

BIBLICAL COUNSELING ON THE PASTORAL AND LAY LEVEL

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BIBLICAL COUNSELING ON THE PASTORAL AND LAY LEVEL

INTRODUCTION

There are many who think of COUNSELING only on the professional level and who feel that this is something beyond the abilities of ordinary Christians. In fact, they might even feel that untrained Christians who seek to get into the area of counseling might do more harm than good and that we who are untrained should stay out of this area altogether.

Therefore, such a view might lead one to THE EXTREME of not feeling any personal responsibility whatsoever to reach out to others or to help them with their personal needs through our encouragement and counsel.

While it is true that there are problems in the lives of people that can be better handled by professionals who are trained in dealing with such problems, there are MANY MINISTRIES in this area that can be dealt with by spiritual Christians who have a love and concern for others and believe that God wants them to invest their lives in this way.

It is therefore important for most pastors and lay people to study counseling from a LAY STANDPOINT rather than just from a professional standpoint. Though we are not professionals, God desires to take the talents and abilities He has given us and develop them for reaching and serving others. If these are fully dedicated to Him, there are no limits to what He can accomplish through this use of our lives.

UNDERSTANDING THE CORRECT SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO LAY COUNSELING

Non-Biblical Approaches In Lay Counseling

The Bases for Non-Biblical Approaches

Their emphasis upon HUMAN REASONING

1. With no knowledge of Scriptures and its spiritual answers to the problems they are dealing with, and with no help from the Holy Spirit in giving spiritual wisdom to them, the non-Christian counselors have to resort to HUMAN REASONING.

2. This dependence upon HUMAN REASONING limits their ability to clearly understand the true nature of the problems they are attempting to deal with and to find permanent answers.

Their rejection of the need for Divine help in their counseling.

1. This leads them to the conviction that they alone can solve the problems of the ones they are counseling.
2. Therefore, the people they deal with also need no Divine help

Their rejection of the need of the ones they are counseling to accept guilt and blame for bad decisions and actions in their lives

1. Moral standards become vague and not very relative in much of their counseling and they hesitate to “condemn and judge” those with problems.
2. Bad actions and decisions are often justified by them, with others often being blamed for these problems, so that the personal responsibility of the person being counseled is minimized.
3. Since they have no fixed or authoritative moral standards, those they counsel have no strong obligation to really settle their problems or to correct bad decisions and actions.
4. This approach permits the person being counseled to set his own standards and to pursue his own course as long as it satisfies him and deals with any anxiety he might feel about his actions and decisions.

Their rejection of any final judgment or consequences for actions.

1. On the human level, of course, they accept that there will be judgment and consequences in society and before civil authorities for bad actions and decisions that offend and hurt others or break laws, but, even on this level, the non-Christian counselor might be willing to testify in court that the person he counseled was innocent in such matters because of psychological or personal problems in his life which made him incapable of doing right or obeying the law.

2. On the Divine level, they do not believe in any final judgment or penalty by God for sin in their lives. This means that if the person being counseled can deal with his problems on the human level he need not worry about anything beyond this. This not only leaves the person uncertain about the true condition of his life, it also gives him a false hope concerning his final meeting with God.

The Failure Of Non-Biblical Approaches

1. They leave the person being counseled with the same inner conviction of guilt and unresolved problems.
 - a. Though the person might feel some temporary assurance and relief, the basic problems have never been dealt with and the sense of guilt and responsibility will always be in his life underneath the surface. He may ignore it for the time, but it will still be there as a problem in his life.
 - b. Unless he completely hardens his heart and life, sooner or later the sense of guilt and responsibility will come to the surface and the problem will be greater than it was before.
2. They have nothing to offer in the way of lasting solutions and the clearing of the person's conscience both before God and man so that he is completely free from the problem that brought him to the counselor.
3. The person being counseled is being deceived by such an approach the failure of this approach could lead him to conclude that he can never trust anyone for help and to reject all means of help.

THE BASICS OF A BIBLICAL APPROACH IN LAY COUNSELING

1. **The involvement of the Christian counselor in the lives of the ones he counsels with heart concern and a sense of spiritual responsibility for finding lasting spiritual solutions to the problems with which he deals.**
 - a. For the Christian counselor, this is a necessity. SEE: Philippians 2:3, 4. If this is not present the help that is given will seem distant

- b. and irrelevant to the one being counseled and the person will feel that he might as well turn to a non-Christian counselor.
- c. The person being counseled needs to see that the person doing the counseling is serious about the role he is assuming and will stand with the person in need throughout the process.

2. Accepting the absolute authority of Scriptures in all matters of life.

- a. This gives the Christian counselor a firm and reliable foundation upon which he himself can stand and upon which he can base all his advice and counsel with others.
- b. This requires that the Christian counselor himself must fully believe in the Scriptures he is using, must have those as the foundation of his own life and must have absolute confidence that they will give the person being counseled the only possible answers to his needs and problems.
- c. If the Christian counselor himself has any doubts about the authority and place of the Scriptures in his counseling of others, these doubts will undermine everything he says and will even open the possibility that he might compromise their teaching with a non-Scriptural approach.

3. Correctly understanding and using the Scriptures in their application to the problems with which he is dealing.

- a. It is unfortunately true that some Christians use the Scriptures in dishonest ways to prove some point they are trying to make or to reach some conclusion to a problem for which they have not found a clear answer or which perplexes them.
- b. If we are willing to sincerely study the Scriptures and find their correct applications to life and problems, the Scriptures, when correctly and honestly used, have the answers to all problems and needs.

4. While using the Scriptures with compassion and love, refusing to compromise the teaching of Scriptures in reaching solutions to problems being dealt with.

- a. The answers to some problems demand solutions which are both difficult for the counselor to state and for the person being

counseled to accept, but they must be presented without compromise.

- b. The Christian counselor must recognize that anything less than the truth will not really help the person find the real solutions.
- c. Approaching the person with love and compassion will help the person to accept the truth more readily.

5. Making clear the importance of the difference between right and wrong responses to the Scriptural teaching concerning the problems being dealt with and the consequences of each response.

- a. The Christian counselor must recognize that the person being counseled may neither be happy with nor accept the Scriptural solutions to his needs and problems. He cannot be forced to do what he is supposed to do to clear them up.
- b. From the beginning of the counseling process, it is necessary to show the one being counseled the clear choices, either good or bad; he has before him and the consequences of each. This advice must be given as a clear warning to him so that there is no misunderstanding.
- c. If the person being counseled makes the wrong choices, rejecting the clear teaching of the Scriptures, it is possible that he will cut off all relations with the Christian counselor. This possibility must be accepted by the counselor even though it is regrettable.

6. Depending on the help of the Holy Spirit in giving both wisdom to us as the counselors and also in penetrating the hearts of the ones with whom we are dealing.

- a. The teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (SEE: I Corinthians 2) is one of the keys to successful counseling by Christians. In our own wisdom, we are no better than the unsaved man in our counseling. In the Holy Spirit's work, He instructs and guides us both in understanding the needs and problems of the ones we are seeking to help and in finding Scriptural answers to these needs and problems.
- b. We also need His help in penetrating the hearts of those with whom we are dealing. No matter what we tell them, we cannot force them to either acknowledge their needs or to act in Scriptural ways. In

John 16:7-11, the Lord told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would be the means of seeing men come to the conviction of sin and repentance and true faith in Him. This truth can also be applied to the counseling we do.

- c. This penetrating work of the Holy Spirit will not guarantee that they will respond to Him, but it will guarantee that they will clearly understand the choices and decisions they must make and their hearts will be touched to do something about them.
- d. His work in giving us understanding and also penetrating their hearts with Truth and conviction will also open the way for us to deal further with them. He will give them no peace of heart until they settle these needs by acting on Biblical solutions.
- e. His work in continuing to speak to their hearts even long after our counseling efforts with them have ended is also important for the Christian counselor to recognize. Even when much time has passed or the counselor is separated from them by distance, the work of the Holy Spirit will continue and will bear possible fruit in their lives. Many counselors note the marked change in attitudes and approaches of people who had previously been stubborn and rebellious against any Scriptural approach to their problems and recognize that this change did not come from any influence which they themselves had had in the lives of those they helped.

