone might need to immediately confess or repent or seek forgiveness or offer forgiveness.

Next is Homework. Both, 1 Peter 2:2 and Hebrews 5:13-14, I think make it clear. We are not talking about busy work. Not just something to look like we are attacking this thing or getting at

it. But this is something to take home in the Word to work on before God in prayer and seeking. Particularly if I've been with someone and they have been sharing and pouring out their heart. I've been listening and praying and I have written down five or six passages maybe. And they ask what I think and I begin to share these. And you know, time goes on, you realize or they say they need to go or it just seems like you both wore each other out. You know, there might be two or three or four passages left. If they say, “Can we get together again on this?” I like to say, “Yeah, and why don't you take these and be praying in them. I mean, really consistently seeking God. I think God wants to speak through these passages.” That's what I'm talking about by homework. It is something to take home to help get in the Word to hear from the Lord. Then you get together again and that is what you talk about. “What did the Lord show you in those verses? Hey, let's go over them together.”

1 Peter 2:2, “...As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

The Word of God is pure spiritual milk and often people need to grow up in and grow out of their situations. And the Word of God is there to assist them.

Hebrews 5:13-14,

For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food, meat belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their sense exercised to discern both good and evil.

It is not only the milk of the Word, but the meat of the Word. The meat here especially is shown to be the things about Christ, as our great High Priest. That is real growing up, maturing, let us go on to perfection, Hebrews 6:1 kind of food. Reading the Word to find out who Christ is, what He has done and what He is doing now on our behalf. Letting people drink and chew on the Word of God between times with them.

And then last is Prayer. And that is purposefully a repeat from the first one. That was prayer, Philippians 4:6. The last prayer is from 1 Thessalonians 5:17, “Pray without ceasing.” It certainly fits the counseling ministry to be those who want to pray without ceasing.

Pray before we meet with folks. Pray with them when we are together. Exhort and encourage them to pray. Pray as we depart. And pray for one another while we are apart. I mean, that just fits the Biblical counseling ministry. It keeps our hope resting on the One who is the Counselor.

Now this is not exhaustive, but I really believe that it is, though somewhat brief, it has a significant measure of fullness to it. If we just walk in these things in our counseling ministry the Lord will be adding other unfolding aspects that will become increasingly important in our ministry personally as the years go by. But these are a great place to pray and ask the Lord to build.

Let me share a concluding word or a final exhortation based on some Scriptures that we have looked at. Isaiah 9:6, that wonderful, wonderful passage. “And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor.”

What we have been looking at, throughout this course, is this glorious truth that in the kingdom of God man is not the counselor. God the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit, is our Wonderful Counselor. May that shape our counseling ministries. May it shape our perspective on Biblical

counseling that the Lord is the Counselor. And in light of that, may we be those who respond in a Hebrews 12:2 kind of a way, “Looking unto Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith.” When we need counsel we want to characteristically, habitually be looking to the Lord Jesus Christ and in His Word to counsel us. When others come to us for counsel, we want to increasingly, habitually be pointing them to the Lord. Urging them to look to the Lord and get in the Word. I’ll get in the Word with you. Let’s search out the Lord, the mind of the Lord, the Word of the Lord. Let’s be looking to the Lord.

Oh, how desperately we need that in these days. People in the culture and people in the churches are looking to human experts instead of to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is understandable in the world, but tragic when it comes into the church. This is the Lord God Almighty, Creator of us all and Redeemer of His people. Shouldn’t we look to Him for all of the issues of our lives? I mean, it just makes perfect Biblical sense. There is a lot of nonsense of the flesh in the church world and we don’t want to contribute to it. We even want to be salt and light to see the church move out of it and see people looking unto Jesus. Run with endurance the race that is set before us (Hebrews 12:1).

Boy that creates a lot of counseling ministry right there. The fact that the Christian life is a race that needs to be run with endurance. A lot of us feel worn out a lot of times on the track. And we are turning to one another for help and encouragement. How’re we going to help each other press on down the track? If we don’t encourage and help one another to look unto Jesus, we will stagger on our face and make no progress down the track. Or we will even be tempted to drift off the track. We need to be looking to Jesus who authored faith in us, by presenting Himself to us in the Gospel. Now He wants to perfect our faith, mold it, shape it, build it, deepen it, and strengthen it. How? It is by looking unto Him, getting to know Him, and learning to trust Him. It is letting Him work in our lives as faithful and true and trustworthy, so we will trust Him more. That should be the very shape of our counseling ministry.

Then John 8:31-32,

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’

There is so much out there in the religious church counseling arena with so-called Christian psychological counseling and counseling clinics and trained psychological church staff members. They are referring to the Christian psychiatrist and there is so much that is going on in the church world that is not built on, permeated with, and in-line with the truth. God’s people need to know *the* truth because only *the* truth sets people free. What truth? It is the truth of the Word of God. “If you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth...”

