

A Pastoral Model For Biblical Counseling

By Dr. Edward Watke Jr.

I. THE PHILOSOPHY OF COUNSELING

1. Counseling is a ministry primarily by the pastor provided through the local church to his people because God has called him to be an overseer and a shepherd.
2. In order to feed Christ's sheep, individual care must be given. When the sheep have needs, the pastor is to supply them. If they are spiritually hungry, suffering, needing wisdom or direction -- it is his responsibility to seek to meet those needs. (See John 21:15-17.)
3. It is also the ministry of every mature believer to be involved (at least informally) in a restoring, admonishing and exhorting ministry of counseling. (See Galatians 6:1,2.)
4. In counseling, assume that most problems originate from sin and the sinful nature that is in man. (See Jeremiah 17:9.) From the wicked heart come the problems of thoughts, actions and emotional difficulties.
5. The counseling session must always be Christ centered and never self-oriented. (Colossians 1:16-18; Revelation 4:11.)
6. Unless the Holy Spirit of God is present doing the transforming, a person cannot be change, see the error of his ways or even come under conviction. The counselor can only point the counselee to the Word of God for it is his responsibility to apply the Scriptures.

II. A METHODOLOGY OR MODEL

A. Problem Identification

1. As a Pastor You Must Build Relationships.
 - a. This is a must if the counselor is going to gain the confidence and get the receptiveness that he would desire.
 - b. One must demonstrate to the counselee genuine concern and compassion mingled with the love of Christ.
 - c. He must create an atmosphere and environment that will not be threatening to the counselee.
2. There Are Surface or Symptomatic Problems.
 - a. Many problems that are experienced are the symptoms of even greater problems.
 - b. We must differentiate the surface problems from the root or inner problems.
 - c. Many of the surface problems will have to be dealt with first to allow the person to break through and see the inner or more basic problem (s).

3. The Pastor Must Recognize Root Problems.

a. *Physical source* -

One must be conscious that physical illness can be the symptom of a greater problem stemming from sin. But at the same time physical illness can have an effect on how the person behaves and operates.

We need to be alert to the fact that some of the counselees may need to have physical examinations before progress can be made. There may be some cases where a patient is on some kind of medication and it is having adverse effects.

b. *Mental source* -

Thought processes are very powerful motivators. Sinful thoughts are often the product of the intents of the sinful heart and sin nature that is in man. Once they are formed and become a habit, thoughts can manipulate and control a person's attitudes and behavior.

- Matthew 5:28 indicates that it is not necessary to physically commit adultery to sin, it can be done in the mind.
- In Philippians 4:8 Paul urges us to think upon that which is pure, whole, good and to keep our minds stayed on that which is of honorable and godly.
- If we concentrate on evil and wrong it can lead to outward sinful behavior. As we allow the Holy Spirit to control us, our thoughts will be established. (See Proverbs 16:2.)
- In Romans 12:2 Paul writes of the need to be transformed by the renewing of the mind. We carry a lot of old baggage from the old nature and we need to be constantly renewing our minds through the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

c. *Emotional source* -

- God did not make Adam and Eve without emotions. Their emotional problems were a result of the fall. They experienced guilt, fear, loneliness, and pride.
- Many people do experience extreme emotional problems and are controlled by them. But the Lord can and will give victory to that person if that one is willing to surrender his emotions to Him.
- Emotions can be channeled and used in a good way or they can get out of control and destroy an individual. Our emotions are not an independent entity that is able to control the person without remedy. They stem from thoughts and are nursed until they become controlling factors.

d. *Other root problems* -

These are the problems that are the basis for all other problems. This is the area that the counselor must get to eventually if he is going to solve the problem and not just treat the symptoms.

- *Status of Salvation* -- The root problem may be that the person is not saved.
- *Personal walk with Christ* - This is where most of the problems start. It must be dealt with in the first counseling session.
- *Specific sin* - There may be a specific sin that is the root of all the problems that the counselee experiences. This sin must be found, exposed, confessed and thoroughly dealt with. (Heb. 12:1)

B. Problem Confrontation

1. Why Do We Confront in Love?
 - a. *It is a Biblical activity!* (I Thess. 4:1; 5:14; II Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9; 2:6,9,15; Heb. 3:13.)
 - b. *It is to include judging, reproof, reconciliation, restitution, discipling, exhorting and training.* (John 7:24; Heb. 4:12; Col. 3:8-14; II Tim. 3:16,17)
2. How Do We Confront in Love?
 - a. *It must be done because the Word of God is authoritative.*
 - b. *It must be done in compassion and the love of Christ for that individual. One must be assertive in presenting Biblical principles and not beat around the bush. The counselor must gather data and arrive at a Biblical diagnosis and present it to the counselee.*
3. When Do We Confront in Love?
 - a. *When the Holy Spirit leads.*
 - b. *When we perceive that a brother has been overtaken in a fault. We are to endeavor to restore that individual or family. (See Galatians 6:1,2.)*
 - c. *When the person comes on his own for help. Pastors need to be approachable, and ready to help. People with whom the pastor labors must see his compassion and know that he is trustworthy with personal information.*