DEALING WITH THE PROBLEMS IN LAY COUNSELING

Facing The Responsibilities of the Counselor In Reaching The Deep Needs Of Other People.

Dealing Spiritually With the Problems in the Counselor's Own Life.

1. Though some seem to teach only a rosy picture of the Christian life, the reality is that all Christians have problems. This may be true in special ways for lay people in their own lives. They must deal with these.
2. It is right before God that we first seek to meet these deepest needs and problems in our own lives. We recognize that one of the primary problems we face in our lives is that of being so self-centered that we will never be able to really be used by God in reaching others. We thus face the danger that this problem of self-centeredness will characterize our lives as we live

in the world and will even destroy any incentive we might have to reach beyond ourselves to others.

3. If this and other problems in our own lives are either too great or we are unwilling to resolve them, it may mean that we not yet ready to counsel others. We would only be a poor testimony to them. It may even mean that, in the eyes of God, we are disqualified from having a ministry in the lives of others as long as these problems are not dealt with and settled.
4. Even if we might feel we are not ready to minister in counseling, this does not take away from our responsibility to seek to love and care for others in our daily lives.

Dealing Spiritually With The Needs of Others

1. The difference between Christians and non-Christians is that the Christian has both the command from God and the spiritual incentive to reach out to others. It is clear from the Scriptures that failure to have a love and concern for others and to be willing to reach out to them with all that we have and are able to do for them would be a sin against God. SEE: John 13; Philippians 2:1-5
2. This reaching out includes not only the sharing of the Gospel with the lost, but also reaching out to others in the Body of Christ who have needs of every kind.
3. These needs in others include both their material needs and also their spiritual and personal needs and problems.
4. Though we cannot make their decisions for them, God uses the Christian to call their attention both to the true nature of their needs and God's answers to them. He also uses our sympathetic concern to show them that they do not stand alone and that we are ready at any time to help them.

Recognizing The Nature of the Problems and Needs In Others

1. In a school setting, there will be countless numbers of students who feel rejected by others, who have home and family problems, who are lacking in academic ability or who have few obvious talents in any area that would permit them to compete or to reach the levels of their fellow students..
2. On the adult level, there are family problems, financial problems, rejection by others, lower positions in life as compared with others and other personal, spiritual and psychological problems.

3. These needs and problems need not dismay us. Rather, we need the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to both give us wisdom and help.

Finding the Balance Between Meeting Personal Needs And Reaching Out To The Needs Of Others

1. There are many REASONS why we do not reach out to others with our lives. Among them are: lack of any love and concern for others, lack of time and the opportunity it gives us to devote our entire lives to our own concerns, activities and needs, the concerns we have only for friends who are most important in our lives and a genuine feeling that some people are beneath us in their status in life and therefore their needs and problems not our concern.
2. Assuming that we are genuine Christians and that we are spiritual enough to be responsive to God's desires for our lives, there still must be a willingness in our hearts to take every spiritual step He wants us to take to be prepared and used.
3. We need to EXAMINE every excuse we use to not reach out to others and to discover the real reasons why we are not using our lives in ways God would want us to serve others.
4. We need to BROADEN the scope of our concerns to include those of fellow students/fellow workers/neighbors of any background, level of attainment in life in popularity and achievements or personal appeal to us. This would make us open both to the needs and problems of all we come in contact with and also help us to see our proper role in life as Christians. While there might be many needs and problems we are not capable of dealing with, it at least gives us the broad concern we need.
5. We need to RECOGNIZE the abilities and talents God has given us to help meet the needs of others, including both our strong points and our weaknesses, seek wisdom from God in how these might best be used to help others and determine to use these to the fullest for God.
6. We need to DEDICATE all we have and are to the Lord and let Him lead us in the best use of our lives with others.

Some of the Needs and Problems Students and Lay People Can Help Meet In the Lives of Both Christians And Non-Christians

Some of those God wants us to reach simply need friends.

1. It is true both for Christians and non-Christians that there are great numbers of people who have no close friends at all.
2. Sometimes, this may be their own fault because they prefer to live their lives alone and reject friendship with others. Other times, however, it may be due to the fact that they are not accepted by others and are rejected by others as friends.
3. We can both point to the Lord as their constant friend and companion and also sincerely offer our own friendship to them. This will help them to understand that God has not abandoned them and that, on the human level, there is at least one friend they can look to for help and encouragement.
4. This approach is the right spiritual one to make, but it also means that we accompany this approach with dedicated attention to our responsibilities as their new advisor and friend.

Some of them have home and family problems that burden them.

1. These may include some form of abuse at home, or an oppressive attitude on the part of their parents, or problems with some of their brothers and sisters or open persecution at home because of their faith in the Lord.
2. We may not be capable as students and lay people of meeting some of these home and family needs, but we can be used by God to give them the daily encouragement and support they need to cope with them.
3. We may also be used by God to get them other forms of help they need to deal with these problems as we show them their need of such help and stand with them in seeking it.
4. We can also be used in the follow up to the help they find as we see that some of their problems are not yet resolved or that other home and family problems have arisen.

Some of them have deep fears and worries that plague them daily.

1. Some of these may only be in their own imaginations and we can show them that they are without any real foundation in their lives and they need not have these worries and fears. Since the presence of such worries and fears can bring defeat, they can pray to God about them and have Him give victory over them.
2. Some of these may be real fears and we can help show them the answers to some of them by examining these fears and worries with them and giving suggestions for dealing with them.
3. Some of them may be due to worldly habits they have, friends they have who deal with evil things, the influence of television and other forms of entertainment or even the lack of control in their thought life. There can be no peace until these are taken care of.
4. In all of them, we can show them there will always be something in their lives which could give reason for worries and fears but that God's Himself also has the answers to the problem of worries and fears and wants to deal with this need in their lives. SEE: Philippians 4:6, 7.
5. If there are genuine psychological problems in their lives, we can refer them to those better qualified than ourselves while standing with them with encouragement and prayer.

Some of them may have deep feelings of inferiority and inadequacy

1. These feelings may be due to obvious and real lacks of talents and abilities in their lives, or to the attitudes of others toward them in degrading and making fun of them or to the constant criticisms they hear from loved ones, teachers, or fellow-workers.
2. While we cannot make up for real lacks or inadequacies in their lives, we can encourage and strengthen them by reminding them of their value and worth both before God and others.
3. We need to personalize this evaluation of their value and worth before God and others by showing them that we ourselves deeply admire and appreciate them and have no doubts about who and what God has made them to be. We also do not compare them badly or unfairly with others in our own thinking. We express our confidence that God has a wonderful plan for their lives and that we stand ready to help them find that plan.

4. We can also encourage them to use the gifts and talents they do have to do everything God wants them to do with their lives and not to feel that they have to compete with others.
5. We can share with them the experience of Paul, who, in II Corinthians, often expressed his feeling of inferiority in comparison with others. Even still, God gave him a very high calling and greatly used and blest him in his calling as an apostle and in his missionary labors.
6. We must avoid making false promises to them about what God will do for them in making up for things they feel make them inferior or inadequate. We cannot promise them that God will radically change who they are, but we can promise them that, if they are willing to completely submit themselves to the Lord, He will bless and use them in the way He has made them.

Some of them may have problems of sin in their lives needing attention and spiritual solutions..

1. As friends, we can lovingly point out these areas of sin and spiritually help them deal with them. Proverbs 27:6 teaches the value of help when it comes from a friend even though the advice a friend might give might be hard for a person to accept..
2. We can also assure them that when there has been true repentance for their sin and the establishing of a right relationship with God that God will truly forgive them and restore the fellowship they have lost with Him.
3. We can also point them to the spiritual means God has given them for avoiding these sins in the future and the spiritual steps they will need to take to protect themselves against the temptations that led to those sins.