People who live in the Word of God they are really walking a path of discipleship and they get to know the truth of the Word and the truth of the Word liberates their lives from crazy thinking, bondage of bad thinking, bondage of bad talking, bondage of bad behaving, bondage of bad relating, bondage of bad priorities. The truth just sets us free more and more from that stuff.

And there is so much that’s going on in the church world that is not the truth. It’s just full of subtle human compromises, even lies and myths. And may the Lord stir our hearts to have a passion for the truth. We want to be counseled by it and want to counsel with nothing other than the truth of the Word of God.

Now to be doing that we will certainly want to be Bereans like Acts 17:11. Way back down the road I would hear a counseling theory and I'd think, "Oh, sounds pretty good to me. I'll try it or I'll recommend it to someone." Boy, more and more I hear it, I just want to sift it through the tightest sieve of the Word of God. I think that is what Acts 17 is all about. "These [at Berea] were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica..." Boy, you read First and Second Thessalonians, spiritually speaking those were noble-minded people. They received the Word of God for what it is, the Word of God and not the word of man. It began to change their lives. I mean, we are not comparing good and bad here. We are comparing great with greater. Those in Thessalonica they were spiritually noble. But these in Berea were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, "in that they received the word with all readiness..." That is also what they did in Thessalonica. "...and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things are so."

These things called Christian counseling literature, theory, approach, let's see if these things are so! Let's have that kind of a mind. Let's just see if they are so. No one is harmed in that if we do it with the right attitude, only can be help for us all. "Oh, let me tell you this great new idea, this great new theory. Oh, it's just touching lives everywhere." Well, now wait a minute. Is it just getting crowds and filling appointment books, or is it really doing what God wants to do? "Oh, yeah, it's just the greatest." Well, let's hear about it. "Well, it's about getting the other half of your brain to work." Oh wow! The prophets wrote about that numerous times. It's all they could talk about." Let's just see if these things are so.

And as far as the theories and ideas of man, I have become a radical skeptic. You know, prove it to me by the Word of God! Not in a nasty, mean way but very stubborn. Show me in the Word! If it is in there, praise God! If it is not, "get thee behind, Satan." You know, I don't want anything to do with it. In fact, I want to warn against it. I want to be a spiritually noble-minded Berean.

Testimony

I spent too many years as a young believer without this noble mind being even a fleeting thought in my Christian life. I spent too many years, I would say five of the twenty-five that I pastored, I with never an interest in being this noble-minded counselor. In fact, I was very careful to avoid such things. Never inferring that something might be wrong or that someone might wrong or that I could say this is right and that is wrong. "Hey, don't judge. Hey, don't be negative." That's a smokescreen. We don't want to be judgmental. We don't want to let negativism to be our way of life, but we do want to be noble Bereans. As we take in everything that is out there in the church world, and boy there is a lot out there and some of it even the world snickers at and is embarrassed. And the church is just plowing on like, "Well, we've got the answers from Freud and Jung and Maslow and the rest."

Let's search the Scriptures daily. Let's really be in the Word measuring all these counseling ideas to find out whether these things are accurate. And listen, if they were doing that with the apostle Paul and that was noble-minded as he preached the Word, don't you think we ought to be doing it heavy-duty with theoreticians and clinicians and interns and psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and all the other "gists"? Let's just see if this is so.

We need noble-minded Bereans this day. May the Lord make each of us into that kind of counselor. Not just grabbing the kind of, "Hey what's hot, what's popular, and what seems to work or what people are interested in?" Personally, I have no interest in that. I mean, zero anymore. I want to know: does what you are suggesting fit the Word of God? In fact, let's start another way. Let's just find in the Word what people need and then let the theories of man buck up against that.

“And His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor,” that’s kind of the heart of the whole thing. If our heart is set on Him and He is counseling us and we pass it on to others, ultimately we will be counseling God’s way and not man’s way. And I have shared my heart pretty openly. I think we desperately need something more than a counseling revival. We need a spiritual reformation like 400 years ago, to come heavy into the church. God is able, and may we be willing to be used.

Let’s pray together.

Lord, we thank You for giving us these weeks, these hours of study in this course. We thank You for the Word of God and what a perfect text and more than a text. It is a love letter from heaven to our hearts. Lord Jesus, we acknowledge You as our Wonderful Counselor. And we want to be those who are looking to Jesus, pointing people to Jesus as the Wonderful Counselor. Men and women who live by, stand on, and counsel from the truth of the Word of God and are noble Bereans measuring everything out there in the counseling ministry by what the Word of God says. Lord, raise up an army like that throughout the church world. Forgive us for our attraction to the ways of man, our fleshy, self-serving delight to take man’s way and not God’s way. Forgive us for any contribution in that, Lord, and use us now to call the church in Your direction. And just do a wonderful work in these days when so many, many hearts are troubled, burdened and seeking help. May we give them what You have for them and not man. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.