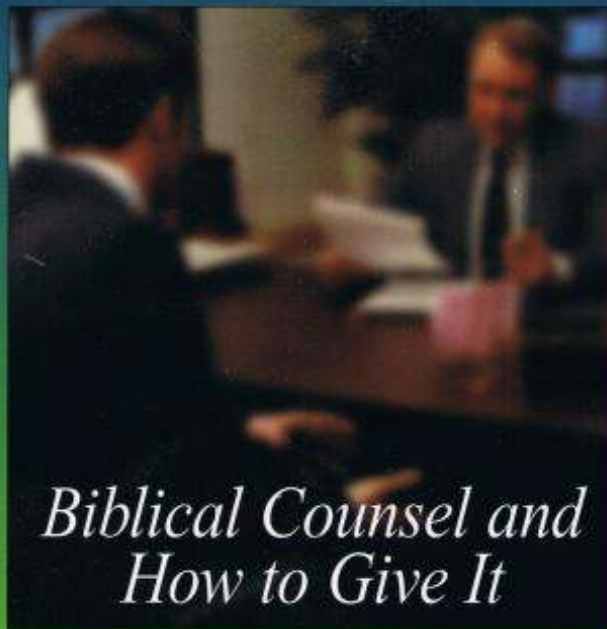


PRACTICAL COUNSELING PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIANS



*Biblical Counsel and
How to Give It*

BY DR. JEFF OWENS

SLBC
Christian Counseling One
LESSON FOUR

COUNSELING ON MARRIAGE



*“People need to be reminded more than
they need to be instructed.”*

–Unknown

XXXIII

COUNSELING BEFORE An Engagement

IN PROVERBS 18:22, the Bible says, “*Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD.*” The key to having a godly, successful marriage is to find the will of God concerning whom to marry. Helping someone choose the right person may be considered what I call “pre-engagement counseling.” I have successfully utilized the following principles in teaching the single person about seeking God’s will about marriage. In His Word, God designed a way for a person to find the correct mate.

1. **One must seek God’s will concerning a prospective mate.** “*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*” (Proverbs 3:5, 6) A person seeking a marriage partner must believe that God is able to do what is best for him. If we trust and ask God, forgetting our wants and wishes, He will order our steps.

2. **The prospective mate must be saved.** II Corinthians 6:14 says, “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*” An unsaved person is not even within the realm of choice for a Christian young person to marry. The counselor must warn of the unequal

yoke. Far too many young people marry an unsaved person and live in misery for the rest of their lives.

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” Amos 3:3 holds a subtle warning for the Christian. How can two people be together in marriage for the rest of their lives if they don’t agree about Jesus? There are absolutely no exceptions to salvation being a prerequisite for marriage.

3. A prospective mate must value the spiritual. *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* (Matthew 6:33) Two people who want to be married should desire Christ above all else. They should love and want Him more than they desire a marital partner.

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” (I Corinthians 15:58) The dating couple should love working for Christ and being active in His service. Christ should hold first place in each of their lives. They should not just merely be saved, but each should also be living for God as well. A concern for the souls of men and an active personal relationship with God should be present.

This couple should not be interested in building their future marriage on the basis of those temporal things which are subject to change, such as beauty, money, or physical strength. Temporal things should not determine God’s will in marriage.

4. The prospective mate should be ambitious and industrious. *“He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.”* (Proverbs 10:4) Possessing the characteristic of hard work is a must when choosing a mate. A beautiful woman who is lazy will quickly become ugly to her husband. A lazy man makes for a very poor husband. *“That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”* (Hebrews 6:12) A man should work to support his wife and family. If he is able physically, he should be responsible to house her, clothe her, and feed her and not depend upon her adding an income or on the state for welfare. If a man is lazy before marriage, he will continue to be lazy after marriage. The Bible has a special name for the man who will not care for his family. *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”* (I Timothy 5:8) If a teenage girl won’t help her mother do housework, she will make a poor wife when the housework is her personal responsibility.

5. The prospective mate should be good-natured and even-

tempered. “*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.*” (Ephesians 4:32) The attribute of kindness should be easily seen. One should always keep in mind that most people demonstrate their best behavior in public. What is seen of someone’s temperament in public may very well change in private, and that behavior usually does not improve.

“*Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go.*” Proverbs 22:24 does more than caution; it forbids a close friendship with a routinely angry person. Friendship should come before marriage and should carry on through the life of the marriage. Friendship is the mortar that binds relationships. However, unresolved anger means trouble and division in relationships.

These verses are two of many that teach the principle of marrying another who practices self-restraint. To marry a temper-bound person is to ask for trouble, and Proverbs 22:25 warns that one could become like the angry person: “*Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul.*”

6. It is desirable that the prospective mate have good training and a good background. “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*” (Proverbs 22:6) The wise person seeking a mate will study the background of his date. Of necessity, he needs to look at the roots. If the roots are bad, he must decide whether or not the family recognizes the past problems. If the prospective mate is saved, but the parents are not, the wise person will be sure his date has been doing right for a long time before allowing a relationship to become serious. He needs to be sure the person has been in church long enough to have received plenty of Bible training. However, if the family is not faithful to church and God, as a rule the date won’t be faithful in marriage like God instructs.

7. The prospective mate should have good morals. “*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*” (I Thessalonians 5:22) Young people should stay pure. This gift of purity should be closely guarded and protected. Of course, one way to stay pure is to never be alone anywhere with a member of the opposite sex. If a prospective couple will have sex outside of marriage with each other, then they may have sex outside of marriage with someone else. If a person has not stayed pure, it is unreasonable for him to expect to marry a pure person. Even though our God is a forgiving God, His forgiveness cannot restore someone’s physical virginity once it is lost. I believe it is best that two “likes” in the area of purity should marry.

8. The prospective mate should be clean and neat. “*Therefore*

hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight." (Psalm 18:24) The wearing of clean clothes usually indicates a clean person. Cleanliness is taught in the Bible and is expected of God's people. I have to believe that living with a dirty person would be very unpleasant because a dirty person will result in a dirty house and, more than likely, dirty and unkept children. What a horrible testimony!

9. The prospective mate should see marriage as a lifetime agreement. "*Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*" (Matthew 19:6) The word *asunder* is an adverb meaning *into parts or pieces* or *apart* or *separate in direction* or *position*. According to the Greek word for *asunder*, God yokes together a husband and wife; therefore, marriage should be entered into as a lifetime commitment. Marriage partners do not go their own directions. It is so dangerous for a couple to enter the marriage relationship with the thought, "We can give this a try; and if it doesn't work out, we can get a divorce." What a desecration of the institution of marriage! Divorce should not even be seen as an option; the word *divorce* should not even be uttered or be a part of the vocabulary in a Christian home. A couple should make their marriage work. Once a couple has been married—yoked together by God—He does not want that couple going in separate directions.

