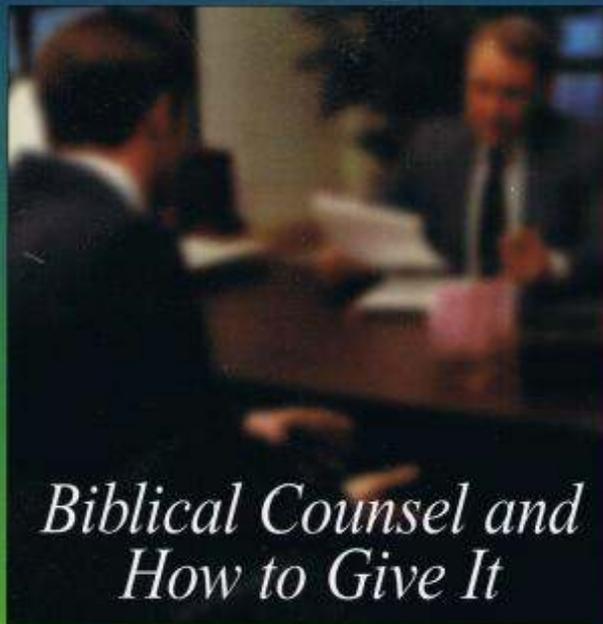


# PRACTICAL COUNSELING PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIANS



*Biblical Counsel and  
How to Give It*

BY DR. JEFF OWENS

**SLBC**  
Christian Counseling One  
**LESSON TWO**

# COUNSELING GUIDELINES



*“We live in a confused world—  
a world of nervous breakdowns, a world of divorce,  
a world of juvenile frustrations, a world of dope  
addiction, a world of alcoholic beverages,  
and many other things that lead to frustration,  
unhappiness, and discontentment. This means that  
the average pastor who loves his people  
must spend hours in counseling with them.”*

–Dr. Jack Hyles

# XII

## COUNSELING

### OF

## Different Types and Descriptions

**I**N THE BIBLE, MANY words and adjectives are used to describe counseling. Let me share some of those words and the places they are mentioned.

- Mark 15:43 speaks about *honourable* counseling.
- Ezra 4:5 speaks about *hired* counseling.
- Proverbs 27:9 speaks about *heartly* counseling.
- Proverbs 24:6 speaks about *wise* counseling.
- Isaiah 28:29 speaks about *wonderful* counseling.
- Isaiah 7:5 speaks about *evil* counsel.
- Psalm 64:2 speaks about *secret* counsel.
- II Samuel 17:14 speaks about *good* counsel.
- Ezekiel 11:2 speaks about *wicked* counsel.
- Psalm 55:14 speaks about *sweet* counsel.
- Psalm 83:3 speaks about *crafty* counsel.
- Job 42:3 speaks about *hidden* counsel.

The following 21 points describe different kinds of counseling appointments many counselors will have by virtue of their office. The wise counselor will be familiar with each type that will come his way.

1. **Decision counseling.** *“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?”* Luke 14:28 speaks of counting the cost before a building is built. Many people need a counselor to guide them in how to count the cost or help them to make decisions. They seek advice before making a decision so they actually know what the decision will cost them. Decision counseling is most often concerning routine decisions in life, such as courtship, purchasing a vehicle, job offers, or the buying of a home. These decisions do not require a 30- to 40-minute appointment, but rather a three- or four-minute block of time.

2. **Marital counseling.** I believe marital counseling should be by appointment. Marriage problems will not be corrected in three minutes. Usually, a counselor needs to plan no less than one hour for a marital appointment, and both husband and wife need to be present. Since divorce and abuse is on the increase, marriage counseling will be an ongoing type of counseling for today’s counselor. *“Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.”* (I Peter 3:7)

3. **Advice counseling.** I call *advice counseling* the type of counseling which involves strife. These appointments usually require 15 minutes. The counselor helps people to know how to handle difficult relationships. Perhaps two brothers are not getting along, and they seek help. Maybe a teacher and a student are in a troublesome situation and seek help. Two friends may be having a difficult time. Possibly an employer and employee in the church are having a difficulty. The counselor takes about 15 minutes to hear the problem and put the relationship back into perspective by resolving the strife. Unresolved strife will multiply. *“And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”* (Matthew 5:41)

4. **Rebuilding counseling.** Psalm 51:12 says, *“Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”* God is a restorer. The prefix *re-* means *again*. God wants a counselor to help the person who has strayed to once again be right and do what God expects of him. Therefore, as counselors, we will be in the ministry of rebuilding lives. *“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”* (Galatians 6:1)

Usually while doing rebuilding counseling, the counselor will meet the person seeking help for at least 15 minutes every day for the first week.

Why? Because that person seeking help to rebuild his life needs encouragement every 24 hours. The consecutive days and appointments will be scaled down to every other day for ten minutes, etc.

