Qualities of the Counselor!

By Dr. Edward Watke Jr.

- **What does God desire in a counselor?**
- **How do you build a relationship?**
- **What should your motives be?**
- **What are common commitments of good counselors?**

- Preface -

Counseling can be a great joy. What you are as a counselor, how you look at counseling, and what your motives are go a long way toward the results experienced in counseling.
Biblical counseling is a must. It is taught so thoroughly in Scripture that the pastor can't miss seeing the tremendous need of being a good Biblical counselor. It is a "one on one" ministry that makes the difference. I have spent hundreds of hours counseling, and I know that the Holy Spirit works in hearts to bring change as we faithfully share God's Word.

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Building a Relationship With the Counselee

Without a good relationship with the counselee little can be done. There are those who will come for counsel whom we have never met. It is our task to build the rapport necessary to be able to assist them in their needs.

There are a number of very important ingredients for a good counseling situation. These we want to examine.

I. BY OUR PRESENCE IN THE COUNSELING PROCESS

A. The counselor must be sure that he is absolutely present in the session or situation. To be present means to

1. set aside all distractions out of the mind;

2. listening and giving full attention.

B. This will be noted by the way we set, by our body language, by the way we speak, and the way we look at the counselee.

C. We must focus on the person and their needs!

1. As we probe for problems, look for themes, for things that may be repeated.

2. The questions, the probing, and the responses will be guided by careful listening in the process.

The Word of God has a lot to say about listening.

I. BY MANIFESTING CONCERN

Biblical counseling is about solving people's problems. We must work at discovering the causes of their problems and then help them apply Biblical answers to those causes.

To do this we must be **people- oriented** and not problem-oriented or we will probably wade in without much thought of the person and their feelings. We must develop a facilitative relationship that will assure the counselee of our **concern**.

We must be receptive to their personhood in order to have their good-will in the counseling situation. ***Our impact and influence in people's lives is usually related to their perception of us.***

II. BY MANIFESTING COMPASSION

A. The example of Christ's compassion:

1. Isa 9:6 He is the Wonderful counselor; (Isa. 11:2) for upon Him would rest *"the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength."*

2. Matt. 9:36 Seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion. Why? Christ felt for them, cared for them.

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3. He is (Heb. 4:14-16) moved with the feelings of our infirmities.

4. Luke 19:41 He wept over Jerusalem; John 11:33-35 moved, wept.

B. The example of Paul's compassionate spirit.

1. Acts 20:31 Paul reminds the elders of his burdened heart; admonished them day and night with tears.

2. Gal. 4:19 Paul revealed his prayer life for others, travailing twice over. See I Thess 2:0 and II Thess. 3:8. Note Col. 1:28, 29.

3. II Cor. 2:4 Paul reveals his heart when writing to them about sin in the church.

C. Ways of developing genuine compassion

Coldness, hardness, indifference, and a spirit of being full of "I don't care" seems to be the spirit of our age. We hear so much about suffering world-wide and gradually we become hardened to it all.

1. **We need to think about the impact on the persons** because of the things they face. Somehow we must *"sit where they sit"* and be identified with their struggles!

   What is significant of the following verses?
   Matt. 9:36 _____; Luke 7:13 _____; Heb. 4:15 _____

2. **We need to think of the counselee as if they were a family member.** Paul wished himself accursed for his own people. (Rom. 10:1) Consider I Timothy 5:1-2 and think about how you will respond to a sister, brother, mother, father, in a special time of need.

3. **We need to consider our own sinfulness.** Meditate upon your own failures, weaknesses, sinful actions, thoughts, etc., and thereby allow the impact of your own sinful ways effect your approach to the counselee.
   Gal. 1:6 _____; John 8:1-11 _____

4. **We need to consider ways we can show compassion.** Feelings of love, concern, or compassion come out of a choice of the will. We must make the decision to act in ways that manifest compassion. It is an act of the will.
   Consider:

   Have you told the person (s) that you truly care for them? (Phil. 1:8)
   Have you prayed for them and with them? (Col. 4:12,13)
   Have you entered into their sorrows or their joys? (Rom. 12:15)
   Have you been gentle and tender with them? (Matt. 12:20; I Thess. 2:7-8)
   Have you spoken graciously to them? (Col. 4:6)
   Have you continued to love and accept them when they have rejected your help? (Rom. 15:7; 14:1)
   Have you forgiven them of any wrong toward you? (Matt. 18:21-22)
   Have you defended them against those who might mistreat and accuse them? Christ did in Matthew 12:1-7.
   Have you been willing to meet their physical needs if necessary? (I John 3:17)

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These are considerations that we should address when we examine our own lack of compassion.