I believe a prospective mate should meet these prerequisites for marriage. I am not dogmatically saying that if a person doesn't fit every category, he is not eligible. I am stressing that if every person carefully seeking God's will in choosing the right mate will follow these nine guidelines, he will be greatly helped.

XXXIV

COUNSELING DURING The Engagement

THE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS and direction could be given to an engaged couple soon to be married. A word of caution: a couple should not quickly decide to marry. If adequate time has been given to the maturing of the relationship, premarital helps will be a great service to the couple.

1. **The counselor should instruct an engaged couple from the beginning that there is no such thing as a perfect marriage.** Romans 3:10 says, “*As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.*” Romans 3:23 says, “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*” As long as sinners are involved, there can be no perfect marriages! We are all sinners; therefore, we should be the best imperfect people we can be. An engaged couple needs to realize they are two imperfect people. Therefore, a couple should practice perfect patience and perfect longsuffering.

I believe many expect far too much of their mates. To be sure, a husband or a wife will sin at some time or another. Some are devastated when they find their mate has sinned. However, one does not need to become disillusioned with a person if he never has false expectations in the first place.

2. **About one month before the wedding, the couple should**

meet with their counselor for a two-hour premarital counseling session. I believe it is very unwise to counsel much sooner because of the sensitive nature of some of the counseling topics.

3. Premarital counseling should be going on from the time a person is an infant. From the moment a child comes into a home, that child is learning about marriage. He is learning about how parents should behave and how married couples should behave. Meeting with a couple for a two-hour session one month before the wedding does not totally prepare them for marriage. That is impossible!

Some people mistakenly think, "I need to have some premarital counseling to get ready for marriage." That person should have been getting ready all of his life. In order to have a good, strong marriage, the couple must put a lot of time into their marriage.

The average person in the United States of America will put more time into preparing for his wedding ceremony than he will put into character building and preparation for marriage. He will put more time into planning that one-hour service than he will put into planning that lifetime contract he is about to "sign." This two-hour appointment will be to help them with the honeymoon and give some practical guidelines to get them started out right.

4. During the premarital counseling session, the counselor should discuss the four main causes of marital problems. These four major contributors to divorce are also discussed in the marital counseling chapter.

A. Finances. *"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."* (I Timothy 6:10) [See chapter 27 about "Counseling on Finances."]

B. In-laws. *"And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?"* (Matthew 19:5) Times will arise when a newlywed couple's parents won't understand the young couple's service to God and their commitment to Christ and the church. There will surely be times when a couple will make personal decisions that the in-laws will not understand. Still, in-laws should never come between a married couple.

C. The intimate marital life. *"Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband."*

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband." (I Corinthians 7:2, 3) The Bible teaches that a man should be physically satisfied by his wife, and his wife should be physically satisfied by him. The Bible teaches in these verses the need of fulfillment in the area of the physical intimate marital relationship. If problems arise, the couple should seek counsel immediately.

D. The disciplining of children. *"He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* (Proverbs 13:24) The Bible teaches to have discipline in the home. If a couple loves their children, they will discipline them. Not disciplining indicates an absence of love. Advance preparations must be made by a couple to avoid this future area of possible disagreement.

The wise counselor will warn the couple that these four areas need to be dealt with immediately as soon as a problem arises in any one of these areas. If a couple has a difficulty in any one area, they shouldn't think it odd or strange. They merely need to seek help when needed.

5. The wise counselor will talk to the couple about the wisdom of having no children for the first three years. *"When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year, and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken."* (Deuteronomy 24:5) A young married couple need to get to know each other and strengthen their marriage ties. In historical Bible days when a young man married, he did not go off to war. Even in America, there was a day when the draft board would not call a newly married man.

Picture in your mind a young man and a young lady wanting to get married—probably from the time they were in their teen years. After a very long wait, she finally receives her engagement ring. They await their wedding day with anticipation. Finally, the marriage ceremony is over, and they leave for their long-awaited honeymoon. They have waited all those years to be alone with each other! She unexpectedly becomes pregnant, and, as of that night, the newlyweds are no longer alone anymore. What the couple needed to do was take a couple of years to adjust to one another. I believe it is a good idea for the child's sake that the young father and mother work the snags out of the marriage before a child becomes a family member. When parents are in harmony with each other, a child has a better chance of living in harmony with his parents. Therefore, I believe it is wise

for the husband and wife to plan to have no children for the first three years of their marriage. She should probably not try to get pregnant for the first two years and three months. Once the wife is carrying a child or a child enters the picture, things change. All decisions include the child.

It also takes a little time to prepare financially for a child. I personally don't believe people should have more children than their character level will allow them to support. Too many people have eight or ten children and cannot care for them—monetarily or emotionally.

Many different methods of birth control are available to today's married couples. The wise pastor will suggest ways or refer them to a physician.

6. The wise counselor will read and explain I Corinthians 7:3–5. *“Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”* A wise counselor will take the time to explain that the Bible teaches a husband and a wife are to spend time together physically. The Bible uses the words “*defraud ye not*,” which means the man does not have power over his body. He is to submit to his wife's needs physically. The husband is to fulfill his wife; the wife is to fulfill her husband. These verses teach mutual submission. If a husband would be concerned about fulfilling his wife, and the wife were concerned about fulfilling her husband, problems in the intimate marital relationship would not be so prevalent.

7. The couple should promise to never refuse each other's romantic advances. *“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”* (Ephesians 5:21) A husband and a wife may experience some division. It would be easy for a wife to say to her husband [and vice versa], “You can't touch me because I'm angry.” That spouse will be using the intimate marital relationship as leverage in their relationship. However, the Bible instructs explicitly that marital partners are not to reject one another's attentions.

I cannot stress how important it is for a counselor to explain to the husband that he should please his wife physically. It is a proven fact that many women who have been married for as many as 60 years never one time have fully enjoyed the intimate marital relationship. How sad and disappointing! That wife has been robbed because the husband was so self-

centered and egotistical—all he cared about was himself. That lack of fulfillment will cause a wife to eventually become cold. I don't believe a woman should ever become cold and shut out her marital partner. A husband should help his wife to enjoy herself as much as he expects to enjoy her.

8. When necessary, a married couple should seek counsel about their intimate life. In Proverbs 15:22 the Bible says, "*Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.*" I believe couples should be more concerned about their spiritual life than their intimate life, but certainly the intimate area deserves and demands attention. The physical drive needs to be met and fulfilled. I can assure you that there is many a husband who is frustrated because he is not sure what to do to help his wife enjoy what he gets to enjoy. There are also many wives who are frustrated about intimacy because they are not sure what to do.

I certainly do not mean to be inappropriate, but this area of life must be addressed like any other area of life. All married couples need to learn. A man's pride usually won't allow him to seek counsel in this area of marriage. If a couple seeks counsel, possibly the counselor can talk to the husband, and, if necessary, the counselor's wife can advise the wife.