**5. Preventive counseling or public counseling.** *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”* In II Timothy 4:2, the Bible says to *“preach the word.”* Public counseling is preaching to the people’s needs. A pastor publicly counsels his people through the message that God has given him. The purpose of much of a pastor’s preaching is preventive maintenance. Pastors are much better off practicing preventive maintenance than breakdown repair. The messages preached should not always focus on fixing what is broken.

It is probably a good idea to keep track of what subjects are preached so the pastor can evaluate and make sure he is giving his people a good, steady diet of what will help them. A counselor should encourage his people to listen to preaching tapes, which is another preventive measure to keep from counseling one on one. Also, the counselor should encourage his people to read the right kind of literature, starting with the Bible. Many problems could be solved if Christians would just obey the preaching.

**6. Spontaneous counseling.** This counseling time usually lasts about three minutes or less. The counselor helps the person seeking advice without the benefit of an appointment. A counselor cannot be too busy to help the people he loves. Often, a matter can be cared for without arranging an appointment.

**7. Counseling by mail or letter.** Did you know that the Bible is a letter from God to you for the purpose of counseling you? Yes, I admit that it is a pretty thick letter, but it is a letter! Not only is it a letter, it is a love letter that will help Christians because it is quick and powerful. *“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”* (Hebrews 4:12)

I personally believe that a counselor should not counsel serious problems through the mail. However, in a letter a counselor can promise to pray for the person seeking advice. I have a standard reply to those who seek help via the mail. It is as follows: “I have a policy that I do not counsel problems of this magnitude through the mail.”

However, if a counselor does choose to advise by mail, he must remember to always be very ethical. For instance, if someone else’s assistant

pastor writes to me seeking counsel, I will not counsel that assistant without talking to his pastor first. By not being ethical and following this advice, a counselor could cause hard feelings and unknowingly hurt others.

A busy counselor may need and want to develop form letters for the purpose of helping those who seek counsel by mail.

**8. Regular counseling.** What I call regular counseling is the process of meeting with an individual seeking help on a weekly basis. In fact, this type of counseling is somewhat like rebuilding. After meeting with the person several consecutive days, the counselor then meets with him twice a week, then once a week, and then one time a month.

This regular counseling may include subjects such as seeing a child's or a teenager's report card because he is fatherless. I believe the Bible teaches to pay special attention to the fatherless—those who have lost their fathers in death. In today's society, it may well include those who lose their father due to a divorce or abandonment. Some children come by my office every week of the school year. As I write this, I am thinking of a little boy who comes by my office whose daddy left the family and is now living a wicked life. I always spend a few minutes with this boy helping him. I show him how to tie his tie correctly. Why? Because his daddy is gone, and a preacher should be a role model for the fatherless.

Some people need an authority figure in their lives to help them develop character in certain areas. For instance, some people really want to lose weight; but without an authority figure to check on them, they will not do it. This kind of appointment fits into what I call regular counseling. People who struggle with their Bible reading make themselves accountable to me. I say the following to the person struggling in a given area: "Why don't you come by my office every Sunday and show me how you are progressing. You will then have to face me about whether you failed or succeeded." Many people's lives can be transformed when they choose to make themselves accountable to an authority figure.

**9. Referee counseling.** This type of counseling is when two or more people meet with a counselor and agree to do what he recommends. Perhaps two businessmen in partnership have a falling out, so they ask the pastor to be an arbitrator in their dispute. I recommend meeting the businessmen in the office. Both of them must beforehand agree to follow the decision that I, as the mediator, make. As their referee, I listen to their differences of opinion. Then I make my decision.

Once, two people came for counseling. They had gotten themselves

into a difficult financial situation. Though they were on the outs with each other, they agreed to do what I recommended. After hearing the dispute, I said to number one: "You will pay this amount." To number two I said, "You will pay this amount."

They both looked at me and said, "That amount only cares for two-thirds of the needed amount."

I answered, "Yes, I am aware of that. Since you trusted me, I will pay the other third needed."

A counselor should never have as his goal to hurt someone; his goal is to help others. After I made my decision, one of the businessmen protested, "But, Preacher, you don't need to do that!"

I replied, "Oh, but I want to do it. You agreed when you came in that I was the referee and that you would do whatever I recommended. I want the three of us to agree on this matter."

Probably, I taught those two men more about business in that appointment than either of them learned sitting in a classroom. It was not a matter of paying the bills; it was a matter of being fair, honest, and just with people.

**10. Checkup counseling.** This type of counseling involves seeing people regularly who have sought counseling in the past. I could call this counseling a progress report time. Often I check with a person about his progress in the area of his life where he sought counsel. I try to meet with a person often enough to be sure he is working within the framework of the advice he received. I want to be sure the counsel is serving to help correct the problem.

**11. Prayer counseling.** I believe counselors need to intercede for people. "*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*" (Philippians 4:6) A counselor should meet regularly with people to pray that they have the victory and strength. For example, I have a man in my adult Sunday school class who loves the Lord, but his wife does not. We have done everything humanly possible we know to do to help her get right with God. Finally, I said, "The only answer left is prayer. Please come by my office every Sunday after church, and we will have a word of prayer."