C. Problem Support Groups

1. There are great advantages to having a counseling ministry within the local church since the structure for support groups probably already exists.
2. It may be necessary in some counseling situations to develop support groups that will help the counselee to keep his mind stayed on getting victory over the problem that he faces.
3. The church family as a whole can be an encouragement even if the person's problem is not made known.
4. If the counselee does not attend church, he should be required to get under the preaching of the Word. Then there are smaller groups within the church that can act in closer support than the congregation as a whole, such as in Sunday School or small Bible study groups.
5. Then of course the family and close friends of the individual may help even more intimately according to the needs and desires of the counselee.

D. Problem Solving

1. Change is the ultimate goal in the problem solving process. It might be easier to help the person feel better but the goal should be to help that person live through the problems that he is facing and gain victory over them so that he can grow.

2. Problem solving deals with the *Behavioral Processes* which are the external problems and the *Cognitive Processes* which are internal problems.
3. Problem solving takes place through the *putting off and putting or Replacement Process*. This is the key to successful long term change.
3. One must deal with the actions almost immediately. But if he is to solve the problem he must seek to change the inner problems (or his self-talk) as well. The internal problems help produce the outer actions or behavior.

a. *Cognitive Processes*

- This deals primarily with the thoughts that produce external actions.
- Christ taught about the relationship between the inner and outward life, Matthew 12:24, 35.
- In Proverbs 23:7 Solomon speaks of man's thoughts and their effect. "For as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Man's basic problems stems from pride which is an internal problem that produces external results, (Proverbs 6:16-18.)
- Self-talk is very much involved in this internal process. As the thought life changes, behavior will change also.
- Our inner thoughts have a great influence upon our emotions and our actions.
- One's internal processes are all motivated and controlled by his own belief system and it may be necessary to modify this system or eradicate it and replace it with a biblical one. This is one of the most important aspects to change in any person's life.

b. *Behavioral Changes*

- This basically deals with the practice of habits.
- These habits are produced by the continual repetition of a certain action until one can do it unconsciously. Here is where the counselor will have to identify the sinful habits and work out a system of discipline, (which is the key to getting victory in this area). This is the only way to break the chain of sinful actions and get victory over them.
- Often changing behavior is one step towards changing attitudes.
- This stage involves creating new patterns of action.

c. *Putting off and Putting on*

- This is the biblical system of changing the cognitive and behavioral processes.
- Paul speaks repetitively on this subject in Ephesians 4:17-32 and Colossians 3:8-14. The principles of *putting off and putting on* are dealt with in detail in these passages.
- One cannot just get rid of a bad habit or thought without putting something good in its place. If this process is not carried out then the counselee will soon fall back into the old habits and thoughts because there is a vacuum left there.

E. Problem Assignments

1. This is the outworking of the *put off and put on process*. There must be homework to help the counselee to bring about change.

2. This is one of the most important parts of the counseling process based upon what James said in James 1:22 *“But be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”* We would be deceiving ourselves if we thought that we could bring about change solely by the words of advice that we give.
3. Change necessitates activity. Making assignments will help delineate and guide those specific activities that will help break the patterns of sin.

III. THE OUTWORKING OF THE MODEL IN THE COUNSELING PROCESS

Let me describe how you would use this model in as few words as possible.

A. How You Would Begin

1. When someone comes for counsel one of the first things that you would do is to set them down and explain your methods of counseling.
2. Possibly the next thing would be to develop rapport and set the stage for the relationship with the counselee.
3. The next step, unless you do this earlier, might be to have the counselee fill out an inventory form (personal data sheet) or if that has been done, to ask further questions concerning the reason (s) for the desired counseling.

B. Getting The Process Started

1. There is a process that one must go through to evaluate through questions and non-verbal communications to determine the surface problems and to get to the root situation.
2. This may take a number of sessions but one can immediately start working on what he knows are the surface problems. The counselor will need to continue to get data about the counselee's problems.

C. Getting Beyond the Beginning

1. The next major step is confrontation; a Biblical diagnosis based upon the data gathered and presented to the counselee. By this time the counselor should know if a specific support group inside or outside the church will be needed.
2. The next step is to begin working through the behavior and the thoughts and outline a *putting off and putting one* process for the counselee to begin to implement.

D. Getting Homework Assigned, and Working at Change

The problem assignments are closely associated with problem solving. The importance of giving the counselee homework assignments cannot be stressed enough. This is where the rubber hits the road.

If the counselee is sincere in surrendering his life to the Lord he will willingly and energetically do the assignments given. This homework will then be evaluated at the beginning of each session and new homework will be given as needed.

Much more could be said about the outworking of this model but space and time will not permit. Probably, through the years individuals will modify and restructure this model to better meet the counseling needs of the people they work with.