9. The wise counselor will remind a couple that he will always be available when needed. Ninety-nine times out of 100, a couple will come back to the person who helped them get started in their marriage relationship. I Corinthians 13:8 says, "*Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.*" A pastor's love should not fail his people. The people should know and realize their pastor will be available and loves them and wants to help them. If a pastor loves his people unconditionally, they will seek counsel.

10. The newly married couple should read books on marriage. In fact, a good idea might be to assign a book on marriage for them to read. A counselor needs to find books that he can recommend.

11. Both the husband and the wife should have an attractive evening wardrobe. "*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.*" (Isaiah 61:10) Proverbs 31:22 says, "*She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is*

silk and purple.” My wife once heard the late Mrs. John R. Rice teach on Proverbs 31:22 and the importance of a wife’s evening wardrobe. There is nothing wrong with a husband and a wife having attractive sleepwear.

Every husband should have decent clothes to wear to bed; I believe the same for every wife. The mystique of marriage is enhanced. The wise counselor will remind the husband that his wife cannot purchase attractive nightclothes unless he gives her money to do so.

12. The newly married couple needs to be careful about cleanliness. The Bible has much to say about being clean. Many have heard John Wesley’s quote: “Certainly this is a duty, not a sin. Cleanliness is next to godliness.” It’s still true! I have heard of husbands who come home from work and are dirty, and they won’t take a shower before they go to bed. He cannot understand why his wife is not interested in being intimate with him. He might even ask, “Honey, what’s wrong?” If she could tell the truth, she would say, “You smell bad.”

I must say that I wonder about a man who cares about the freshness of his breath before marriage, but the minute he is married he doesn’t use breath fresheners any longer. Maintaining that level of cleanliness is very important. A husband should wear cologne that he enjoys for his wife’s sake. I believe the same courtesies should also be shown by the wife.

13. A couple should make big of their anniversary date. “*And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant.*” (Exodus 6:5) This verse is one of many which show how God made covenants with His people. Marriage is also a covenant. The bride and groom promise: “For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.” An anniversary is saying, “I remember the day I made the promise.” Therefore, I believe a husband and wife should remember to make big of the day they covenanted together.

A young couple who is about to be married should be told to make big over their future anniversary days. A counselor should prompt a couple to make sure that they video their wedding, have an audio cassette made of the wedding ceremony, and have many pictures taken at their marriage. Why? Each year at anniversary time, they should be reminded of their covenant.

I once counseled with a young lady who was planning to leave her husband. I advised, “When you get up in the morning, fix a cup of coffee and sit down on the sofa. Then I want you to watch carefully the video of

your wedding. Then, get out the picture album of your wedding and look through all the pictures. Call me before you leave him.”

The next day she followed my instructions. She called, weeping. “Brother Owens, I am so sorry. I followed your instructions; I watched the video and looked at the pictures. I promise to get right with my husband tonight. I now remember my vows and my wedding day.”

The world jokes about how the husband always forgets the anniversary. I believe it is fine to joke about the husband forgetting if he never forgets one of the greatest commitments he has made in his life. How foolish it is to forget. As the world jokes lightly about the covenant of marriage, two out of three marriages end in divorce. God remembered His covenant with His people; a couple needs to remember their covenant at the wedding altar.

14. Every couple should cut the word “divorce” out of their dictionary. The word *quit*, which goes hand in hand with the word *divorce*, is another word to cut out of the dictionary. If you go to my library and check my dictionaries, you will not find the word *quit*. Matthew 19:6 says, “*Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*” Becoming one flesh was God’s plan. Marriage is an unconditional love commitment, a spiritual commitment. Every couple must realize that the relationship between a husband and wife is a beautiful picture of the relationship between Christ and the church.

Since marriage was the first institution God created, a couple must constantly work at preserving their marriage.

XXXV

COUNSELING ON Marriage

IN MATTHEW 19:3–8, the Bible says, “*The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female. And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*”

In America today, statistics show that one out of two marriages end in divorce. Other statistics indicate the divorce rate is as high as sixty percent. This percentage would probably be higher if people didn't sinfully live together instead of marrying, causing no divorce to be recorded when they go their separate ways.

Three reasons for this high rate of divorce are as follows:

- A decrease in a Biblical influence on the family.
- A decrease in a Biblical standard of living, which consequently

brings a decrease in sexual morality.

- A higher percentage of immature people who get married, as well as young people who have no respect for authority—especially the authority of the Word of God.

When people are converted and begin to live according to the Bible, the number of divorces decreases. Choosing the right mate is as much a key to having a successful marriage as being the right kind of mate. One must prepare for a successful marriage, as well as continue to work at it after marriage. The institution of marriage never fails; people fail. A counselor must be well prepared to help work out the conflicts of a marriage.

MARRIAGE IS A LIFETIME CONTRACT

Matthew 19:5 says, “*And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.*” Matthew 19:5 is a New Testament quote of Genesis 2:24 which says, “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.*” The husband is to cleave to his wife. The word *cleave* is a verb which means *to cling to* or *to be faithful to*. The marriage contract stipulates leaving behind all, including parents, clinging to each other for mutual support.

Genesis 2:21–23 says, “*And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.*” God easily could have made Eve without the taking of Adam’s rib. God could have formed Eve from the dust of the ground as He did Adam in Genesis 2:7. I believe God made woman from man’s rib to symbolize that they were to be one flesh.

Every counselor should have as his goal to help reconcile marriages. I believe God can work miracles if people will let Him. Since entire books have been written on marriage, this chapter will be far from comprehensive. The principles presented will be helpful to study for guidelines on how to conduct a marriage counseling appointment.

1. Both the husband and the wife must be present for a marriage counseling appointment. It is very difficult to counsel two-party

problems with only one person present. I may be able to teach one member about how to be a good Christian, but I can't help repair a marriage with only one person. I have found that when only one person will come for counseling, what was said during the appointment often gets back to the other party. Usually what is said is biased. The counselor may lose the confidence of the person who did not come for the appointment.

2. **A counselor may advise an individual in a troubled marriage about how to be a good Christian.** The wise counselor will graciously decline counseling with the husband who seeks marital advice without his wife present. If the husband is sure his wife will not come for counseling, the counselor may want to counsel him on ways to become a better Christian. The counselor may want to discuss what good Christians do in his situation. I believe if we would all just be good Christians, marriages would go better. The counselor should instruct the husband to read his Bible and pray, which are definitely a part of the solution to marital problems.

3. **The wise counselor will have a specific agenda for a marital counseling session.** Both the husband and wife must be present in the office. A fair plan must be presented to both. I often start the appointment by saying, "I'm very glad you both came today. Before we start, I want to explain something to both of you. Sir, I am not on your wife's side, and I want you to know it. Ma'am, I want you to know that I am not on your husband's side. I do not take sides in my counseling. I want us all to be on the side of right. Neither of you have to worry about this information or counseling being biased."