Every Sunday that man gets in line outside my office. When he steps into my office, we bow our heads. I pray a short prayer: "Lord, please change her. Please give her every opportunity available." We both say, "Amen," and he leaves. We have been praying together for two years because I can't

counsel him any further with words.

**12. Telephone counseling.** A counseling session via the telephone will work in emergency cases, but again it is comparable to counseling via the mail. The wise counselor will let people know he cannot counsel about serious situations over the telephone. I am not saying it is wrong to counsel by telephone; I am saying that it is not best. A counselor is far better off to look the person seeking counsel straight in the eye and have him present in his office.

**13. Prayer counseling for the sick.** *“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”* (James 5:14, 15) Prayer counseling for the sick is a little different from prayer counseling because the Bible specifically says when someone is ill to call the elders (pastors) of the church to anoint the sick with oil. Fundamental Christians need to get back to having faith in the healing power of God. Whether or not we want to accept it, it is God Who heals the person going to the doctor. Don’t misunderstand me. I am for doctors and medicines, and I believe there is a definite need for them. However, far too often God is left out of the situation.

Every counselor should be aware of the importance of keeping a bottle of oil in his office so he can anoint his people and pray for God to heal them.

**14. Group counseling.** *“And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see.”* Luke 10:23 deals with Jesus taking His disciples away from the crowd in order to privately instruct them. For instance, if a problem arises among the faculty in the Christian school, the wise pastor would not deal with that situation in front of the entire church congregation. The whole congregation is not a part of the group that needs some guidance. The wise pastor will call a meeting of the faculty and solve the problem at that meeting. Times will arise for group counseling that the pastor will need to address.

**15. Senior appointments.** Wise is the counselor who teaches how important it is for seniors in high school or college to seek counsel about their futures from the man of God. These times of decision are both dangerous times and important times. Wise is the senior who seeks advice from the man of God during this time of transition. Leaving the realm of being a student to put into practice full time that which he has learned is

good cause to seek advice.

**16. Premarital counseling.** After a couple has decided to get married, I try to prepare them for the actual marriage. Some of the subjects I cover are preparing them for the honeymoon, preparing them concerning finances, and preparing them for actually being married.

**17. Testimony-type counseling.** When Paul wrote Hebrews 11, he was counseling the people to use the testimonies of those who had gone on before. “*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*” (Hebrews 11:4) Paul speaks of the great men of faith like Abel, Abraham, Noah, Enoch, Moses, and others as examples. What was Paul doing? He was counseling a person by using the godly characteristics of others. The wise counselor will give his people examples of others’ failures as a result of disobedience, as well as people’s victories as a result of their obedience. Even a counselor’s personal testimony can be used for counseling.

**18. Seeking advice counseling.** When someone seeks counsel and I ask him how he would counsel someone inquiring about that same situation, I term it *seeking advice counseling*. During the time that person is giving me advice, I am praying that he is learning from his own words. Some who start spouting off advice have the mistaken concept in their arrogance that they are solving the world’s problems. In reality, I am merely putting up a mirror and letting it reflect right back at the person, hoping to help him.

**19. Third-party counseling.** I personally do not take part in third-party counseling situations. Third-party counseling is the person who sought counsel telling person #2 he had a counseling session with an anonymous someone (me) and how that session fits #2. Needless to say, this counseling does not work; it generally stirs up strife.

**20. Cooperative counseling.** This type of counseling involves asking another to take part in helping with a situation. For instance, I may call a person’s dad (with permission) and say, “I am helping your son, but I felt like I wanted to get your thoughts on this. Perhaps we would be better off cooperating on this matter.” I might call an employer and say, “I am counseling with your employee. I would like to get your input on this matter because I believe we could better solve this problem with your help.” I must say that this type of counseling will not work for everyone because many people cannot cooperate with anyone. How sad—especially if having an uncooperative spirit means no change or growth in a person’s life.

**21. Pre-engagement counseling.** This type of counseling includes teaching and directing a person to someone who would be a good choice for a future mate. A pre-engagement counseling session would include teaching what specific qualities to look for in a person, as opposed to looking for a specific “Mr. Right.”

At one time or another, every counselor will engage in each of these forms of counseling. Because each person who seeks counsel is a unique individual, some types of counseling may suit one person better than another. The counselor may need to try different types of counseling with some people. The wise counselor will adapt his counseling to the needs of the individual seeking advice.

## XIII

# COUNSELING

## AND

# Three Biblical Types of People Who Seek Counsel

**P**ROVERBS 4:7 SAYS, “*Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*” My definition of wisdom is the ability to see life through the eyes of God. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could see everything the way in which God sees it? There is no problem so big that God cannot solve it! I have found that a man with limited wisdom also has limited spiritual eyesight. A man may dig himself so deeply into a hole that all he sees are walls. So, he says, “I can’t see how to go forward.” When he looks to his right and sees another wall, he says, “I can’t go that way.” When he looks to his left side he says, “I don’t see how to avoid this or go around it.” When he looks behind himself he says, “I can’t even see how to go back the way I came.”