Some of them may be overwhelmed by the ordinary stresses of life.

1. We can point out Paul's problem with the stresses of life and how he came in desperation to God. Though God did not take away the thing that especially troubled him, God did assure Him of the sufficiency His GRACE to take him through that stress. SEE: II Cor.12:1-8, 9-11.
2. We can give advice concerning eliminating unnecessary duties and activities in their lives which not only are unnecessary but which also add to the stress they feel. Sometimes people add these unnecessary tasks and activities without realizing how they are affecting them. Once these

unnecessary things are eliminated, much of their stress will also disappear.

3. Sometimes they may even need to change jobs if those in charge of them are simply demanding too much of them and there will never be relief from the things that overwhelm them. Changing jobs may mean some sacrifice as far as finances and position in life are concerned, but it will save them from needless breakdown in their health.
4. From a spiritual standpoint, they need to realize that some things will never change in life and that it is important that they have to have the right ATTITUDE toward God and the things that He permits to happen to them in life.
 - a. This is best illustrated in the life of Paul when he was in a prison cell in Rome and some of the preachers were preaching against him at the very time when he needed their loving encouragement in those difficult circumstances. SEE:: Philippians 1:15-18, where Paul's attitude was still one of not only REJOICING but also of SEEKING NEW OPPORTUNITIES to witness and encourage others in the midst of those prison experiences.
 - b. We see this positive and victorious attitude again in Philippians 4:11-13 where Paul, in the midst of these difficult circumstances, testifies to his CONTENTMENT in every possible circumstance.

Some may have problems they were born with

1. Some of these problems may be deformities, learning difficulties, inherited diseases or even mental illnesses.
2. While we are not qualified to deal with mental illnesses, we can be a true friend to those born with such problems, show them love and compassion and help them to realize that God can still bless and use them in spite of these problems. There are many examples we can use of those who have, in spite of such problems, gone on to be greatly used by God.
3. In reaching out to them, we may even be able to get them the help they need to overcome some of them. This shows them that we really care and are standing with them as they face the presence of these problems in their lives.
4. We also are encouraging them with their worth before God and the fact that God is able to help them to go on in life with the presence of these problems still present in their lives.

Some may have academic problems or other school problems.

1. Some of these problems may not be their fault, such as problems with teachers who have bad attitudes toward their students, lack of compassion for the needs of their students or manifest other poor teaching approaches. Other problems may include absences from classes caused by sickness or home difficulties or being accused of things in which they were innocent.
2. There is also the possibility that a solution cannot be found to the problem of unjust or unfair treatment and they may have to accept the situation as it is. SEE: Romans 12:17-20. God is either able to change the attitudes and behavior of the ones who have caused the problem or else give the ones suffering from them the spiritual grace to go through with them without bitterness or anger. SEE: Philippians 1:14-18.
3. If it seems wise and necessary, we can offer to go with them to school authorities to seek some change in their situation, but we should not promise them that the authorities will agree or that their situation will change for the better.
4. Many problems, however, are their own fault and they may have been unwilling to admit their fault and make things right with teachers and school authorities.
 - a. Their problem may be that they either have difficulty in accepting the authority of those over them or unwillingness to submit to the rules that are necessary for the orderly management of the school they attend. They may also lack the respect God expects them to have for those in authority. SEE: Romans 13:1-7.
 - b. They need to face their responsibilities before God and man and deal with the ways in which they need to admit their wrong and change their attitudes and behavior.
 - c. This also means that they have to accept the consequences for their actions if they are in the wrong even though these consequences may be severe, may be ones which will greatly disturb them and may even affect their relations with friends and loved ones.
 - d. In the end, being right with God and others is the most important thing, and they must choose to follow Him in this attitude and v submission rather than to go their own way. We should not compromise with them on facing this truth.

TYPICAL MAJOR SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS WHICH HAVE TO BE DEALT WITH IN LAY COUNSELING

Why Did God Make Me Like This With These Weaknesses?

1. We note that Paul had the same problem in II Corinthians 12:8-11 and may have asked somewhat the same question of God. God's answer was that He was AWARE of the embarrassing weakness/illness/whatever Paul had and would give him the strength to live with it and to go through life with victory.
2. We cannot always answer WHY God acts like He does. In the Gospel of John, chapter 9, vs.3, Jesus answered the Pharisees that a man had been born blind since birth "that the works of God should be made manifest in him."
3. It may therefore be true that God has some great purpose for the one who has problems and weaknesses in the way God has made him and he should be encouraged to think in these terms. Rather than having bitterness over the matter, he should accept the way he is made and see how God can use him.

If God Loves Me, Why Did He Permit These Terrible Circumstances To Come Into My Life?

1. We need to assure them that God always loves us and deeply cares for us no matter what situation He permits to come into our lives. This is true even if that situation causes us fear and uncertainty.
2. In Hebrews 12:5-12, God explains why, in His deep love for us as His children, He permits various things to happen to us and how these things can be used in our lives to help us grow closer to Him and follow Him more devotedly IF we are willing to submit.
3. Our goal, in counseling a person with such a question, is to not only reassure them of God's great love for them as one of His children but also to show them the importance of learning from what they are going through and profiting from it spiritually.
4. We also accept that, when God permits certain things to happen in our lives, He may be trying to "get our attention" concerning some spiritual need in our lives which we have never recognized. He may also be using us in our difficulty as an example to others of the way God brings

Why Did God Not Answer My Prayers By Doing What I Asked Him To Do Concerning My Needs?

1. There are those who have given up prayer because God did not answer according to their DESIRE in their praying. They have concluded that God did not hear them, did not keep His promises concerning His answers to their prayers and therefore prayer must be worthless.
2. The important thing for Christians to realize and accept concerning prayer is that God always works for our good and this includes the WAYS He chooses to answer our prayers. Many times the things we pray for are not for our spiritual good and God will never answer such prayers in the way we want.

NOTE: The example of a child who always wants to eat candy and who even begs and cries for it.

3. We are to counsel such people that they NEED to pray but that that they are to trust God to answer their prayers in ways that will most bring glory to Himself and will work for their own good. Good results can come from their difficult circumstances if they are willing to trust God for that.

NOTE: The example of Jim Elliot and the five young men who died in 1956, and the example of the Burnhams who were kidnapped and mistreated in the Philippines.

Why Do I Have More Problems Than Other People?

1. Psalm 73:1-14 is an example of a man who was asking this very question. In the rest of the Psalm God gives him the answer. In His answer, God shows him that God has enriched his life in ways that are not only far beyond what others have found but which also more than make up for all that others enjoyed and he did not.
2. In counseling such a person, we need to focus his attention on THE TRUE DESIRES of his life. Is the material prosperity and success of the unsaved man his real desire or is he looking for a life focused on God which may not enjoy all the successes, material benefits and good health of the unsaved man but which results in the blessing and favor of God???

3. His ANSWER to this question will either lead him to more despair and bitterness OR it will give him the proper way to understand the spiritual disparity between what he enjoys and has in life in his relationship with the Lord and what others have and enjoy. WRONG DESIRES will not bring help!

How Can I Go On Living My Life With The Presence Of These Problems And With No Solution Or Release From Them In Sight?

1. JOB felt this way when God permitted him to be afflicted and then seemed to ignore JOB'S suffering. As you read the Book of Job, you can see his total despair and even his wish that God would end his life. Elijah also felt this way in I Kings 19 when threatened by the evil king. He had to flee for his life.
2. In counseling such a person:
 - a. This could be a potentially dangerous situation, for sometimes depressed people even consider suicide.
 - b. It is important in your approach that such a person knows how deeply you care and are sympathetic to what they are experiencing and that you are also standing with them as a friend and they can come to you at any time.
3. You encourage such a one with the fact that God will not always take away the "mountains of life", which these problems of the one you are counseling represent, BUT HIS PRESENCE WILL ALWAYS BE WITH US.
4. You also recognize that, if the person is too deep in despair and depression over this, you may need to refer such a one to a professional counselor. In such a case, it may be dangerous if there is too much delay in helping them to find professional counseling.

