

Hints on effective counseling

Counseling is guiding someone to the truth and the way of wisdom. In a biblical sense, we don't really counsel; rather, we either teach or exhort. If someone does not know how the Word of God applies to their issue, we teach them the Word. If they already know the Word of God as it applies to their issue, we exhort them to act on the Word of God.

1 Thess. 5:14 – *“We urge (exhort) you, brothers, warn (admonish) those who are idle (unruly), encourage (comfort) the timid (feeble-minded), help (support) the weak, be patient with everyone.”*

Exhort: To urge someone to pursue a particular course of conduct (particularly looking to the future). Different people in different contexts and different states of heart require different approaches.

- Those who are unruly (rebellious, unsubmitive) need to be warned (to gently or reprove; to admonish or bring to mind; to alert to danger)

- Those who are feeble minded, faint-hearted (literally, small-souled), discouraged need: Comfort and encouragement (particularly with regard to the past)

- Those who are weak (without strength) need support (to hold oneself opposite to in support of; the picture is of two people carrying a large object)

And, finally, be patient with everyone: if you err, err on the side of mercy!

The point is, we don't counsel all people the same way. We counsel people according to their state of heart and their specific context.

How Jesus dealt with people

John 4:1-26 gives us a little insight on how the Son of God guided people to truth.

John 4:7 – *Ask revealing, penetrating questions* (e.g. Matt. 21:23-27; Matt. 15:1-3).
Some questions Jesus asked:

- Do you want to be whole?
- Why do you entertain evil in your hearts?
- Who do men say that I am?
- Who do *you* say that I am?
- Do you believe that I am able to do this?

- Haven't you read what the scriptures say?
- What do you think?
- Could you not watch with me one hour?
- Are you able to drink the cup which I drink?

These questions, for the most part, were designed to expose the heart and get to the root of the problem. There are surface problems and there are root problems.

Some questions I have found effective:

- Can you tell me about your conversion experience? (Don't take it for granted)
- Can you tell me the problem in one sentence?
- Is there any secret sin that you are involved in that you refuse to repent from?
- Do you want to be free from what binds you?
- What is your plan? (Since God always makes a way of escape, when you are tempted again, what will you do to pro-actively resist the temptation?)
- In what areas are you giving yourself permission to disobey God?
- Is there something you have sown in the past from which you are reaping in this situation? How can you make amends or change this now?
- What are you doing on a daily basis to maintain your walk with God?
- Before God, are you walking in honesty and integrity in all your dealings?
- Are you being responsible for the Word of God that you know? Are you focusing on others who may be disregarding their responsibility?

Some questions I ask myself about the person:

- Is there any fear of God in this person, especially in regards to the sin that is besetting them? Any humility?
- Are they genuine about wanting help?
- Who is their spiritual covering? Are they submitted or rebellious?
- In what areas have they resisted God's grace?

John 4: 10-13 - *Lead them to understand that their answer is Jesus*

Generally, people are looking to other things besides Jesus (heart idols) to meet their needs of security, significance, provision, love. Many have gotten worldly counsel that is contrary to the Word of God.

2 Peter 1:2-4 - May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Colossians 3:2-3 - Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Matthew 6:33 - *But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.*

John 4:16 – *Deal with specific sin issues.* Sin is the problem. The only answer is to repent, turn from sin and turn to God's way.

Genesis 3 - Curse, pain, thorns. thistles. sweat and death are the fruit of sin.

Hebrews 12:1-2 - *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

John 4:17-18 – *Rely on the Holy Spirit*

Don't forget that the Holy Spirit is there to give you discernment, wisdom, counsel, the word of knowledge and word of wisdom

Isaiah 11:1-4 - *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth*

John 4:19-24 – *When they try to sidetrack, bring them back to Jesus*

Other considerations:

- There are two sides to every story. Don't take up someone else's offenses (Ps. 15:3). As much as possible, stay neutral
- Avoid counseling when a person is emotional. There is a time to listen and a time to counsel
- The one with the problem is usually the key to the solution. Draw them back to their responsibilities. Don't let them focus on other's wrongs.
- Pray about specific needs. Focus on the true problems.
- Reclaim spiritual ground they have given to the enemy
- Rely on the Holy Spirit in the moment.
- Speak the truth in love
- Pay attention to the spirit of the person, not just the facts
- Deal with roots – these are usually pride, unforgiveness, fear, moral impurity, greed.
- Learn to be a good listener. Discern without judging. Sometimes people are not aware of hidden motives causing their problems.

- Are they deceived (ignorant or unaware) or are they walking in wickedness (intentional evil)?
- Draw people out of their problem to see God's overall perspective or plan
- Do not counsel the opposite gender without clear guidelines
- Watch for wrong emotional attachments to you.
- Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know. Let's pray together and trust God for guidance."
- Consider practical issues (Remember the Elijah story – God's prescription was two good meals, two good naps, one short term goal, one perspective adjustment)
- Learn to recognize the cross in people's lives

Overall principles:

- 1) What is God doing here?
- 2) Balance scriptural principles and Spirit guidance (Rely on the "Counselor" to speak truth)
- 3) Believe in the power of the cross to meet every need of fallen man, spirit, soul and body
- 4) Fill yourself with the Word of God – this is the sword that the Spirit uses when you need wisdom