“*The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.*” (Psalm 18:2) Since God is above us, our High Tower, He can see what is to the right and to the left and what is in front and what is behind us because He is not in the hole; He is in a high tower! If only we

could view the problems in that way.

People say, "Well, under the circumstances...." A wise person is not under the circumstances; possessing wisdom can keep a person above the circumstances. Who said we are to live under the circumstances? We need to search out the wisdom of God and climb above the circumstances to see things from God's perspective.

I find it amazing to hear a man of God choose a Scripture which we have read hundreds of times, and then unfold the verse in a way we have never before understood it. That preacher is able to present a "new" truth because he is seeing it through the eyes of God. Too many of us look at life using our own eyes all the time; we need to see through His eyes.

### THREE BIBLICAL CLASSIFICATIONS OF PEOPLE

As I have studied the Bible, I find that basically the Bible addresses three main kinds of people. As a general rule, people fit into one of these three categories: (1) the wise, (2) the simple, and (3) the foolish. Let me address each category in depth.

1. **The Wise Man.** This person wants to live according to the Bible. He seeks after Bible principles and truths by which he can live. After finding these truths, he applies them to his life and lives them. "*The wise in heart will receive commandments....*" (Proverbs 10:8) A wise man will receive the commandments of God. A person who does not receive the commandments of God is not wise. "*Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.*" (Proverbs 8:33) A person who does not read his Bible is not wise.

I am a faculty member at Hyles-Anderson College, where I currently teach Bible for three hours from 8:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M. I then go to chapel, where I hear the Bible preached from 11:00 A.M. to noon. I then leave campus and listen to the Bible for two or three more hours in my car. I follow this schedule every day of the week. I average teaching the Bible 24 or 25 times each week. I average spending three and one-half hours in the Bible per day by listening to the Bible on tape. Every morning I have personal devotions. I go to church three times a week. One reason why I follow this schedule is because I want to hear instruction. Since I do not want to be average, I will pay any price to be everything God wants me to be.

A wise man seeks after Bible principles and Bible truths. During the

times I am not listening to the Bible on cassette, I listen to preaching tapes. I want to know what will happen to a man who will totally surrender himself to God. "*A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.*" (Proverbs 1:5) A person will not be wise without desiring to be wise.

2. **The Simple Man.** The simple person does not know how God wants him to live. He doesn't live right merely because he doesn't know how. His life has not yet been permanently etched by sin; he is still moldable.

It may very well be that the simple man has not been trained. Perhaps the simple person has not sought wisdom for himself. "*The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.*" (Psalm 119:130) Since the Bible gives understanding to the simple, we can therefore ascertain that a simple man doesn't have understanding. It is difficult to give something to someone if he already has it. The simple man is void of understanding in certain areas of life. This lack of understanding explains why he is disobedient in some areas. We need to keep in mind that not everyone is doing wrong because he hates God or the Bible. Sometimes a person does wrong without knowing. Doing wrong on purpose is one thing; doing wrong unknowingly is another.

Proverbs 14:15 says, "*The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.*" The simple man often believes every word he hears because he has not been well trained. More often than not, he believes the very last word he heard on a particular subject as the authority on that subject. He is still in the process of being molded.

For example, a young preacher boy attends Bible college. He does not know exactly what the Bible teaches about a given subject. All he knows is the last thing he heard another preacher say, and what was said made better sense than what he knew. What the preacher taught may be exactly right; however, what the preacher taught could have been heresy.

Therefore, each person needs to seek the wisdom of God and learn what the Bible says. A person should believe what is right and correct what needs to be corrected in his life. A wiser Christian needs to be patient with people and carefully teach what the Bible says. A simple Christian may want to cling to the last thing he heard. However, we never have to worry about changing what we believe if we are wise and what we believe is based on the Bible, which never changes. "*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*" (Hebrews 13:8)

We ourselves need to be very careful as we deal with the simple person. He may seem to be rebellious when, in fact, he is simple. I don't have much, if any, patience with a person who says, "I don't care what the Bible teaches." That person is rebellious.

As counselors, we need to mold our thinking to the Bible; we cannot mold the Bible to our thinking. Our desire should be to help the simple become wise—to conform their thinking to the Bible. A good counselor will realize there are wise people and simple people who will seek counsel. Someone will invariably say, "Preacher, I've been doing thus-and-so in this way." Instead of thinking, "That is stupid," we should think, "This statement is from a simple person, and I want to help him gain wisdom in that area."

Too many counselors tend to be rude and unkind to simple people. For instance, if a person has not learned all that he needs to know about personal hygiene, the wise counselor will not drive that person away. He will help him when perhaps the tendency is to laugh. As counselors, we need to always keep in mind that not everyone had the golden opportunity of having parents who had the character to teach their children. The simple person needs understanding, help, and answers.