III. BY GIVING RESPECT

We must build an atmosphere where there is love, acceptance, and respect. It makes a big difference if the counselee senses that there is acceptance toward him regardless how serious the matter, or how awful the sin, and the failure in the life. The gospels often portray Christ in His love and compassion toward hated sinners, and often He ate with them, and also ministered to them.

Maybe we will find it hard for us to give deference and to consider the person worthy of honor but that is what giving respect means.

Rom. 12:10 says _____; Phil. 2:3 commands us to _____.

A. Giving proper verbal respect.

1. Consider the admonitions of II Tim. 2:24-25.

2. We must speak the truth in love. Eph. 4:15.

B. Give respect in nonverbal ways.

Body language is even more important than what we say. How we speak, the tone of voice, the movement of the body and other non-verbal communication can either help us or hinder us in the counseling situation.

Our nonverbal as well as verbal communication shows whether we really take the person's needs seriously or not.

How do people communicate with body language?

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____ _____ _____

The Importance of Motives and Involvement

Our motivation is extremely important. For what reason do we desire to work with people? Often the Word of God speaks to us about our motivations. Paul wrote of his purposes, desires, goals, and aims as a preacher of the gospel. Paul wrote that some preached Christ out of envy and strife.

Some whom we might train to counsel others may have a wrong motivation. We must watch for such.

I. POTENTIAL MOTIVATIONS!

A. Some valid motivations

1. We love people.

2. We desire to help for God's glory.

3. We are burdened for others (compassion).

4. We want to see Christ magnified in other's lives.

B. Some invalid motivations

1. Some may desire to counsel out of curiosity.

2. Some have great inner needs and desire to counsel for the end purpose of meeting their own needs of -- distress, failure, heart-ache, etc.

3. Some see counseling as bringing personal fulfillment.

4. Some want to counsel so they can build relationships they desire.

5. Still others desire to counsel for it will give them great personal power because they get to listen and give counsel. They feel they have a measure of power over the other person's life.

6. Some feel so defeated in their own lives that they might feel better if they could hear of the problems others have or find solutions for themselves.

II. POTENTIAL MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT A COUNSELOR'S ROLE

A. **Some see counseling as visiting,** and they feel if they can talk with someone for a period of time about something then they have been involved in a counseling situation.

B. **Too often when we pastors do our visitation on our own members it is idle talk that effects little.** Maybe we have no particular direction, aim, goal, or purpose. There has been little admonishing, exhorting, encouraging, teaching, or directing others into good words.

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C. Others may feel that counseling is giving advice. They may enjoy that role and feel a certain amount of fulfillment, power, etc., in this manner.

D. Sometimes people see the counselor's role as being a judge. They pass judgment, manifest a judgmental spirit, and may even overwhelm the person with all their quick answers.

E. Then there are those who feel counseling is "telling all you know." They overwhelm the person with their twenty five answers for some problem and may feel so grand for having so many ideas.

F. Some feel that counseling is totally directive in nature.

1. They feel it is basically directing people as to what they should do.

2. The learner often forgets that is it also being interpretive.

3. It is not just giving direction but helping the person understand what is taking place in his life.

4. The counselee must come to his own conclusion, see how to apply Biblical truth, and become discerning as to his personal problems through personal insights.

G. Counseling to others is being emotionally involved in another person's life. They enjoy this kind of involvement. If there is too much emotional involvement the counselor will forget to analyze the needs, will fail to be interpretive, and will exercise very poor discernment.

H. Then there are those are who extremely defensive and are greatly upset when the counselee does not agree. The counselor feels he has all the answers and is threatened if the counselee rejects what he has said. The counselor may construe this to be an attack on his person.