Then, I tell them that I will talk to each one privately about the situation, and then we will meet together after the private sessions.

In preparation to talk to each person privately, I may make this statement or one similar: "I would like to ask one of you to go to the waiting room for just a few minutes while I talk to the other. Why don't we let ladies go first? I'll talk to your wife first." I then direct the husband to the waiting room and let him know I will call him in just a few minutes. (The counselor may feel it wise to leave the door slightly ajar when counseling alone with a lady.)

I ask questions, and I listen to the wife. I take notes while listening to her side. When we are finished, I ask the wife to leave, and the husband comes in. I listen, take notes, and ask questions.

I take a few moments alone to look over my notes and their answers. I then meet with both for a conclusion. During this time, while using the

answers to my questions, I try to begin repairing misunderstandings. Please note that I do not feel that one person should try to change the other person. However, I do feel that each should work at changing self. I find it is not always wise to reveal answers they have given in private to my questions.

I assure them both that while each was in my presence that each was very kind and appropriate concerning the other.

4. The wise counselor will have prepared questions to ask during the marriage counseling session. I ask the following questions to both the husband and wife while I am meeting privately with each:

- A. *What would you most like to change about your spouse?*
- B. *What would you most like to change about yourself?*
- C. *What would your spouse most like to change about you?*

I use both sides of a 3 x 5 card for these questions, which are already written on both sides of the card. I write the lady's name at the top of one side, and the husband's name is on the other side. I leave space in between for their answers. I must admit that after asking these three questions to both the husband and the wife, I am amazed at how often they already know what needs to be changed! Allow me to make the following observations:

- 1) If they know what needs to be changed, but they have refused to change, pride has entered into their marriage relationship.
- 2) If they know what needs to be changed and pride is not the problem, they need the counselor to train them to solve their problems. Organization is their answer.

5. The wise counselor will assure them that their problem is not uncommon. Sometimes people will hesitate to reveal some of their conflicts because they think that they are the only ones that have that struggle. They may be less embarrassed if the counselor says, "A problem like this is not uncommon." They are more apt to open up, and the counselor will better be able to help them.

6. The wise counselor will offer a prescription for the solution to the problem. The wise counselor acts like a doctor who dispenses prescriptions. Though most doctors write their own prescriptions, I recommend the following procedure:

- A. *The counselor should ask the wife to write the "prescription" as he dictates it.* One reason for doing so is she will be more likely to

give attention to the details when it is in her own handwriting.

B. *The counselor should repeat the “prescription.”* He needs to be sure the instructions are written correctly. If a doctor writes the wrong prescription, the illness cannot be cured.

C. *Ask both the husband and wife to promise to follow the “prescription.”* Perhaps each should sign the prescription.

PRESCRIPTIONS OFTEN NEEDED BY COUPLES

- *The decision-making areas in the relationship need to be divided.* If a couple cannot agree in making decisions, it is very obvious that the counselor needs to assign given areas to the husband and the wife. By doing so, the husband makes some decisions on his own, and the wife makes some decisions on her own. They both must agree to abide with each other’s decisions in those given areas. For instance, some husbands and wives cannot agree in the area of finances. Therefore, a decision must be made as to who will pay the bills. They simply must not share this responsibility.

Not many couples can agree in the grocery store. He questions and wonders why she is buying this or that or why she is doing it that way. The truth is, the husband would be much better off giving her grocery money and letting her go to the store alone. He should let her have that area of expertise so there is no disagreement.

Basically, what I am suggesting is that some couples are not good enough Christians to harmonize when sharing some responsibilities. The counselor helps them avoid that area of conflict. For this particular prescription, she writes down the areas in which they will divide their decision-making.

- *The wife should have a given number of hours each week away from the house.* Frequently, a husband is gone 40 to 50 hours a week, but the wife is left at home and never seems to have time away from the house. This situation can become very frustrating to a woman if she never has any free time. After all, the husband does not spend entire days “locked up” in the house with children. She, too, needs a chance to breathe! She needs an opportunity to have friends. She, too, needs the chance to buy a refreshing drink and relax. Often a husband stops on the way to work to buy himself something to eat if he wants; however, his wife doesn’t have that luxury.

The counselor's prescription is to organize how much time the wife needs to herself and when the time will be spent, and then she will write those findings on the prescription blank.

- ***The married couple should have a weekly date.*** Rarely do I find a couple who has a weekly date. Those who are experiencing difficulties seem never to have dates. Without fail, my wife and I go out together every Monday afternoon. Before they get married, a couple wants to date every day and spend every available minute together. But after he places a ring on her finger, many a husband never dates his wife again! That philosophy is not right! A marriage will not stay together unless a couple spends quality time together on a regular basis. When both the husband and wife know they will have each other all to themselves at a given time, it provides much security and comfort—especially during stressful times.

The counselor's prescription is to help the couple set a time for a weekly date, and the wife needs to fill out the prescription form with that set time.

- ***The husband should plan regularly scheduled times with each child.*** In the average home, the mother always cares for the children. It's sad to say, but true, that fathers rarely spend any structured or scheduled individual times with their children. As I have mentioned elsewhere, family time is so important. More important than family time is individualized time spent with the family. If a person had to choose between spending time with individuals and spending time with the family, I believe he is better off to spend time with the individuals. The individual relationships build the strong family unit. Far too many Christian fathers are failing in this area by not spending any time or enough time with his sons or daughters.

The wise counselor will advise the husband how to spend quality time with his children. The wife will write those times on the prescription.

To be sure, these are not all the "prescriptions" available to troubled marriages. I do find these areas are the most prevalent problem areas. The counselor needs to keep in mind that his prescriptions will help the people with whom he is counseling to know what is expected of them.

7. The wise counselor will remind the couple of God's priorities for their lives. Sometimes people are so busy choosing priorities that they do not remember that God has priorities for Christians' lives. When counseling people, the wise counselor will remind the couple of the priorities that God has given to them in life. Let me share the top priorities the Bible gives to a husband and wife.

A. The husband's priority is work. According to Genesis 2:15, God created man to care for the "garden." "*And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*" Both need to be reminded that man's original purpose in life is to work.

B. The wife's priority is the man. According to Genesis 2:18, the woman (or the wife) was created to care for the man. "*And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*" A wife needs to be reminded of the purpose for her creation—to be a help fit for her husband.

C. God commands both the husband and the wife to each work on weak areas. For instance, in Ephesians 5:25 the Bible says, "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*" God commanded the husband to work on loving his wife because that is man's weak point. It is very easy for man to love his work and to be captivated by his work. Why? Because God created him to work. God knew He would not need to command the man to work. Rather, He knew the man needed to be commanded to love his wife and express that love. Therefore, the Bible reminds man he must spend time with his wife and love her.