The following letter was written to me by a couple I won to Christ. The husband is a graphics engineer and artist in Chicago. As a matter of fact, he was responsible for the cover and art layout on a Fruit Loops® cereal box in 1994.

*Dear Dr. Owens,*

*We just want you to know how much we appreciate and care for you and your family. You know, as much as we regret admitting it, we still need further counseling. We would appreciate it if you could find time to counsel us. We both need the Lord in our lives, and we can't follow Him if we don't know how. We need some guidelines in serving the Lord.*

*You and your adult Sunday school class have shown your love and concern many times over. We hope that we can do the same for someone else someday. We have a beautiful family, thanks to God, and we wish to serve Him just as you do.*

*Thank you for showing us how to be saved.*

*Sincerely,*

*John and Jane Doe*

When this couple attends my adult Sunday school class and they are not dressed properly, I understand. They are not rebels. Though they are very intelligent in their given fields, they are simple about the Christian life.

Every pastor should have simple people in his church. If he does not, he is not a soul winner because a soul winner pumps his church full of simple people and then helps them to become wise. If ever a pastor reaches the point where he does not have any simple people and all he has are “sanctified saints” attending, he probably has a dead church. He has become satisfied with his “four and no more.” We need to influence as many people for Christ as possible. The more simple people a pastor has in attendance, the larger the number of wise members he will grow.

A pastor will have many people come to his church and ask questions that seem so simple. Young Christians need to be taught, and the pastor is to guide his people. Some will not be willing to pay the price in order to take someone from simplicity to wisdom. Maybe he is too busy building new facilities. However, I contend he is not building a church for God; he is building a name for himself. We must take the time to teach the simple.

**3. The Foolish Man.** The foolish person rejects, hates, and runs from doing right. “*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God...*” (Psalm 14:1) Fools choose not to do right and even despise doing right because they believe there is no God. “*Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?*” (Proverbs 17:16) A fool will not pay any price to get wisdom because he simply has no desire to attain wisdom. When I think of this verse, I think of people who will pay to go through college and then not learn anything while they are students. They are foolish enough to pay to get wisdom, and then they waste the money by not studying that for which they paid. If a fool could buy wisdom with money, and he had the money, he would put the money back into his pocket and walk away. He tells God, “You keep Your wisdom; I don’t need it.”

Proverbs 23:9 teaches, “*Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise*

*the wisdom of thy words.*” The Bible says that a fool actually despises, or looks down on, wisdom. According to the Bible, the fool will despise what I say or teach. He will even take what I say and twist it to fit his thinking. Not only does he not want teaching, he will take what another says and try to use that wisdom against him.

*“The lips of the wise disperse knowledge: but the heart of the foolish doeth not so.”* (Proverbs 15:7) Often a fool has a lot to say when, in reality, he really doesn’t have much to say at all. If a person comes to my office seeking counsel and shows himself to be a fool, I politely figure out a way to shorten our time together. Why? I have far too many people seeking counsel who say, “Will you teach me?” I am in the process of helping the simple to be wise; I am not in the process of spending my life arguing with a fool.

I have preached thousands of messages to teenagers. As I stand in the pulpit and scan the crowd, I might see a young man straight from the streets with hair down to his waist, with an earring in each ear, wearing a T-shirt with a wicked emblem. As I notice that young man and watch him misbehave a little, I can understand. Though he is obviously wise in the way of the world, he is no doubt a very simple young man about Christianity. He has not been trained to know the difference between right and wrong. However, if one of my regular teenagers who has been coming to a service for four or five years misbehaves in a service, I am liable to point him out and say, “Settle down and be still. You know better than to behave like that.” Why? He **does** know better because he has been trained.

As pastors and counselors, we had better learn to be patient with the person we **think** is a rebel. We need to turn up the heat on some of those who truly are rebellious. Some of us will mistakenly label a person as a rebel who is, in reality, a simple person. That unearned label may well drive a simple person to foolishness.

### THE SIMPLE/WISE/FOOLISH PERSON

The question is often asked, “Dr. Owens, could a man be all three?” Yes, a man could be simple, wise, and foolish at the same time. A man could be wise in a given profession, simple in another area, and foolish in still a different area of life. We all start out very simple. We hope to improve in all areas in order to be balanced and wise. Any person who starts out simple in any given area and then is taught can no longer remain simple in that area.

He will either be wise or foolish. A person will accept what God says, which is being wise, or he will reject what God says and be labeled as foolish. "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.*" (Proverbs 13:20a) Once a man has become wise in a given area, he will never be simple again in that area. He will have to choose to be wise or be a fool.