III. INVOLVEMENT MUST BE OUT OF SINCERITY

(II Cor. 4:2; I Thess. 1:5-7; Gal. 4:20; II Cor.2: 1-7; 4:7-15; II Cor. 12:19-20)

A. Be honest about your qualifications and credentials.

Don't misrepresent your credentials in attempt to gain respect and confidence. Remember we are but servants of Christ.

B. Be honest about your own weaknesses.

It is good if we are open about personal struggles or problems. Note I Cor. 2:1-3. Paul did not represent himself as somebody who always had it all together. He was honest about his own fears, and afflictions. (II Cor. 1:8-9)

C. Be careful about your goals and agenda.

It is wise and fitting to share your goals with the counselee from the beginning. It is good to share what you are trying to do and how you intend to do it. We need to be clear that the Word of God is our source of authority. Let them know your approach to counseling in a clear, honest way.

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Common Commitments of Biblical Counselors

What is Biblical counseling? Those who are called to this have many common commitments that they share. These are common goals that are embraced by those who labor in counseling.

I. BIBLICAL COUNSELORS ARE COMMITTED TO COMMON GOALS.

These goals are not of man's will, making or invention. But goals that springs from the Word of God. This is seen in --

Eph. 4:14,15 _____
II Thess. 1: 11-12 _____
Eph. 1:12 _____
Rom. 12:2 _____
Col. 1:28 _____

II. BIBLICAL COUNSELORS ARE COMMITTED TO THE REALITY OF SIN .

We take seriously the portions of Scripture that deal with the reality of sin and the tragedy of sin as announced in the Word of God. We consider sin to be exceedingly sinful and that basically we are dealing with a sin problem in the counseling process. (Consider: Rom. 1:18-32; 3:9-24; 6:23; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:1-13.)

We must not try to put a bandage on the problem of sin. We cannot make the crooked straight for only God's Word can do that. It takes the drastic work of conviction and repentance to bring change. (Consider Isa. 1:4-6.) Surely God states the seriousness of sin.

III. BIBLICAL COUNSELORS ARE COMMITTED TO THE NEED OF PATIENCE AND GRACE.

Godly counselors recognize the need of an atmosphere of patience and grace in order that the counseling process can go on and the needs of the person be met.

Paul spoke of the need of the spirit of meekness (or humility) (Gal. 6:1) and in I Thessalonians 5:14 we are told to *"comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men."* Counseling demands much love, patience and understanding.

IV. BIBLICAL COUNSELORS ARE COMMITTED TO HELP PEOPLE BRING ABOUT CHANGE.

A. If we are going to be biblical we will be committed to helping people to recognize the need of building new attitudes and actions into their lives.

1. We will have a goal of bringing about change. This will necessitate dehabituation and rehabituation, or the *"putting off"* and *"putting on"* process. (Eph. 4:22-28; Col. 3:8-14)

2. Old habits must be broken and new ways put into place. The old man must be put off and the new man in Christ put on.

B. We will want to see them grow into maturity, thereby becoming Christlike.

1. This will require time and a process in bringing about change. The counselor will need to be patient and understanding and know how to labor with the counselee in order to effect such a permanent change.

2. There will be the need to build new habits as the old habits are broken and are replaced.

3. The counselee must adopt a new life style in those areas of needed change. The old garments of sin (of the old man, Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:5-9) must be put off and replace in the power of the new man (Eph. 4:23-24).

C. There must be an adopting of new attitudes, new practices and a real change in the life. Just some minor changes will not do. *Often it requires a* ***radical*** *change.*

V. BIBLICAL COUNSELORS RECOGNIZE THEIR TOTAL DEPENDENCY ON THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

A. We must recognize that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit we can do nothing, for it is not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.

1. We must humbly admit our total dependence upon the Holy Spirit to do the work in hearts and lives. There must be more than lip service to this truth. (Jh. 7:37-39; Jh. 14:16-17, 26; Jh. 15:26-27; Jh. 16:7-15)

2. We must be empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:49). We are reminded the disciples were not to attempt to do anything until they were endued by the Holy Spirit of God.