On the other hand, God also knew that woman would express her love, so He commanded her to obey or to submit according to Ephesians 5:22, which says, "*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.*" Why? Because it is easier for a wife to love; however, it is more difficult for her to submit or obey her husband.

God gave commands concerning the weak areas. He commanded the husband to love and the wife to submit. Often in marital counseling, the need arises to remind the husband and wife of their specific priorities. A wife may complain because her husband loves his work. She ought to be thankful! A husband may complain because his wife is too romantic. She is supposed to be romantic and affectionate! The couple needs to be reminded of God's priorities for their lives.

8. If he feels it is necessary, the wise counselor will suggest scheduling a follow-up appointment. After counseling and spending time with a couple and giving his prescription, the counselor may want to schedule an appointment for one month later. If he feels no follow-up is

needed, he should let them know that he is available if problems arise in the future.

9. The wise counselor will make sure that no one feels he has been biased. At the same time, he should assure the couple that he is not personally against either one of them. He is merely trying to help them solve a difficulty.

10. When having a follow-up appointment, the wise counselor will check to see if the prescription is being followed. The person who is ill cannot get well if he doesn't purchase the needed medication the medical doctor has dispensed. In the same way, if the prescription the counselor advises is not being used, how can a couple expect any healing?

11. The wise counselor will explain that a husband cannot expect a wife to have a man's disposition. He cannot expect her to act like a man, think like a man, respond like a man, or have the emotions of a man. The Bible says in Genesis 5:2a, "*Male and female created he them.*" God's plan was to make the man and woman different from the very beginning.

12. The wise counselor should schedule adequate time for a marriage counseling appointment. I find that most marriage counseling appointments last one to two hours.

13. Every counselor should be familiar with the four main causes of marital problems.

A. Finances. It is a fact of life that a woman needs security. When she left the security of her father, she hoped and believed that loss would be replaced by her husband. However, receiving shut-off notices from the electric company does not engender security. In the first years of marriage, far too many newly married couples want the same standard of living and the same material possessions their parents enjoy. They, too, easily forget that their parents struggled and worked all of their lives to have the niceties they now take delight in having.

Credit buying can easily destroy a marriage. The wise counselor will help a young married couple organize their finances. He will also teach them restraint and how to wait. (See chapter 27.)

B. In-laws. If a man wants to get married but feels he must live with his in-laws or his parents, he is not ready for marriage. The Bible teaches that a couple is to leave mother and father and cleave to one another. It is best for a couple to live alone. I am not discounting a

rare emergency situation arising that necessitates a young married couple living with parents; these do happen. However, living with parents often causes a number of problems. For instance, the first time a new wife hears her husband say to his mother, "You're the best cook in the world," he is in big trouble! Or, the first time a new husband finds that his wife has borrowed a few dollars from her dad, she will have an irate husband on her hands.

In the same respect, the wife should not spend too much time with her parents or at their home. The same is true for the husband and his parents. Without meaning to interfere, in-laws often are quick to take sides. Guess on whose side they are most apt to be? The in-laws should be loved and treated like family, but they should not be allowed to hinder their children's marital relationship.

C. *The intimate marital relationship.* As I mentioned elsewhere, a couple should be instructed to kiss and make up before going to bed for the evening. They should be physically clean for one another. Both should have attractive sleepwear. Both should watch their weight. Both should strive to satisfy each other intimately. A man should never compare his wife's beauty to another. Each should regularly send sweet notes, give flowers, make short phone calls, give gifts, and so forth.

D. *The disciplining of children.* The Bible is very clear concerning the correct form of punishment to be used on a child. "*Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*" (Proverbs 22:15) "*The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*" (Proverbs 29:15) According to these verses, the Bible advocates corporal punishment. There should not be any difficulty about the disciplining of children because the Bible is very clear about what to do. However, if there are differences, they should not occur in the presence of the child. The parents must work together in the rearing of their children.

This short chapter seems a futile attempt to explore one of God's most wonderful institutions and plans for His people. As Christians, we should work to build successful marriages on the Biblical principles God has provided for us in His Word. The wise counselor will study and seek more truths from the Word of God about marriage.

XXXVI

COUNSELING ON Divorce

UNFORTUNATELY, EVEN IN Christian homes, divorce is on the upswing. Because of this fact, the counselor needs to be prepared to help those remaining in the broken home. The repercussions from desertion and divorce are devastating to all involved, especially to the children. One of the saddest facts is that divorce doesn't solve problems; it creates a new set of problems. Often, the person who thinks divorce will solve all his problems encounters the same set of problems, as well as creates a new set of difficulties.

1. **THE COUNSELOR SHOULD BE PREPARED TO COUNSEL A WIFE WHOSE HUSBAND HAS DESERTED HER.** The following are principles and steps I teach to a wife who has been deserted.

A. *She should not be seen with other men.* She should strive to remain pure.

B. *If she has charge of the children, she should give much attention to the children and their rearing.* She now has extra love to give, and that love should be channeled to her children, who will more than likely not be receiving any attention from their father at this time in their lives.

- C. *She should never criticize the children's father.*** Though it would be very easy, she should not be negative to the children about her situation. They do not need to have their affections divided, nor do they need to choose between their parents.
- D. *She should spend a lot of time at home.*** By doing so, if her spouse happens to come home, she will be available for reconciliation.
- E. *She should accept his telephone calls.*** Granted, hearing his voice can be difficult. I believe she should even attempt to communicate frequently with him.
- F. *She should work diligently on the upkeep of her house.*** If and when her spouse does come home, the atmosphere of cleanliness and neatness will be attractive and tempting to him.
- G. *She should not speak negatively concerning her situation to her friends and family.*** As much as possible, I advise to keep the situation confidential. The fewer people who know about the problem, the more her spouse is able to save face and the more likely he is to return. However, if she has maligned him to the point everyone is against him, how can he possibly return? A man's pride and ego cannot take that kind of attack.
- H. *She should keep up her personal appearance.*** She needs to be attractive for him if he returns.
- I. *She should read much in her Bible.*** She should study and meditate on stories of reconciliation, such as the story of Hosea and Gomer. She should also stay faithful to the church services, as well as in her service to the Lord.
- J. *She should pray and ask God to bring her spouse home as pure as when he left.*** She should also ask God to bring him back as quickly as possible.
- K. *She should search her life for anything that would hinder the reconciliation.*** By all means, she should seek counsel to help her overcome any character flaws that may have contributed to his leaving.
- L. *She should seek counsel concerning reconciliation.*** The reestablishment of cordial relations may be very difficult to attain. The wise wife will seek counsel to be ready should her husband choose to return.

2. **THE WISE COUNSELOR SHOULD BE PREPARED TO COUNSEL A HUSBAND WHOSE WIFE HAS LEFT.** The following are the principles and steps I use with a husband who has been deserted by his wife:

A. ***He should not be seen with other women.*** He should strive to remain pure.

B. ***If he has charge of the children, he should give much attention to the children and their rearing.*** He now has extra love to give, and that love should be channeled to his children, who will more than likely not be receiving any attention from their mother at this time in their lives.