It is my prayer that after carefully reading this chapter, the counselor will help those who seek counsel to become wise and to continue to seek after wisdom. "*Wisdom is the principle thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.*" (Proverbs 4:7)

## XIV

# COUNSELING

## Illustrations from the Bible

**T**HROUGHOUT THE BIBLE, one can learn from the lives of people with unique problems and difficult situations. How these Biblical characters dealt with their circumstances varies. The following is a partial list of people in the Bible who were wise enough to seek godly counsel to help solve their problems. Many of them held various titles or positions, and they each sought counsel for different reasons.

### MANOAH

Manoah was a father who sought counsel about his son. Judges 13:8 says, “*Then Manoah intreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*” In other words, Manoah was saying, “Please allow the man of God to counsel me about my child.”

As men of God, we will do some counseling about the rearing of children. Therefore, the counselor should be prepared to help with the rearing of children. There should be people in our churches who say, “I am glad we have a man of God who can help me rear my children.”

Notice the words, “*what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*” This father is seeking counsel about his yet unborn child! It is tragic to me how many people spend more time decorating the nursery where their child

will sleep than learning about how to rear that child. The same is often true with preparing for marriage. Many people spend more time preparing for the actual wedding ceremony—giving far too much time to such details as the color of the flowers, who will take the pictures, what flavor the punch will be, and what the groomsmen will wear—instead of learning about being the right kind of spouse. Some will spend hours, even months, preparing for that 30-minute ceremony but will give very little time preparing for the actual marriage relationship. How tragic and sad!

### SAUL AND HIS SERVANT

*“And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass: now let us go thither; peradventure he can shew us our way that we should go.”* I Samuel 9:6 is a power-packed verse about the man of God being sought by Saul and his servant. I Samuel 9:3–5 gives an account of Kish instructing his son to find some missing donkeys. Apparently, Saul and his servant had traveled many miles for three days to no avail. When Saul suggested returning, his servant suggested they seek counsel from the man of God. The servant said, *“...he can shew us our way.”* Both knew the man of God (Samuel) had wisdom and could help them solve the problem of the missing donkeys.

Samuel was known as a man of God—*“an honourable man.”* A counselor should also have the same kind of reputation as the man of God in I Samuel 9.

### DAVID AND ABSALOM

David was a king of God’s chosen nation who had a counselor. Though Ahithophel had been David’s counselor for many years, he chose to follow Absalom. II Samuel 15:12 says, *“And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.”*

Every counselor should live in such a way that someone even as lofty as a king or king’s son would want to seek his counsel.

### BEN-HADAD

Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, was sick. When he was told Elisha was coming, he sent Hazael with gifts to seek counsel about his illness. II Kings

8:8 recounts, *“And the king said unto Hazael, Take a present in thine hand, and go, meet the man of God, and enquire of the LORD by him, saying, Shall I recover of this disease?”*

The Bible teaches that a man of God should take interest in his people when they are not physically healthy. He is to care about them and love them. Every person should have enough confidence in the man of God to seek counsel when ill. A wise counselor will see the need of preparing himself to give advice concerning health issues.

The Bible teaches us in James 5:14 that when a person is sick, he should go to the elders of the church so they can pray for him and anoint him with oil. *“Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”* It seems counselors today are afraid to anoint someone with oil and ask God to heal that person because the charismatics have made this doctrine into something it is not. A counselor cannot let them rob him of something which God has instructed him to do!

People should be taught that if they are ill, they are welcome to come to the counselor’s office for prayer and to be anointed with oil. This practice is Scriptural. I keep a small bottle of olive oil in my office, and I use it often with people who seek my help.

It must be understood that the counselor personally cannot heal people, but he should have the faith that God can. Why should some medical doctor, trained in a heathenistic school, receive credit for something that God does anyway? Of course, we need the help of medical doctors, but let us also be sure to seek God’s help as well. Let’s not forget Who really does the healing.

Because of the cost of healthcare, many Christians’ financial status is deteriorating. I believe if Christians would just get back to praying and asking God to heal them, and preachers would get back to preaching some old-fashioned Christianity, counselors could help their people financially with healthcare as well. If the Bible says that the pastor should anoint people and pray that they be healed, then the pastor is supposed to anoint the people and pray that they be healed! I am often asked if I really believe God can heal someone as a result of being anointed with oil and prayer. Of course I do! I also am aware of the fact that God may choose NOT to heal everyone over whom I pray and anoint with oil. Surely I have nothing to lose by believing!

Do you know why some will not pray for and anoint an ill person?

They are afraid God will not heal the person who is ill, and they do not want to feel like a failure. It may not be God's will to heal every person, every time. The promises of the Bible are for today as well as days gone by.