Why Have So Many Christians I Know Been So Uncaring And Distant From Me When They Know That I Need Their Help And Encouragement?

1. While it is true that some Christians are so self-centered that they have little concern for others, this cannot be said for all Christians. It is fair to say that most Christians have a genuine concern for others and a deep sympathy for the needs and problems others experience.

2. We counsel them that many Christians sincerely feel that they care for others but don't feel that they have the answers that are needed and they therefore don't feel capable of reaching out to others as they should.
3. While we recognize that some Christians lack such concern, we also point out that many of those who don't reach out to others as they should have simply never been challenged or instructed in this area of life.
4. We make it clear that we ourselves are completely available to help them and will do anything we can to meet their needs. Just because we cannot solve their problem, we are still their friend, and will stand with them always.

Is it Really Worth it to be a Christian? When I Was Unsaved, I Did Not Have So Many Problems in My Life

1. We cannot deny that Christians do have problems and needs in their lives, and that sometimes these problems and needs seem to be greater than they experienced when they were unsaved.

1.

SEE: Acts 4:23-41; II Corinthians 3:8-10; II Corinthians 11:23-32.

2. We counsel them, however, that the VALUE of being a Christian goes far beyond just the problems and needs of this life. This VALUE, in fact problems and needs we experience seem small in comparison.

- a. Their salvation and all that it offers is the greatest evidence of the VALUE of being a Christian.

SEE: Romans 5:1-21; Ephesians 1:3-14

- b. The constant presence and help of God in their lives as a Christians and the presence of His Holy Spirit in their lives, with all that He does for them also makes it absolutely "worth it" to be a Christian.

SEE: John 14-16; Romans 8; Galatians 5:16-6:26; Ephesians 4-6.

- c. Their hope for eternity in having a home in heaven when they die and the future hope of the resurrection of the dead at the coming of Christ also emphasizes the supreme VALUE of being a Christian.

SEE: I Corinthians 15; II Corinthians 5:1-8; I Thessalonians 4:13-18.

- d. Their choice by God to have the privilege of manifesting the Lord in their lives and sharing Him with others also emphasizes the VALUE of being a Christian.

SEE: John 15:16; II Corinthians 4:1-7; 5:14, 15; Galatians 1:15, 16; Philippians 1:20, 21.

3. We urge them to be thankful to the Lord for all they have and are as Christians rather than approaching Him with a negative complaining spirit. This will help them change their attitude toward these needs and problems, will give them a joyful positive spirit and will strengthen their faith and walk with the Lord.

SEE: Philippians 1:14-18; 4:10-13.

4. We encourage them to discipline themselves in the future to think in spiritual terms when they are faced with their problems and needs.

SEE: Philippians 4:8.

5. As was true with others who had problems and needs, we are to be careful not to make wrong promises to them concerning the future. The problems which have caused them to doubt and complain may not only continue but they may also increase. Their relationship with Him and the daily Grace and strength He supplies by His Spirit will be more than enough.

SEE: II Corinthians 12:7-10.

PREPARATION FOR SERVING AS LAY COUNSELORS

Learning All We Can About Counseling and Reaching Out to Others.

1. We can find books concerning counseling on the student and lay level that will help us correctly understand how we can best be prepared to reach out with our lives to others. We can also join classes taught in our own local church or in other churches that will help us gain more insight into how God can help us with this ministry and the approaches and methods we will need to use.
2. We can also prepare ourselves by observing other Christians as they are used by God to reach out to others. This does not mean that we will exactly copy their methods and approaches to people, but the Lord will

use them to help us form the methods and approaches He wants us to use with the gifts and abilities He has given us.

3. We can also learn to rely more on the wisdom the Holy Spirit gives us in dealing with the problems and needs in our own lives and in helping others with their problems and needs.
4. We also need to learn to pray more for each individual we deal with and the problems and needs they have, asking for God Himself to intervene in their lives. Prayer will not take the place of our own dedicated efforts and commitment to helping them, but it will bring the aid of God Himself to add to whatever help we give them. SEE: II Corinthians 6:1.
5. We can also learn from our successes and failures in dealing with others. Sometimes we are tempted to be discouraged when we have tried and failed or when things did not go as we expected them to. To the contrary, we can learn from these failures and apply what we learn to any further counseling we do.

Having a Heart For Helping Others And Being Available When They Need Help.

1. It is possible that even many professional counselors who have this as their life work have no real heart feeling or concern for the ones they deal with, and their approach is strictly professional. Counseling is simply their career and the source of their livelihood. How the person feels or what happens to the person after the counseling is finished is not their primary concern.
2. Without this heart approach, the ministry of reaching out with our encouragement, advice and counsel becomes shallow and hypocritical, and the people we are seeking to reach can sense this.
3. This heart approach cannot come simply from the knowledge that reaching out to others is what Christians need to do and a feeling of obligation to do it. It can only come from a spiritual walk with the Lord and the work of the Lord in our lives. SEE: Ephesians 4:30-5:2. The most effective counselor, therefore, is a truly spiritual one.
4. Therefore, this heart approach can only come from God through the work of His Holy Spirit in our lives. We recognize throughout our lives that that God is continually molding and shaping our lives to “conform to His image” and that there is never a time when we will be perfect and without

5. We need to constantly guard ourselves that we never lose this heart approach. It is possible to start out well in counseling, but later to become hardened in the process after we have dealt with many people so that we lose the heart intensity that we had in the beginning.

Knowing the Spiritual Approach God Would Want Us to Take In Counseling And Being Familiar With Scriptures That Would Apply To Various Kinds Of Advice We Might Need to Give

1. Although we may not be professionally trained, we still need some of the basic knowledge about the problems of life, a true Christian approach to them and what the Scriptures might have to say about them.
2. Even without taking formal courses in these matters, the spiritual Christian through personal reading, dedicated Bible study, watching the help that others give as they counsel and encourage those in need and the help of the Holy Spirit in his life can qualify to work on the most basic levels with others. God will honor his heart desire and give the wisdom he needs.
3. These basic preparations he makes for this lay ministry for the Lord will also show the lay counselor the right approaches with others without compromising or ignoring the spiritual teachings of the Word of God.

Being A Spiritual Example To The Ones Being Counseled.

1. In order to do counseling, the person we are seeking to help must have respect for us in order for them to be willing to respond to the advice and counsel we give them. Without this respect, they might even be tempted to turn completely away from any Christians who might seek to help them as they conclude that our poor example is all they can expect from Christians.
2. Being a spiritual example to them includes the genuine spirituality of our own lives, the way we live, the way we treat others, the concern they have observed in us for others and how we ourselves have handled the problems we have faced..

3. Sometimes we will fail in our Christian walk before others. We need to acknowledge this before God and be restored again to the spiritual position we need to maintain before others.

Being The Right Person In The Right Situation

1. In many cases it is both unwise and inappropriate for persons of the opposite sex to deal with a person, and that it would be better, even if the person is insistent about talking with a particular person, for the person in need to be referred to another person or for the counseling to be done only in the presence of a third party.
2. This warning could also apply even to a pastor or to someone else who is highly trained in counseling.
3. The reason for such caution, is that there is always the possibility that the person seeking counsel might come to someone of the opposite sex for the wrong reasons or motives because of personal attraction to that person, and that such a time of counseling would be more of a temptation than a help.
4. Even when the counseling is being done in situations where someone of the opposite sex is the appropriate person to be used in doing the counseling, it must be done in the right SITUATION for counseling.
 - a. Many pastors, for instance, prefer that their wives be with them when they counsel a female member or interested person. They would also never even ride alone with women, other than their wives in a car. They also prefer to only counsel if there is a window in the door to their office so that there would never be suspicion of wrong.
 - b. Young people also need to guard themselves when someone comes to them for counseling. Though their intentions in reaching out to others with help and encouragement may be very good and spiritual, the temptation can still always be there to sin if they do their counseling in a compromising situation, in an isolated place or even in a home when no adults are present.
5. If students and lay people are determined to keep their counseling spiritual and beyond reproach they can find suitable situations so that their own integrity and reputation is not compromised.