C. ***He should never criticize the children's mother.*** Though it would be very easy, he should not be negative to the children about his situation. They do not need to have their affections divided, nor do they need to choose between their parents.

D. ***He should spend a lot of time at home.*** By doing so, if his spouse happens to come home, he will be available for reconciliation.

E. ***He should accept her telephone calls.*** Granted, hearing her voice can be difficult. I believe he should even attempt to communicate frequently with her.

F. ***He should not speak negatively concerning his situation to his friends and family.*** As much as possible, I advise to keep the situation confidential. The fewer people who know about the problem, the more his spouse is able to save face and the more likely she is to return. However, if he has maligned his wife to the point where everyone is against her, how can she possibly return?

G. ***He should keep up his personal appearance.*** He needs to be attractive for his wife if she returns.

H. ***He should read much in his Bible.*** He should study and meditate on stories of reconciliation, such as the story of Hosea and Gomer. He should also stay faithful to the church services, as well as in his service to the Lord.

I. ***He should pray and ask God to bring his spouse home as pure as when she left.*** He should also ask God to bring her back as quickly as possible.

J. ***He should search his life for anything that would hinder the reconciliation.*** By all means, he should seek counsel to help overcome any character flaws that may have contributed to her leaving.

K. ***He should seek counsel concerning reconciliation.*** The

reestablishment of cordial relations may be very difficult to attain. The wise husband will seek counsel to be ready should his wife choose to return.

3. **THE WISE COUNSELOR WILL HAVE COUNSELING STRATEGIES PREPARED TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE DIVORCED.** The following are simple counseling suggestions and statements that I use for those who are divorced:

A. Divorced people are just as precious to God as are married people. *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16) *“Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.”* (Psalm 139:16–18)

B. Divorced people can still serve God and should be allowed to do so. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* (Romans 12:1, 2)

C. A divorced person should be slow to decide about remarriage and should seek Biblical counsel before doing so. *“Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.”* (I Corinthians 7:27, 28)

D. A divorced person should behave in a Christlike manner toward his former spouse. *“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”* (Ephesians 4:32)

E. A divorced person should be advised to think through his previous marital situation and use his experience in a positive way to help himself and others. *“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”* (Galatians 6:2)

F. A divorced person should guard against lust and impurity.

“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” (I Peter 2:11)

G. A divorced person should be sure his first commitment is to Christ. The time he spends alone without a mate could strengthen his walk with God and his service to God in a tremendous way. *“But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.”* (I Corinthians 7:32, 33)

I trust these few pages about divorce will compel the counselor to help those who are divorced to recommit their lives to Christ. They need someone to believe in them, and the wise counselor will ask God for extra wisdom in guiding those who have suffered through the trauma of desertion and/or divorce.

XXXVII

COUNSELING AND The Death of a Mate

PSALM 23 SAYS, “*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.*” This Psalm is probably one of the most comforting passages of Scripture I know.

The death of a mate can be very devastating to a person. The wise counselor will want to be well prepared to help in this time of loss. The following points may assist a counselor as he counsels in this situation:

1. **The wise counselor will be prepared to recommend a funeral director.** The wise pastor will establish a good working relationship with a local funeral home.

2. **The wise counselor will be willing to help in the contacting of family members.** Breaking the sad news to others is not easy for the living spouse. The counselor should offer his services to the grieving one.

3. **The wise counselor may need to advise restraint in funeral expenses.** The counselor should help the person who is grieving to make good financial decisions. For instance, an elaborate, gold-trimmed casket is not necessary if finances are a consideration. Counselors need to keep in mind that the people who sell caskets are in business to make money. Counselors are in the business of helping people—especially in the time of bereavement.

4. **The wise counselor will have a plan to organize people to provide food.** Generally, a meal is provided for the immediate and extended family following the memorial service. Also, a plan to implement the delivery of food is needed.

5. **The wise counselor will help plan the funeral service.** He may want to care for calling the local newspaper to place the obituary notice. He needs to include the time and place of the funeral. Simple details such as these become complicated when a person is grieving. Often, the grieving person is unable to make decisions and needs guidance in these areas.

6. **The wise counselor will let the survivor know immediately of his availability.** At this time of loss, the spouse needs a friend to listen perhaps much more than he needs a friend to talk. The wise counselor will make himself available in any way for the sake of the grieving person.

7. **The wise counselor will remind the grieving one of his availability at the cemetery.** In a week or two, he may once again offer his assistance when visiting. Waiting a couple of weeks often gives the bereaved person a sufficient amount of time to want to begin dealing with the changes that must come to his life.

8. **If asked for counsel by a widow, the wise counselor will discuss the following issues and questions in her life.**

- A. *Where will you live?*
- B. *How will the memories of living in the same house affect you?*
- C. *Is your present house too big for you?*
- D. *Can you maintain and care adequately for the house financially?*
- E. *How much security does your house offer?*
- F. *Can you afford to stay in your present house?*

If the widow cannot afford to keep the house, the counselor should discuss with her what realtor to contact. The counselor should warn her about shady offers. He needs to suggest that she contact someone trust-

worthy, perhaps an attorney, before making any decisions. He might even recommend a good lawyer she could contact.

9. The wise counselor will learn about wills and be prepared to help. Many times, local libraries have all the information readily available that a counselor would need to study to have a good foundational knowledge in this area.

10. The wise counselor will be prepared to discuss insurance settlements and financial investments. He should have some knowledge of interest rates, stocks, and portfolios. He may need to advise a widow about properly utilizing and investing insurance money.

11. The wise counselor will study and be knowledgeable about such terms as prime rate, certificates of deposit, government bonds, etc. If the survivor has been left an inheritance, the counselor should be ready to help guide in making decisions concerning the best ways to invest that money. Having knowledge in these areas will be of great help for investments. **A counselor should not personally be a part of any transaction.** After discussing options, he needs to simply recommend an attorney to help with the legalities.

12. The wise counselor will discuss the grieving person's future. Many questions, such as the following, will need to be answered:

A. Will the survivor need to fill void time?

B. If the wife is the survivor, will she need part-time or full-time employment to fulfill necessary needs?

C. Are there children at home? If so, their schedules will need to be discussed.

13. The wise counselor will find out if the bereaved one needs friends. A counselor should plan to help find good Christian people for a support group. Extra support at a time of loss is very important. It is wise to have many people to offer this support as opposed to one person. Becoming too attached to one person can become overwhelming for that one person. The one who has already sustained a loss cannot possibly cope with losing a second person so soon.

14. The wise counselor will not force any decision-making; he will only advise. At a time of loss, it is common for some to be slow to ask for help and advice. Proverbs 21:5 says, "*The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but of every one that is hasty only to want.*" The Bible advises to think through decisions with care and deliberation.