### THE SHUNAMITE WOMAN

II Kings 4:8–17 tells the wonderful story of the great woman of Shunem being rewarded with a son because of her care and provision for God's man. When the son unexpectedly dies, she knows exactly where to seek help—the man of God—Elisha. *“And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray thee, one of the young men, and one of the asses, that I may run to the man of God, and come again.”* (II Kings 4:22)

A mother may seek counsel concerning a child at any stage of her child's life—adult, teenager, adolescent, toddler, or even an unborn baby. A counselor should be prepared to have some expectant mother come to him for counsel. In the course of the appointment, she may say, “Preacher, the doctor said that we must take the baby by abortion because it is either my life or the baby's. The doctor said that I cannot possibly survive childbirth. What do I do?” Perhaps her husband is sitting beside her, also waiting for the right answer. This lady may teach a Sunday school class and her husband may be a fine deacon. How does a counselor answer the question, “Preacher, what do we do? If I have the baby, I'm signing my death warrant. What do I do?”

Read this paragraph very carefully: The counselor DOES NOT make a decision like that! The counselor lets GOD make that decision. According to Deuteronomy 19:10, it is wrong to take that baby's life. *“That innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee.”*

May I ask every counselor a question? “Since when is the doctor in control of life anyway?” Many decisions do not need to be made if a counselor will just follow Bible principles. I cannot recall one time where I have ever purposely gone against the Scriptures. I have always said, “God is in control of life, and we do what God says.” It is very rare for a mother to die in childbirth; if she does, she goes to Heaven an obedient Christian.

Medical doctors do not understand the Bible. If God said it was wrong to kill, it is wrong. Abortion is always murder—no matter what the situation!

I am so glad God gave us the illustration of the Shunamite woman

who goes to the preacher on behalf of her child and says, “What do I do?”

## **JEHOSHAPHAT**

Jehoshaphat was a political leader seeking counsel concerning an alliance to go to war with Ahab. I Kings 22:5-7 says, “*And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Enquire, I pray thee, at the word of the LORD to day. Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said unto them, Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I forbear? And they said, Go up; for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king. And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?*”

Jehoshaphat had to make a decision about whether or not he should join forces with a wicked king and go to war. He wanted to do exactly what God would have him to do. Ahab gathered his lying counselors together to sway Jehoshaphat, but the king of Judah knew he needed a man of God to help with his decision-making. “*Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides?*” he asked. He needed a man of God—someone he believed walked with God and had the power of God on his life.

People of influence in the community will probably attend our churches. They deserve to have a counselor who can counsel them from God’s Word with Biblical principles. God has something to offer everyone in our city—from the blue-collar city worker to the mayor himself. The truth is that the man of God can probably run a city better than the mayor by simply following Biblical principles. Truly, a city operated by Biblical principles would be sure to prosper, according to Proverbs 11:10 and 11: “*When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.*”

How can a counselor advise the mayor of a city? By the power of the Word of God, which is the beginning of knowledge and the beginning of wisdom. The Bible, written by our Almighty God, exceeds all knowledge any person could ever learn at any college. I believe I could advise the President of the United States because I have the Word of God, which is more powerful than his education. All humanistic philosophies must take a backseat to our God and our God’s Book.

### ARTAXERXES

This powerful king of Persia was wise enough to have seven counselors from whom he sought advice. *“Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand. And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king’s mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.”* (Ezra 7:14, 28)

Everyone needs counselors. A businessman should be able to seek solid Biblical counsel from a counselor; therefore, the counselor should know something about business. It is a tragedy when a businessman joins an average Baptist church and the pastor is so second-class in everything he does that the businessman moves his membership to a liberal church where at least the guy who runs it can spell, knows math, and can balance his checkbook! I am not for the move to the liberal church; neither am I in favor of lack of professionalism, of which many of us are guilty. A church, especially an independent, fundamental, Baptist church, is to be run first-class because God’s business is the greatest business in the world.

What businessman wants to seek advice from a counselor who does not have anything to offer? No businessman would want to bring his friends to a church where he will be embarrassed by his pastor’s obvious lack of abilities.

### SOLOMON

According to I Kings 3:12, Solomon was the wisest man who ever walked the face of the earth, with the exception of Jesus Christ Himself. We would be counted wise ourselves if we would do as Solomon did and seek counsel. Proverbs 11:14 says, *“Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.”* God initially blessed Solomon with enough sense to seek counsel for himself. I don’t believe God gave Solomon a truckload of wisdom and said, “Here is your wisdom. You can have it all at one time. You’ll never need to worry about it again.”

I rather believe the scenario was more like this: “Let Me give you the essential key to being wise: seek counsel. Your questions will be answered with the seeking of wise counsel.”

Proverbs 15:22 says, *“Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counsellors they are established.”* Solomon, the wisest man on

earth, is reminding people of the need to seek counsel. Proverbs 24:6 says, "For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counsellors there is safety." The Bible promises safety in seeking advice from many counselors.

## MOSES

Many of the great and well-known preachers believe that Moses was probably the greatest leader in the Bible. For 40 years, Moses led approximately three million people in some of the worst conditions known to man. That's a long time to lead a lot of people! Let me draw an analogy: The President of the United States is elected for four years, and sometimes he is re-elected for four more years for a maximum leadership role of eight years. Compare that stint to Moses' 40 years!