B. We cannot produce conviction but too often we do try to create conviction. We will see **no lasting change** without the Holy Spirit's work. So we must not run ahead of Him or we will be trying to do His work.

1. We must discern what He is doing, listen to Him and be directed by Him.

2. Conviction and change are the results of the Spirit's ministry. We are but instruments through whom He is at work.

VI. BIBLICAL COUNSELORS OPERATE UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST. (Rom. 14:9; Acts. 2:36; 9:6; II Cor. 5:14-15)

The counselor's ministry and desired direction toward the counselee is to help him totally yield to the written Word and the Living Word, the incarnate Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We can say, *"Do this or do that because this is what Christ would tell you to do if He were setting in my place."*

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We must give full allegiance to the Word of God ourselves, trusting that this is the means the Holy Spirit will use to bring about change. (Key words in each below)

Col. 3:16 _____
Prov. 2:1-4 _____
Jere. 15:16 _____
Jh. 17:17 _____
Psa. 1:1-3 _____
Jh 8:31 _____

A. All our direction in counseling must be rooted in the Word of God for we must direct them to DO what the Word of God directs us to do! (Jh. 8:31-32; II Pet. 1:4)

B. Paul modeled this in the counseling process as he wrote to Timothy, *"Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us."* (II Tim. 1:13,14; note II Tim. 1:7)

II Tim. 2:15 _____
II Tim. 3:16,17 _____

VI. BIBLICAL COUNSELORS REALIZE THAT THE ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHANGE (victory) RESTS ON THE COUNSELEE, NOT ON THEM.

Of course the counselor must do all he can Biblically to see the need of the person met, but in the final analysis the outcome rest upon the counselee's willingness to apply truth.

Sometimes as counselors we are prone to accept all the responsibility of success or failure of the sessions.

A. We ought not do that, for if we have --

1. truly presented the Word of God and made much of the Scriptures as they speak to the need, and

2. we have been faithful to the principles of good counseling, and

3. have given good Biblical home work,

4. as we looked to the Holy Spirit for His work and given ourselves much to prayer -- **then** we must trust the results to the Lord. (Eph. 6:18; Luke 11)

B. The counselee is truly responsible for change in his life for he is accountable for his or her own choices. (Rom. 14:12; II Cor. 5:10)

C. God never coerces for He gives each person the right of choice and free will to make that choice. (Deut. 30:16, 19-20a)

Qualities and Characteristics We Must Have

There are many qualities we need as we get involved in laboring and ministering to others in counseling opportunities. If we are to exhort, admonish, rebuke, and also confront lovingly, excite, and encourage unto God's will, what kind of person do we need to be so that God can use us for His glory? (Col. 3:16)

I. IN THIS MINISTRY WE WILL NEED TO POSSESS MUCH KNOWLEDGE.

Consider: II Tim. 2:15; II Tim. 3:16,17

A. Eccl. 12:9, 10 *"And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth."*

B. Therefore, we must also labor over the Word of God, find answers, and teach in a practical way what God has said.

C. People have many complex problems therefore we will need to seriously study the Word to find answers.

II. WE MUST HAVE A LARGE MEASURE OF ADAPTABILITY.

A. Paul wrote in I Thess. 5:14, *"Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men."*

1. There are three different categories of persons given here. They do not need, nor could they take the same application. We must adapt the ministry to varying needs. A wrong response could be very devastating to some.

2. There are those who are unruly or disorderly, and they need warning.

3. There are those who are "little souls", meaning feeble-minded who were possibly timid and afraid. If they are handled like the unruly we will "beat them into the ground and they will disappear from sight." They need encouragement and comfort.

4. There are those who are weak who need support and encouragement.

B. A study of Proverbs will bring to light four groups of people:

1. the wise man, 2. scorner, 3. simple, and the 4. fool

C. Some have physical needs, from :

1. disease, 2. crisis events, 3. adjustments to aging, 4. accidents,

D. Some are in the midst of struggles of the spirit and soul, such as:

1. worries, 2. fears, 3. anxieties, 4. testings, 5. trials

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