15. The wise counselor will advise a grieving widow to discuss

his advice with her immediate family members. For all involved, this discussion is best.

16. The wise counselor will occasionally write to the bereaved person. Words of encouragement are always needed after a loss. However, a counselor shouldn't expect a response to his solicitousness.

17. The wise counselor will make his presence known by going by the home in a couple of months to assure them of his prayers. Once again, a counselor should offer his services in any way he can be of help.

18. The wise counselor will advise the bereaved one to make all decisions slowly and delicately and with deliberation. "*Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? there is more hope of a fool than of him.*" (Proverbs 29:20) The Bible warns against being quick with words—that is, responding without thinking. Decisions made quickly without thinking will irrevocably damage a testimony or the future ministry of a person.

19. The wise counselor should note that there is nothing sinful about grieving the loss of a loved one. A grieving person generally goes through five stages of acceptance, which are as follows: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and then acceptance. Everyone goes through these five stages, no matter how tragic or how trivial a loss might be. The only difference is the length of time it takes to go through them and the intensity of emotion felt during each stage. It is good to be aware of these phases of recovery and to know that each is both necessary and natural. However, grieving is like all other things we do: if it is in excess, then it may become inappropriate or nonproductive.

To feel pain after a loss is normal; it's proof that we are alive and a sign that we are able to respond to life's experiences. The wise counselor will seek to be as the Holy Spirit—a comforter. "*Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*" (II Corinthians 1:4)

Note: The wise counselor could well use some of the 19 guidelines when helping a divorced person as well.

XXXVIII

COUNSELING AND Necessary Separation for Married Couples

IN II CORINTHIANS 6:14–18, the Bible says, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

Counseling does not always consist of only right and wrong or black and white decisions. Many times decisions are made based upon good, better, or best. The points I have listed below are ideas I would share with a couple who wants the very best.

1. **Married couples should not spend an abundance of time with people who are single.** Before marriage, single people obviously fellowship with single people. This interaction is good and wholesome

because single people have a common denominator. A married couple—especially a newly married couple—needs to be instructed concerning the finding of married couples with whom to fellowship. When married couples spend too much time with their former single friends, they can be influenced to remember the “good old days” of being a single person. Since marriage is until “death do us part,” constant interaction with singles can no longer be acceptable.

2. Married people should not spend an abundance of time with people who were at one time married and are now divorced. I often find that most divorces end with harsh words and bitterness. Those feelings lead to vocal criticisms that could adversely affect a good marriage. I cannot stress enough that it is best for happily married people if they fellowship with other happily married people.

3. Saved, fundamental, Baptist married people should not fellowship with lost couples. People who are on their way to Heaven have nothing in common with those on their way to Hell. In fact, this particular area of separation is a Scriptural command. If we are concerned about seeing a couple saved, then by all means, we should witness to them. No couple, by any means, should risk their marriage or Christian testimony by fellowshipping with the lost.

4. Spiritual married couples should not fellowship with non-spiritual couples. It is sad to say, but true, that a married couple may be saved but not interested in serving Christ. Brother Hyles often says, “One mono + no mono = two mono.” A non-spiritual couple will pull down the spiritual couple to their level of Christian service. Therefore, this uninterested couple would not be good for fellowship for a dedicated Christian couple. The non-spiritual ones should be loved but not developed into a best-friend couple until they have grown in the Lord.

5. Married couples should be advised not to have just one “best-friend” couple but many “best-friend” couples. When there is only one best-friend couple, the opportunity for an adultery-type situation increases. Two couples who spend too much time together become overly familiar with one another. Becoming too casual around another’s mate is dangerous. Having several couples as friends creates the opportunity for plenty of fellowship. Since this fellowship is not with just one other couple, it helps to keep the proper mystique and distance in the friendship.

6. Married couples should be careful to fellowship with married couples their own approximate age. Many young couples who spend too

much time with older couples begin to covet the belongings of the older couple. This desire could lead to some poor financial decisions on the part of the young couple. A young married couple needs to fellowship with other couples their own age and recognize that others face the same problems they do.

Another potential danger for couples not in the same approximate age bracket who are spending too much leisure time together is the danger of the older man being attracted to the beauty of the younger woman or the younger woman being attracted to the maturity of the older man.

For these two reasons, young couples should fellowship mostly with couples in their own age bracket.

7. Married couples should not fellowship with couples who are critical. I cannot begin to emphasize how dangerous it is for a couple to spend time with those who have a negative or critical nature. If a lady finds herself with another wife who criticizes her husband, she should part company. No happily married lady wants to develop this same attitude. If a couple is critical of the pastor or the church's leadership, certainly that couple would not make good associates.

8. Married couples who are loyal should not fellowship with couples who seem to be disloyal. A loyal couple who associates with a disloyal couple can create an atmosphere of disloyalty. A married couple should be advised to find people who love God, love each other, love the pastor, and love the church and fellowship with them. Disloyal people "discuss" God, God's man, and God's people; a little peer pressure goes a long way in pulling down a loyal couple. I have found that adults must deal with peer pressure just as surely as any teenager must learn to deal with it.

XXXIX

COUNSELING ABOUT Miscarriages

GOD'S ANSWER TO abortion is Jeremiah 1:5, which says, *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."* God knew Jeremiah and had a plan for his life before he was even born. Perhaps the knowledge that God knows us and our children is one of the reasons why a miscarriage is so devastating. According to Jeremiah 1:5, God had a definite plan for that baby.

Miscarriages are caused by a variety of reasons. Whatever the cause or reason, the grief experienced by those involved is not lessened. The following thoughts will help the thoughtful counselor to help the ones who are hurting:

1. **A miscarriage is the loss of a child.** The length of someone's life does not determine the extent of the grief experienced by loved ones at the time of death. Whether or not a mother carried the baby for one month or ten months, she still knew that child and lost that child. Often a husband needs to be reminded that his wife's grief is real. He should and, in many cases, does experience grief himself as well.

2. **Even after a miscarriage, a woman's body may continue to "think" it is still carrying a baby.** Every expectant mother's bodily clock

is set for nine months. The ever-changing hormones are still present, and they are a constant reminder of her pregnancy. In some cases, it may take her body six months or more to adjust to the loss of her baby.

3. The mother's grief is not only physical. A woman herself is born with an innate desire to bear children and to be a mother. For instance, most every little girl plays with dolls; she is the mommy. Maybe she cares for siblings or baby-sits other children, thereby increasing her desire to have her own children. All the while, she practices motherhood the best way she can.

Mothers have a special love for their children. The loss of a child is very difficult to handle. A mother does not need to see or hold a child to love him. A child is born in a woman's mind and heart long before he is conceived.