Establishing A Relationship Of Trust With The Person Being Counseled

1. So many books have been written by professional counselors, in which the most intimate details of their interviews with their clients have been shared, that many people are afraid to share their problems with anyone. Even Christian writers and pastors, in their books or preaching, have referred to those they have counseled, sharing details which were shared in confidence.
2. When someone comes to us for counsel and advice, they expect that the information they share with us will be held by us in the very strictest confidence. This means that we will not share that information with anyone, either verbally or in print so that they know that we can absolutely be trusted. This applies to anyone doing counseling, whether on the professional, level, the lay level or the student level.
3. There are some cases where the rules of the school have been violated, where there is sin confessed to us which needs to come to the attention of the church or where there has been some criminal activity that must be reported to the police. In meeting this problem, the one we are counseling needs to know that some action must be taken but that we will depend on them to take the action needed.
4. We may even, as a trusted friend, express our willingness to accompany them be there for their encouragement as they face the consequences of their actions.

Approaching the One We Are Seeking to Help in the Right Way.

1. In counseling, we are to have an understanding, compassionate and caring approach. It is also to be a soft and gentle approach. These phrases characterize the true approach of a Christian to those in need. At the same time, we are to have an uncompromising approach.
 - a. Many times someone will approach us who has already made up his mind to pursue some wrong approach or to take some action that is clearly against the Scriptures and all that God plans for them. He is looking to us to agree with him and support him in the course he is planning to follow. We must refuse to compromise.
 - b. It is often a temptation, when people are good friends or those whose favor we are seeking, to tell them only what they want to hear. This may be also be true in situations where the

person is someone really important and we feel overawed in their presence and are afraid of offending them.

- c. As Christian counselors, we have to recognize that we may be doing such people more harm than good in agreeing to even hear their problems if we are not prepared to tell them the truth. Even though it may be hard for them to accept, they need to hear the truth. As their trusted friend, they need someone in our position in their lives to “level with them” so that they not only know the truth about their situation but they also know God’s solution to it. SEE: Proverbs 27:6
 - d. It is also true that no one respects those who are so willing to compromise the truth in order to retain the favor of the one who has approached them. In the future, they would have no reason to trust us.
3. James 3:1-12 teaches the importance of TONGUE CONTROL. This is not only necessary in the sinful ways we use our tongues in daily life, but it is also necessary in counseling as we choose carefully and sensitively the words we use in helping others with their needs and problems.
- a. This tongue control comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Galatians 5:16 gives the promise of victory over the flesh if we live by the Spirit.. As we share what we need to express with those we are counseling, He both gives us the wisdom we need and also guards us in the way we express the truth we are sharing.
 - b. The main emphasis of James 3:1-12 is that the tongue, though it is a small member of our body, is able to do great damage when used wrongly, and this is why it can either be used righteously or wrongly. This is why the Spirit controlled tongue is such a vital part of our ministries with others.

IDENTIFYING THE REAL PROBLEMS IN THE PERSON’S LIFE

1. There is the danger of only discussing the SURFACE problems without ever really dealing with the REAL or the UNDERLYING problems that trouble them.
2. Many times if the REAL or UNDERLYING problems are dealt with and cleared up, the SURFACE problems will be either quickly disappear or can easily be disposed of.

3. Patient listening and use of QUESTIONS will help bring out the nature of the REAL problem the person is dealing with
 - a. Suppose for instance that a student expresses a strong dislike for his school, its teachers and the studies he is forced to pursue. He blames others for his problems, feeling that if they would change then his life would be alright. After patiently listening to his complaints, direct questioning may reveal that he has either been FORCED TO STUDY at that school against his will, that he has a problem with AUTHORITY itself or that he has a basic ATTITUDE PROBLEM which he needs to deal with.
 - b. Questioning will also bring out underlying problems of sin in the person's life which have been affecting everything else in his life, including his feelings about others, his reactions to the situations in which he is placed, his response to authority and others.
4. Many times when the one we are seeking to counsel is not completely candid in revealing the true problems in his life, it may mean that we are the wrong person to be dealing with him because he does not feel free to share things that are so deeply personal to him.
 - a. It may be that he does not know us well enough to completely trust us with the truth.
 - b. It may be also true that he is afraid that he will lose our respect and that we will no longer want to be his friend or give help afterwards.
 - c. We may also be too close to the situation. Sometimes it is easier to go to someone who is an "outsider" than someone who is directly connected with the situation that is the source of his problem.
 - d. It may also be true that he has shared his problem with others without success and lacks confidence also in our ability to help him.
 - e. Even when we have to admit that we are the wrong person to help him, this does not mean that we have failed or that he will not need our help in other ways in the future. Having a humble attitude in which we admit our own limitations in dealing with others will give us a greater testimony to the ones we are seeking to help.

DEVELOPING COUNSELING SKILLS ON THE LAY LEVEL

DEVELOPING NON-VERBAL SKILLS.

The Integrity and Purity of Our Lives..

- a. How others perceive us to be in our innermost being is one of the most important of the non-verbal skills. SEE: Psalms 26:1; II Corinthians 1:12; I Thessalonians 2:1-11.
- b. Those in need, even when they are non-Christians, deeply respect those whose lives appear blameless and honest in every way. They may disagree with the Faith we hold, with many of the standards by which we live our lives and our goals and purposes in life, but they have confidence that we are different from others in our character and that there is something about us that they need in their own lives.
- c. Integrity and Purity are spiritual in nature and can only come through a deep desire in our hearts to be all that He wants us to be, intimate walk with the Lord, submission to His will and working in our lives and commitment to Him for the development of these qualities in our lives.

The Genuine Love and Concern We Have For Others.

- a. No matter what we say to others, they can sense whether or not these QUALITIES are genuinely present in our lives. It is to our shame when we profess to have these qualities but nothing in our lives would indicate this to others.
- b. These qualities are SPIRITUAL in nature and come from the genuine changes which have taken place in our lives through our relationship with the Lord and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives in molding and shaping us to be what He wants to be both in our personal walk with Him and also in the way we live our lives in the world. Thus, we cannot artificially develop these in our lives.
- c. Through genuine SUBMISSION to the Lord and to His working in our lives, our lives can be changed from lives of selfishness and self-centeredness to lives of love and concern for others.

- d. This will also require the PRACTICE of showing love and concern for others. This means that we will constantly seek opportunities to deny ourselves and our own wants and desires and to reach out to others instead. This means that it is not enough just to feel something in our hearts, but rather we are to express that feeling in action before it bears fruit.

The Development of Knowledge of Others and Their Needs in Society

- a. The Lord expressed this in John 4:35 when he challenged his followers to “lift up your eyes and look on the fields.” In this passage He was speaking of the worldwide needs of the lost and the need for them to have deep knowledge of them. These included the approaching Samaritans
- b. This awareness of the needs and problems of others first applies on the local level in our own society. We sometimes live our lives in total ignorance of what is going on around us. We have no real knowledge of what it means to be poor, to be from an unhappy home, to be in sorrow, to be rejected by others, to have no friends, to be born with disabilities or to have other deep needs in life. We must be willing to step outside our sheltered lives and learn what the lives of others around us are really experiencing..
- c. This development of knowledge will require effort on our part with commitment to using every possible means available to us to gain this knowledge and apply it to this ministry of reaching others.
- d. It is possible to gain much of this knowledge through books and periodicals that examine some of the most common problems of society. There are lectures which can be attended which deal with current social issues. Many of these are approached from a Christian standpoint.
- e. Students and lay people can also develop this knowledge through participation in church outreach programs such as Awana, neighborhood Bible Clubs and others. These programs not only reach children of the church, but reach out to the children of the community. On a broader scale, this knowledge can also be gained through voluntary work with social service programs in the community, through “rescue mission” and prison ministries for those on the fringe of society and others. Most of these programs focus our attention on nature of the non-Christian world.

