

**CLASS 21**

# Developing the Skills of a Counselor

**CLASS OVERVIEW**

In this class we will:

- Review who should and who probably should not provide counseling.
- Differentiate between talking and giving advice, and counseling.
- Provide a biblical foundation for counseling and counseling principles.
- Review some primary counseling principles.

**Opening Group Questions:**

- What is counseling? What does it mean to counsel someone?
- When should you counsel someone, and when should you refer a person to the minister or pastor?

**I. Introduction**

There is an old saying, "too many cooks spoil the broth." In regard to counseling, when too many people are involved, advice often conflicts and the person being counseled ends up confused. The Bible has a lot of advice for anyone involved in counseling. **As a general rule, counseling is done by ministers/pastors.**

**Visiting/Talking vs. Counseling:**

"Visiting is a friendly activity that involves mutual sharing. Counseling is a problem-centered, goal-directed conversation that focuses primarily on the needs of one person, the counselee. All counseling will involve periodic visiting, but when visiting is prolonged (during a counseling session) primary, counseling effectiveness is reduced."

Collins, G. R. (1988). *Christian Counseling* (p. 26). USA: W Publishing Group.

**Words to the Wise:**

Most Church leaders are asked for advice. It is important to figure out why inquirers desire advice. At times, people might have been given advice with which they disagree, and are looking for someone to support their cause.

When someone seeks spiritual counseling or advice, it is generally best to **direct the person to the Church pastor**. If a member has difficulty dealing with the pastor, the next person to contact would be the regional pastor or regional director. Calling Headquarters is almost never an appropriate action, because it bypasses the chain of authority in place in the Church, as outlined in the Bible.

Regarding advice, unless one is trained in a specific area of inquiry, advice is best given from a biblical perspective. Use your judgment, but also be careful. If you have no background with a matter, you should never give advice on it. **Acknowledge your limitations and refer the person to the pastor.**

"Listen or thy tongue will keep thee deaf."  
—Native American

## II. Biblical Principles for Counseling

### A. Seeking Council is a Wise Thing To Do

Prov 11:14—Without counsel the people fall, but there is safety in much counsel.

Prov 19:20—Listen to counsel and be wise.

2 Tim 4:3—A warning about seeking spiritual counsel from only those who agree with you.

### B. Listen Carefully: There are Two Sides to Every Story—the truth is usually somewhere in between.

Prov 18:13—“He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him.”

v. 17—“The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him.”

### C. Maintain Confidentiality

Prov 11:13—Conceal a matter—do not spread it around.

Prov 17:9—Love covers a matter—gossiping ruins friendships.

### D. Be Honest

Prov 12:17—“He who speaks truth declares righteousness, but a false witness, deceit.”

v. 22—“...those who deal truthfully are His (the LORD'S) delight.”

### E. Be Gentle

Prov 12:20—Counselors of peace have joy.

Prov 15:23—Words in due season are good.

Prov 18:21—Death and life are in the power of the tongue—you can greatly affect others.

Rom 12:8—Exhorting/encouraging and showing mercy are gifts of God's Holy Spirit.

### F. Give Wise Counsel

Prov 15:7—“The lips of the wise disperse knowledge...”

Matt 12:37—We are justified or condemned by our words.

2 Tim 2:15—“Rightly dividing the word of truth”—we must know the Bible.

2 Tim 2:23—We must avoid foolish and ignorant disputes.

Prov 14:12—The way that *seems* right *can* be wrong.

James 1:19—We must be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.

## III. How to Give Wise Counsel

1. **Ask God for wisdom.** The real key is James 1:5—ASK! God only gives this wisdom to those who use it in real service to others.
2. **LISTEN** carefully and do not formulate answers *until* you clearly understand the situation.
3. **Draw on biblical examples.** The Bible is full of examples and they are there for us to use (1 Cor 10:11). *Every* piece of advice that we give as leaders in the Church should be grounded in godly/Bible principles.
4. **Be specific.** Generalizing when giving advice or feedback often results in your point being missed.
5. **Get all of the facts and read between the lines.** There are always two sides to a story. Don't allow yourself to be hurried into making a decision. Quick decisions are often mistaken, because proper time is not given to finding “all” the facts.
6. **Admit when you do not have the answers, and then help the person find them.** A good counselor knows his or her limitations.
7. **Always allow people to make their own decisions. Give them options to consider.**  
It is against the law in many countries, including the United States, for someone to prescribe behaviors without a professional license. The majority of our ministry is not licensed in counseling, thus cannot prescribe that the members do what they say.

### **Suggested Counseling Techniques** (Handout)

Listen first, and then probe with questions as needed. Do not make assumptions or draw conclusions from "reports," regardless of source.

Do not give unwanted advice—when people are not interested in counsel, it is not likely to be of any benefit. They may consider it "meddling" in personal affairs.

Get the *facts*—avoid giving credence to hearsay. What people hear is not always what the person meant; what people say another person "did" may be colored by personal feelings. Judging based on *feelings* alone is dangerous!

Consider motive—people may have a motive that underlies an accusation. Find the motive, if possible, and consider withholding comment if unsure.

Neutralize personal involvement—if you are personally involved, seek an uninvolved third party with good skills and judgment to hear and advise. Personal involvement means emotional involvement; emotions are dangerous in matters of judgment or counsel.

Do not make decisions for people—do not let someone maneuver you into making their "decision" for them, something that they may later hold you responsible for.

Consider timing—sometimes one must wait; *consider the matter*.

Consider our basis for counsel—Jesus Christ. His *example and written word* are our guide.

**Do not dispense medical, legal, psychological or business advice.** Our "function" is to give *spiritual guidance, advice, and support*.

Adapted from: Living Church of God (2001). *Pastoral Policies Manual*.

"There are people who, instead of listening to what is being said to them, are already listening to what they are going to say themselves."

—Albert Guinon

## **IV. Conclusion**

Leaders are frequently called upon to be counselors. Leaders in God's Church must remember that unless they are licensed to give counsel in a specific area, they must limit their counsel to the word of God. More than anything, leaders need to learn how to listen, encourage, practice patience, and listen to both sides of a situation before even beginning to draw conclusions. Additionally, leaders must be quick to recognize their own limitations and be forthright in sharing them, as well as willing to quickly refer people to the pastor, if they need spiritual counseling.

**Optional Homework for Next Class:** (choose one assignment to complete)

- For the next class, discuss why it is important for leaders in God's Church to be familiar with legal issues.
- What is risk management, and how can godly leaders help the Church better manage or reduce risk?

Handout 1—Class 21

## ***Suggested Counseling Techniques***

**Listen first, and then probe with questions as needed.** Do not make assumptions or draw conclusions from “reports” regardless of source (without obtaining first-hand information).

**Do not give unwanted advice.** When people are not interested in counsel, it is not likely to be of any benefit. They may consider it “meddling” in personal affairs.

**Get the *facts*.** Avoid giving credence to hearsay. What people hear is not always what the person meant; what people say another person “did” may be colored by personal feelings. Judging based on *feelings* alone is dangerous!

**Consider motive.** People may have a motive that underlies an accusation. Find the motive, if possible, and consider withholding comment if unsure.

**Neutralize personal involvement.** If you are personally involved, seek an uninvolved third party with good skills and judgment to hear and advise. Personal involvement means emotional involvement; emotions are dangerous in matters of judgment or counsel.

**Make no decisions for people.** Do not let them someone you into giving them a “decision” for which they may later hold you responsible.

**Consider timing.** Sometimes one must wait and *consider the matter*.

**Consider our basis for counsel: Jesus Christ.** His *example and written word* are our guide.

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