4. Her husband is not as aware of the child's presence after conception as the wife is. She carries the baby within her body; he only hears about the baby. She endures the sicknesses and pains; he only hears of them. She feels her body changing; he only watches the changes. She cannot forget she is pregnant from sunrise to sunset, and sometimes even through the night! He can only listen to her experiences.

5. When a mother goes through a miscarriage, she actually goes through the pains of labor, with the result being a loss of life. The pain is real, but it is intensified when the end result is not to have a baby to hold in her arms as hoped. Miscarriage leaves a very empty feeling for a woman.

6. When the miscarriage is a first child, it's more difficult to handle. All miscarriages are hard to handle and understand. No woman should be belittled because she is born with a desire to bear children. When she loses her first, she often wonders if she will ever have another child. Her fears give rise to tormenting questions, such as the following: "Can I successfully carry the next one?"; "Will I ever be able to carry a child full term?" These are just a couple of examples of questions a mother might ask herself again and again.

7. A mother may wonder, "Was the loss of this baby my fault?" She needs to be assured that God has a reason for all that occurs and that fault is not the concern.

8. A wife cannot understand how her husband can forget the miscarriage so easily or quickly. A man needs to be reminded that her loss is very real to her. He needs to be comforting and caring.

9. When a mother is given condolences and sympathy, it usually intensifies the hurt and reminds her of the loss. Sympathy should always be appropriate. It hurts the mother deeply when someone who does not yet know of the loss says, "How's the pregnancy?" or "Have you felt the baby kicking yet?" Questions such as these show care from the person inquiring, and they are not meant to be hurtful in any way. However, the care and interest shown by others does not take away the pain and loss. People should also remember a father is hurting and may need to be consoled as well. When was the last time you heard of someone who was concerned about the father who lost a child due to a miscarriage?

10. Observing Mother's Day can be very difficult for the one who has experienced a miscarriage. Most may not consider her a mother, but she is. Her child just has a different address—Heaven. It is very difficult for a lady who has miscarried to not consider herself a mother. After all, she was aware of carrying that baby. She heard the child's heartbeat. Perhaps she felt all the symptoms of expecting a baby. A counselor should acknowledge her loss as the death of a child, and he should remind her that she is a mother of a child in Jesus' care.

11. People who have never experienced a miscarriage never fully understand the loss. As with many situations, most people cannot fully understand all the feelings of loss another feels unless they have had firsthand experience themselves or have gone through the loss with someone very close. I can honestly say I didn't understand the grieving process until my wife Schery and I lost our first child by miscarriage.

12. The mother who bears a stillborn child sees the death of her child in the same way as any other mother who bears a child sees her living child's birthday. The date of a miscarriage is always remembered. She will not forget that date if she tries. On that day, the baby went to Heaven, and that date will always bring a natural mourning.

13. The parents who experience a miscarriage need to be told the baby is not dead but lives now with Jesus in Heaven. A counselor needs to share encouraging thoughts. Some statements I have used are, "Your child was so special that God couldn't wait any longer to have your child's presence in Heaven with Him." "Just think! Your child is growing up in Heaven and running down the golden streets. He is talking and learning from all of the patriarchs and the godly people who have gone on to be with the Lord." Such statements are encouraging to those who have grieving hearts.

14. Sometimes it takes years for parents to see anything good as a result of a miscarriage. However, if the parents will allow God to be God, He will someday show them the reason for the miscarriage. *“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”* (I Corinthians 13:12) Though many people do not like to have Romans 8:28 quoted to them in a time of grief or loss, the verse is a promise that whatever happens to us is for good: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

15. A husband may need counseling in order to help his wife through her grief. The thoughtful counselor will instruct the husband to do the following:

A. The husband should not belittle his wife’s emotions concerning the miscarriage. She will have many different feelings about what has happened. One moment she may seem strong and understanding; the next moment she may cry uncontrollably.

B. The husband should hold his wife. She will need the security only he can provide.

C. The husband should be patient with her. She will greatly appreciate his understanding and patience.

D. Make note of the date of the loss. Remember the baby on that date with your wife. Usually, a date like that is etched in the mother’s mind. However, a father needs to remember on purpose.

16. Neither the husband nor wife should place blame on each other. Only our great God can know the reasons for His taking the child on to Heaven. Many times, couples will never know God’s reasoning until they get to Heaven themselves.

17. The couple shouldn’t be afraid to try again to have children. A husband should be understanding of his wife’s fear of failing to carry another child. Both should be reminded that many people have several children after a miscarriage. Some ladies have the misfortune of miscarrying children between giving birth to healthy children. A miscarriage does not necessarily mean that a couple will never be able to give birth to their own child.

18. Sometimes it is wise to make public the miscarriage, especially if the pregnancy had been announced. Doing so may stop unnecessary, untimely, and painful inquiries about the baby.

19. The couple should find a child to love. If the couple has other

children, they should invest the love they had prepared to give the child now in Heaven to the living children on earth. If the couple does not have any children, they should find some to love. For instance, they could invest their lives in some lonely bus children. This substitution will not replace the child, but it will help to fill the void.

20. The thoughtful counselor will remind the hurting ones that God understands. The couple should spend time praying for strength, guidance and faith. “*Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.*” (Psalm 147:5)

A DIARY OF THE UNBORN

September 5th—“Today my life began. My parents do not know it yet. I am as small as a seed of an apple. And I am to be a girl. I shall have blond hair and blue eyes. Just about everything is settled, though, even the fact that I shall love flowers.”

September 19th—“Some say that I am not a real person yet, that only my mother exists. But I am a real person, just as a small crumb of wheat is yet truly bread. My mother is real, and so am I.”

September 23rd—“My mouth is just beginning to open now. Just think, in a year or so I shall be laughing and later talking. I know that my first word shall be ‘Mama.’ ”

September 25th—“My heart began to beat today all by itself. From now on, it shall gently beat for the rest of my life without ever stopping to rest. And after many years, it will tire; it will stop, and I shall die.”

October 2nd—“I am growing a bit every day. My arms and legs are beginning to take shape. But I have to wait a long time yet before those little legs will raise me to my mother’s arms, before those little arms will be able to gather flowers and embrace my father.”

October 12th—“Tiny fingers are beginning to form on my hands. Funny how small they are! I shall be able to stroke my mother’s hair to my mouth, and she will probably say, ‘Oh, no! No, dear...’ ”

October 20th—“It wasn’t until today that the doctor told Mom that I am living here under her heart. Oh, how happy she must be! Are you happy, Mom?”

October 25th—“My mom and dad are probably thinking about a name for me, but they don’t know that I am a girl. They are probably saying

‘Andy.’ But I want to be called ‘Cathy.’ I am getting so big already.”

January 26th—“I don’t feel well today. Why, one of Heaven’s angels is here! I’m going to be with Jesus. I’ll see you in Heaven, Mommy and Daddy. Oh, how I will miss you! You will miss me, too, but I’m better off up here with Jesus.”

“I suddenly feel well again....”