The Development of Genuine Spiritual Attitudes in Us.

- a. People with needs cannot be approached or reached by those with a critical, judgmental or indifferent attitude. Because those we deal with must be approached from a Scriptural standpoint, that also does not permit an attitude of arrogant superiority that indicates that we consider them beneath us. This characteristic is often present when there is a critical and judgmental attitude.
- b. They also cannot be approached by those with a harsh attitude. No matter how deep their needs or how serious their offenses might be, they still need someone with understanding and gentleness to listen to them and help them solve the needs in their lives.
- c. They also cannot be approached by those with an attitude of hopelessness. We approach them with the assurance that there is a Scriptural answer to every problem if they are willing to follow God's own standards and find His path of victory. We can therefore be optimistic in our approach to them no matter how serious their problems and needs might be.

The Development of Opportunities For Counseling.

- a. For the Christian, opportunities come from GOD. We can pray daily that others might find us both available and prepared to reach out to them and that He will direct them our way. We also can pray that He would give us the necessary wisdom to deal with the needs and problems they share..
- b. We also need to recognize that there must be TIME in our busy schedules when others will feel free to approach us. If we are among those who are so extremely busy that time is always limited in adding extra things to our lives, they are not likely to feel free to come. If we really are committed to reaching others, we must make that a priority in our lives so that we are never too busy to stop and listen and then to give the counsel they need.
- c. We also recognize the need to counsel on a LONG TERM BASIS. This means that many problems cannot be fully dealt with and solved with an initial time of counseling and that many such times of counseling may be needed to solve some of them.
 - 1) Many people with problems and needs therefore need a MENTOR who will stay with them and who will always be available to deal with additional questions or to help them

with the adjustments they will have to make to the solutions to their needs and problems.

- 2) The need for such a mentor may sometimes be simply the need for someone they can regularly pray with and from whom they can find the encouragement they need to go on with victory in their lives. The main thing is that they should never be made to feel that they have been “cut off” after our initial time with them.
- d. We also recognize that we will be graded or judged by others on the success or failure of our counseling efforts. This may not seem fair, but whether or not others will want to come to us for help with their problems and needs will depend on whether we “get results.” This does not imply perfection in us, but it means that we are not to be satisfied with less than all that God desires.

Coming to Counseling With a Wholehearted Approach.

- a. Though we know that only God can bring real spiritual results in the lives of people, the approaches we use and the way we conduct ourselves is also important. It is therefore necessary that, if we are to be used by God in this way, we put our whole hearts into it and accompany it with much prayer and dependence on Him for wisdom and guidance. .
- b. Though this seems to demand a great deal of us, it is such dedicated labor that God requires of us in everything we do. SEE: I Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17, 21.

DEVELOPING VERBAL SKILLS

The Patient Use of Questions in Counseling..

- a. The patient use of questions forces us as counselors to listen more and to not be so quick to jump in with advice and instructions.
- b. Using questions also helps to bring out all the facts in ways that help us avoid making accusations or giving sharp challenges that might only drive them away.
- c. Questions also help us to bring out necessary things relating to their problems that they might not have been willing to share in the beginning of our counseling with them.

d. Whether in our questions or in any other approach we use in counseling, taking a PATIENT approach will also guard us against drawing hasty or ill-advised conclusions.

e. There are several things that are important in using questions:

- 1) Questions should not be harsh, confrontational or accusatory in nature. Many young people experience too much of this in their relationships with their parents and others in authority over them and would reject such an approach by a friend. Older people we counsel may also react negatively to such an approach. Such an approach may seem to them to be too harsh and unfeeling.
- 2) Questions should be carefully thought through so that there is no possibility of misunderstanding on the part of the one we are seeking to help. Vague questions may give the wrong impression of our ability to help them, might confuse them, might fail to really identify the problem they want to have resolved in their lives or may even give them an excuse to evade us and hide their problem. The latter case may be true if they only have come to us reluctantly or have begun to change their minds during the counseling process.
- 3) Questions should have clear purpose and direction so that we are always heading toward definite Biblical goals in the use of them. Though we are using them to understand the problem better and to have it sharply defined, we also have Biblical goals ahead of us and know where these goals will lead us in our counseling. We never stray from these goals.
- 4) Questions should be asked methodically with one question building on another so that there is progression with them. Single questions seldom are sufficient to really discover the real problem. However, when more than one question is to be asked, the questions in the series should be related to each other in such ways that they will elicit more and more bits of information and that that information will build on the ones before.
- 5) Questions should be penetrating and incisive, but should be sensitive to the feelings of the person we are seeking to help. There may be some areas of that person's life that are very private and sensitive, and, even though direct

- 6) Questions should be gently repeated if the information given is lacking or is wrongly given by the person we are counseling. Sometimes the person may give answers that are too brief, may give answers that are not really related to the question we have asked or may produce answers that lead in the wrong direction. In the latter case, as we seek to keep the direction of our questioning clear and straight, we may have to restate a question or simply rephrase it.

The Use of Personal Testimony and Experiences in Counseling.

- a. Whether in personal evangelism or in counseling, when we are dealing with others, the use of our own personal testimony and the sharing of experiences that we ourselves have had, is helpful in breaking down barriers which people erect to keep us from telling them what they need to know or to keep us from helping them make true decisions in their lives.
- b. The use of personal our personal testimony or experiences also is a non- threatening way to approach them. Sometimes people feel like they are under attack when they are approached too aggressively. The wise and effective counselor will not use an aggressive and overbearing approach.
- c. The personal testimony we give or the experiences we share must be able to relate to their personal lives, to their needs or to the subject under discussion. If this is not so, the use of an irrelevant personal testimony would then merely cause a distraction and keep us from the sharp focus we are seeking in counseling.
- d. The personal testimony we give or the experiences we share must also show that there was a good positive result or that some great victory came through them. Otherwise we are defeating our purpose in using them as illustrations.

The Use of Sincere Praise and Encouragement in Counseling.

- a. There is a difference between using sincere praise and encouragement and merely flattering them to win their attention or trust. Sincere praise and encouragement **is based upon real qualities in their lives** which give them incentive to go on in spite of things which might need to be corrected in their lives. It also builds up their self-esteem and self-confidence that we are seeking not to degrade or cast down in dealing with them. No matter how serious their problems may be, they will need these positive views of themselves to come out of our counseling victoriously.
- b. The use of sincere praise and encouragement also helps them to realize that **they are loved and appreciated and are important to others**. The circumstances that have caused them to come to us in the first place may make them doubt their standing with others or their value in life as a person. With encouragement, however, no matter how serious their problem might be, they never need to doubt their place, worth and importance in the lives of others
- c. We must be careful in using praise and encouragement that we do not detract from the true nature of the problem that brought them to us, from the changes they must make or the remedies that they must find in their lives to the problem. Rather, the praise and encouragement we give them from the very beginning of the counseling process **gives us a good basis to proceed** with the questions and the suggestions we need to give them in their lives by building up their trust in us as a friend and a counselor..

The Use of Scriptures in Our Counseling.

- a. It is important that all counseling be approached from the authority of the Scriptures rather than our own authority. They would have good reason to doubt our authority in any matter if they interpret our counsel as merely our own opinions, or as mere legalism or as an attempt to gain control over them. They would have no way to rightly treat God's Word in this way. If they reject God's Word, it will be clear to them that it is God Himself they are defying or rejecting rather than ourselves.
- b. It is also important that the Scriptures be used absolutely correctly so that they would never have any reason to question their use or to doubt their authority over them. We must never use Scriptural teachings out of context to merely prove some personal opinion that we have or to give a picture of God and His dealings with us that is not right. In the latter case, whether we are dealing with Christians or non-Christians, the true

picture of God as a loving and tender God who deeply cares for us and wants us to be in the right relationship with Himself is important. Correct use of the Scriptures will reveal this.

- c. It is important to note that, in our use of the Scriptures, we can depend on the teaching work of the Holy Spirit in both penetrating the hearts of those we counsel and also helping them to act upon it as He convicts their hearts, shows them the true application of this truth to their hearts and then helps them do what they need to do about this truth.

RECOGNIZING THE LIMITATIONS OF LAY COUNSELING

Honestly Recognizing the Lacks and Inabilities in Our Own Lives.

- a. There are some cases that are beyond our ability to deal with properly and that need to be dealt with by people more trained and qualified than ourselves. It is sometimes a humbling experience to admit such lacks, but there is danger that, if we go ahead anyhow, we may do the person more harm than good. It would certainly be right for us to pray with the person and assure him of our concern for his needs before referring him to someone else.
- b. We therefore spiritually and humbly accept our position as lay people and the limitations we have. We are neither in competition with those more qualified than ourselves nor do we resent the fact that some we are trying to help will want to come to them rather than ourselves.
- c. We affirm to those we want to help that our action in referring them to others does not indicate any lack of concern and care on our part, and that we still want to be their friends and help them in any way we can.
- d. We may offer to even accompany those we are seeking to help to these more capable people, but others would do the actual counseling. Our concern for these individuals will still be of encouragement to them and may develop between us lasting relationships of trust.

Recognizing the Lacks in the Lives of Those We Counsel

- a. We cannot make up for genuine personal lacks in abilities in the lives of those we are seeking to help no matter how much they might long to fully possess the same abilities others have and compete on equal terms with them.

- b. These may include lacks in the areas of ACADEMIC abilities, ATHLETIC abilities, PUBLIC SPEAKING abilities, LEADERSHIP abilities and others.
- c. Though we are seeking to encourage them by emphasizing the abilities they do have, we are careful to not deceive them into thinking that these will permit them to compete with others in areas where they both lack and will never possess some of the abilities others seem to have. They will have to accept, with a thankful spirit, what God has made them to be and devote the abilities and talents the Lord has given them entirely to Him for Him to use them to their very fullest.
- d. This acceptance of who and what they are, and the fact that they will never have the gifts and abilities that others might possess, should never lead them to bitterness against God, to jealousy of others or to the loss of their own use by God in following and serving Him because of wrong attitudes in them.

Spiritually Dealing With the Lacks in the Lives of Others

- a. BY: Not making false promises to them concerning what God will do in their lives through our counsel to put them on the same level as others.
- b. BY: Encouraging them in the development of the abilities God has given them by honestly acknowledging the abilities they do have and then applying themselves wholeheartedly to the fullest possible development of them. All of their abilities are valuable to God. SEE: Romans 12:3-9; I Corinthians 12
- c. BY: Helping them gain victory over envy of others who might excel in areas in which they WISH they themselves were stronger and more competitive. As suggested before, God could even give them a spirit of rejoicing over the way He has made them IF they are willing to have this kind of attitude.
- d. BY: Helping them find God's will for the best use of the abilities He has given them while accepting that others with abilities which seem to be greater than theirs may be led in different directions altogether in His will, and even may be led to places and positions of far greater prominence than any they might ever attain.
- e. BY: Helping them to accept that, in the eyes of God, they are equally worthy with those whose abilities they have envied and longed to have, and the way He chooses to use them is no less valuable in His sight than the way He chooses to use others. SEE: Romans 12:3-8

- f. BY: Helping them live their lives to the very fullest in the ways He has chosen to use them and remaining faithful to Him both in their daily walk with Him and in the carrying out of His purposes for their lives.

Knowing How Far We Should Go in Urging Them to Accept Our Advice and Encouragement

1. Sometimes those we counsel are either close friends, are people in vital places of leadership or they are people who are living such destructive lives that failure on their part to heed our counsel will send them even further down the path they are on. These and other reasons can easily tempt us to put much pressure on them and literally compel them to accept our advice.
2. While the results of such compulsion might seem to bring good results, they will always feel that it was OUR decision and not theirs and will resent the pressure we have put on them to decide. This can finally lead to total rebellion on their part and a breaking off of any further opportunities for us to help them.
3. While we should SPIRITUALLY grieve over those who reject the truth and turn to their own ways, we should be careful that we are not grieving over our hurt egos rather than over their spiritual condition.
4. When those we are seeking to help do turn away, rejecting our counsel, we should let them know that we still care deeply about them and their problems and stand willing to come to their aid at any time and in any possible way we can BUT they still need to accept God's answers.
5. Even if they come to us again and again with the same problem, we should lovingly, kindly and compassionately still be firm in standing for the truth concerning their situation and the solutions they need to find in their lives to solve their problem.

REASONS FOR FAILURE IN LAY COUNSELING

Failure in Our Basic Approach to Them.

- a. It is easy to blame those we are seeking to help when there has actually been failure in our counseling effort. Although sometimes such blame is justified, this may not always be true. We must be honest with ourselves in evaluating our counseling efforts.
- b. The truth may be that we have been insensitive to their needs, have not listened carefully to all they told us, have been impatient with them,

have had a bad attitude toward them or have tried to force on them answers to their problems which were not correct. Though it is difficult, there are times when we must accept blame for failure.

- c. We can learn from such failures and change our approach and attitude in any future counseling we do. God is able to shape and mold us in anything we do for Him and this applies also to counseling.
- d. Though it is difficult, we must confess to ourselves, to God and to the person we have sought to help that we have failed and ask for another opportunity to conduct ourselves as God would want us to. The person may agree and our testimony to that person will be greatly enhanced.

Failure Because of Too Much Regard For Complaints or Excuses

- a. While it is true that we are to approach counseling with compassion and heart feeling, the wrong use of sympathy can stand in the way of our being effective and fruitful counselors.
- b. We sometimes fail to realize that many complaints and excuses are based on their desire to escape from their own responsibilities in their problem and to shift the fault to other people or factors in their lives.
- c. The wrong use of sympathy can lead us to hesitate to share with them the vital information and advice they need to see their problem correctly and to deal with it in spiritual ways.
- d. It may also be that, when discussing their relationships with others, we may mistakenly permit our "sympathy" to even cause us to side with them against these people so that we fail to be honest and frank with them or to confront them with their own fault or responsibility in the matters being discussed so that a profitable and spiritual solution is found to their problem.
- e. The proper approach to use is to show them that we care but that they have a need in their lives to recognize their own fault and deal with it. "The wounds of a friend" (SEE: Proverbs 27:6) may seem hard at times, but they are of great value because they come from a friend who cares.
- f. In the end, honestly dealing with their problems will lead them to true solutions to their problems and keep them from having to deal with them again.

Failure to Hold Those We Counsel Accountable.

- a. It is often difficult to confront people with the full importance and consequences of their actions and attitudes and to get them to accept full responsibility for them. This is especially true if we are a very close friends or classmates of the ones we are counseling and we fear that we might only offend them if we were to be too candid and frank with them. They also might forsake us as friends if we are too candid in sharing the truth with them about their problems.
- b. Rather than this possible compromise proving our friendship, we are actually doing them a disservice because sooner or later their actions or attitudes will cause them even greater difficulties both before God and man.
- c. Even if they seem to resent it at the time, in a kind and compassionate way, we have the responsibility before God to show them their own needs and failures and point out to them the actions they need to take to make them right.

Failure That Comes Because We Are Too Authoritative and Overbearing In Our Approach to Them.

- a. To stand on the Authority of the Word of God in a kind way is one thing, but to approach them with a personal attitude of exaggerated authority is another. In quiet and humble kindness, we are to simply show them from the Scriptures what is wrong and what they need to do.
- b. While they may not welcome or appreciate our use of Scripture with them, our attitude of humility and care may help them finally accept its authority and teaching. We are simply approaching them as a fellow human being on their own level to help them so that they know that we are not trying “lord it over them” or act superior to them.
- c. Such a strong and overbearing approach would only cause them to lose all respect for us and to reject anything we might share with them

Failure That Comes Because We Draw Hasty and Shallow Conclusions.

- a. Many times we become impatient when someone is trying to share something with us and are tempted to reach quick and easy solutions to end the time with them and attend to other matters. This will only produce shallow and incorrect conclusions which are of no real help..

- b. It is important that all of the facts are clear and have been carefully examined before we draw conclusions.
- c. After they have initially shared with us their problems we may have to accept the fact that there are no immediate answers we can give them to the problems they have shared and that we may need to counsel them on other occasions before drawing satisfactory conclusions. Though this might be a humbling thing for us, this will give us time for prayer and careful consideration of all they have shared with us so that we have additional insight into their real needs and the solutions they must find..

Failure That Comes Because We Accept Less Than Satisfactory and Total Solutions to the Matters With Which We Have Been Dealing.

- a. Though it may take two or more meetings with them before matters are cleared up and final solutions are found, some problems may require a long period of time before a solution is found.
- b. Great patience is needed even when friends are together and a problem is being dealt with. This means that there is also a need for followup to see if the problem has really been resolved or whether there might still be lingering unresolved questions.
- c. The person himself may grow weary of the process of finding a satisfactory solution and may be satisfied with less than he needs in his life to deal with the matter, so he should be warned of this danger.

Failure That Comes Because the Person Needing Counsel May Be Seeking Some Personal Gain For Himself Rather Than Sincerely Wanting Help With His Stated Problem..

- a. It is always possible that a person may come to a friend or schoolmate with false motives such as wanting acceptance in life, wanting association with someone who seems better and more popular than himself or to seek some personal favor or advantage from the person he is approaching.
- b. It is important, therefore, for the student or lay leader to be sure that the motives of the person are clear and that he really needs and wants help.
- c. If a counselor goes into such counseling without determining the true motives of the person who has approached him, he is not really helping the person.

- d. This does not mean that the person doing the counseling would not also be a friend to this person or would not also be willing to help him in some other way, but he would not encourage deceit in the other person if that person has false motives in coming him.

Failure That Comes Because of the Lack of Ethics On Our Part

- a. The lay person who does counseling must be sure that he is being perfectly ethical in the way he conducts himself. There is great temptation in helping others, especially if he himself might have false motives for helping others. This can lead to ethical problems that will destroy the spiritual nature of his counseling.
- b. Evidence of lack of ethics may be seen if he is only doing the counseling to draw the person away from someone else, if he is undercutting someone else in the way he talks with the person or if he is only doing the counseling to establish his own reputation at the expense of others who might also be doing counseling.
- c. The problem of ethics in counseling can also affect relationships between staff members in a single church or can affect relations with other churches when pastors and their churches are in competition with each other for members and prestige in the community. This may lead them to carnally do things or take actions in their personal and church ministries which displease God. Many of them refuse to recognize these actions as matters of ethics, and so are unwilling to change what they are doing.
- d. Those who are very strict in their following of ethical practices in counseling or in any other ministry they might be given by God will both be honored by God and respected by others. A strictly ethical approach establishes the INTEGRITY of their lives both before God and others.
- e. It is therefore essential that those who do counseling should not only be fully prepared with knowledge and methods of counseling, but also that they continually examine themselves to be sure that they are conducting themselves in the right way in their counseling.

Failure Because of Our Unwillingness to Continue to Use the Talents God Has Given Us For Counseling After We Have Exercised This Ministry for a time.

- a. Some who are gifted with counseling abilities and have been used by God in this ministry lose their vision for it because they get weary having others

always come to them for advice. They therefore simply give up their efforts to reach out to others after time has passed in order to save the time and energy required to help others.

- b. This may be also due to failures they have experienced in helping others that cause them to doubt their ability to help others. Rather finding the reasons for these failures and correcting them, they get discouraged and assume that God does not want them to continue.
- c. This may be due also to resentment they feel in their hearts against others who do not seem to care for others and who make no effort to reach out with help and encouragement. They feel that it is not fair for them to be expected to do this when others have no concern.
- d. Wrong motives may also be a factor in why some people quit after they have reached out to others for a time. People with wrong motives for entering in to such a ministry find that the basic reasons why they began this ministry have not been fulfilled and therefore there is no purpose in continuing. Their burden to reach others was neither from the Lord nor was it empowered and blest by Him.
- e. This may be due to the fact that they have so many problems and needs in their own lives that they feel that these have priority over the problems and needs of others.
- f. This may simply be due to the fact that they are not in the right relationship with the Lord and thus are not spiritual enough to be used by the Lord in this way.
- g. Some who are gifted with counseling ability may not realize that, for the SPIRITUAL Christian, reaching out to others with help and encouragement is a SPIRITUAL LIFETIME RESPONSIBILITY and cannot be abandoned. It is not just a CAREER that can be changed according to the desires and interests of the person. The use of our gifts and talents belongs to the Lord and He is to be in control of them His use of them is therefore a spiritual responsibility for all Christians and this reaching out to others cannot be abandoned when they desire a change.
- h. Some may feel inferiority or inadequacy as they COMPARE themselves with others who exercise this ministry. They fail to realize that It is not just how skilled they are, or whether their abilities equal those of others or whether they get the attention that others get for their abilities. Rather, they are to totally commit all they are and have in the way of abilities to God and let Him use them in the way these abilities are best equipped to be used for their entire lives.

- i. It may be true that the counseling ministry has taken some away from other responsibilities in their lives as Christians and that they might need to find a better balance between how much time they spend in counseling and how much time they spend with other spiritual responsibilities.
 - 1) This would sometimes be true for pastors who might be tempted to neglect the study of the Word of God and their pastoral responsibilities in the church in favor of devoting themselves to counseling. Church members who note a lack of sermon preparation, administrative oversight of the affairs of the church and other lacks in their pastor would have a legitimate complaint, and the pastor would be wise to heed their suggestions.
 - 2) This would also be true for fathers or mothers who find that they are doing so much counseling that they are neglecting their home and family responsibilities. SEE: I Timothy 3:4, 5, 11, 12 where the qualifications for pastors and deacons are discussed.
 - 3) This would still be no reason to completely abandon this spiritual task of reaching out in counseling to help others with their spiritual needs and problems. While not neglecting other given responsibilities, they simply adjust the time they spend dealing with needs and problems in the lives of others in counseling to find the proper balance.

CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING COUNSELING ON THE LAY LEVEL

The main basis for counseling on the lay level is the responsibility of every Christian to have a deep heart concern for the needs and problems of others rather than just concentrating on our own personal needs and problems. Philippians 2:1-4 makes this very clear.

Christians are gifted with different talents and abilities in dealing with others, but everyone can be used by God to reach out to others in some way.

Some might be more effective than others in helping needy people to find definite solutions to their problems that will be lasting. God has especially gifted them with the wisdom they need to share all the counseling that the persons may need in finding solutions to their problems.

Others may best be used in encouraging others to go on with the Lord and may even be used to “disciple” them in this growth and ongoing walk with the Lord.

Others may best be used in simply befriending those in need and pointing them to those who can best help them in other ways.

In order to be used in this ministry, it is essential that all of our gifts and talents be submitted to the Lord and that we maintain tender and open hearts to reaching others as the Lord opens opportunities.

We also are to be learning constantly from the Lord, both from successes and failures, so that we are growing in this ministry and becoming more effective.

With dedication, we then devote ourselves to this ministry, trusting the Lord to guide and strengthen us.