The following 14 verses present the man Moses seeking counsel from the One Who is called "Counsellor" in Isaiah 9:6. *"The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee*

*from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.” (Exodus 14:14-27)*

Moses, the greatest leader in the Bible, sought counsel from God to lead his people! I believe his greatness came from seeking counsel. Let me ask you a question: “Do you seek counsel from God?” Every Christian should have a set time when he seeks counsel in prayer and by Bible study. We can have a counseling appointment with God at any time! The greatest counselor in the universe is God; appropriate His guidance!

### **NEBUCHADNEZZAR**

*“Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king’s counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.” (Daniel 3:24–27)*

Nebuchadnezzar had Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego bound and thrown into the fiery furnace. As he and his counselors looked into the flames, Nebuchadnezzar suddenly jumped to his feet to ask, “*Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?*” When they answered in the affirmative, he said, “*Lo, I see four....*” Nebuchadnezzar sought counsel to ascertain what he couldn’t understand. Sometimes, I wonder if God’s own people have as much sense as a wicked, ungodly king!

### **APOLLOS**

Apollos was a young and, I believe, underrated preacher. “*And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in*

*the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.” (Acts 18:24, 25) Every person would love to have a biography like the two-verse biography of Apollos. However, this eloquent, fervent man of Scriptures needed counsel. Though he had been educated about the baptism of John, he did not have all the education necessary to understand that the Messiah had already come. The whole concept and doctrine of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus was new to him. “And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.” (Acts 18:26–28)*

Guess who God used to teach the learned Apollos! Aquila and Priscilla (a woman) were used by God to instruct the young preacher. I believe it might be wise for some men to sit up and take note of the fact that God thought Priscilla was wise enough to instruct a young preacher.

God thought a mother was necessary in the training of a young man. II Timothy 1:5 indicates that Timothy was taught by his mother and his grandmother. “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.”

I believe Apollos listened and was instructed by a woman. Of course, the Bible teaches that a woman should not usurp authority over a man. If a man chooses to submit to a woman’s teaching, she is not usurping his authority. I personally learn much from my wife, whom I believe is wise. Certainly, I am not advocating women deacons or pastors. I believe a woman should be in subjection to her husband. I also believe a wise man will learn from a wise woman and become wiser.

## SUMMARY

Many kings and leaders are mentioned in this series of illustrations. Seeking wise counsel helped them in their leadership positions.

Each person is merely the sum total of how everyone else has influenced him, and the good which he has learned from others. If a person

chooses not to accept the good from others, it means he will not be all that he can be. There are no self-made men. The time-honored statement, "No man is an island," is true. Every man is my teacher; therefore, I am going to learn everything I can from everyone I can. I am not talking about going to the heretics or to their works to learn how to counsel. I am saying that I had better seek counsel and be interested in receiving counsel. *"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."* (Proverbs 13:20)

I personally attended a public school where PMA (Positive Mental Attitude) was taught. PMA merely means we can do anything we think we can do. I do not believe that philosophy for a second! However, according to Philippians 4:13, I can do anything GOD thinks that I can. *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* I do not believe in a positive mental attitude; rather, I believe in a positive Bible attitude. Anything God says that I can do, I can do. The Bible teaches that we are not going to become what we decide to become; we are going to become what we decide to be around. If we are going to be wise, we must spend time around wise people. We will be like the people with whom we spend our time.

When Moses came down off the mountain after receiving the Ten Commandments of God, the Bible says in Exodus 34:29 that his face was shining. *"And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him."* Why did Moses' face shine? He had been with God. He had become like the One with Whom he had been spending time. If we want to be like God, we will have to be with God.

Do **you** want to be wise? If so, you must get to the wise men. *"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."* (Proverbs 13:20)

"The Bible teaches that we are not going to become what we decide to become; we are going to become what we decide to be around."

## XV

# COUNSELING Guidelines

**T**HE FOLLOWING ARE ideas that I feel are important to the ministry of a counselor. These concepts will help build confidence in counseling.

1. **The wise counselor will always use an appointment book for scheduling appointments.** The “Week-at-a-Glance” professional appointment book is the one I most recommend. I use this type of appointment book because when I open it, I can see what is scheduled for one entire week. I have learned the hard way that I can get into a bit of trouble by using a daily appointment book because I am not able to see what the entire week holds. Brother Hyles also uses the “Week-at-a-Glance” appointment book.

In conjunction with my “Week-at-a-Glance” appointment book, I keep a large desk calendar that shows an entire month. Being organized is necessary for anyone’s success. An appointment book will help to keep a person organized.

2. **The wise counselor will attempt to ascertain how long each appointment may take, based on the need.** Ecclesiastes 8:5 teaches, “...*a wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment.*” For instance, I find that counseling someone experiencing marital problems requires a longer period of time. Logically, two-party problems will take longer to solve than one-party problems because two people are involved. A rule of thumb to follow

is that the more in-depth the relationship, the more time is needed to fix it.

Counselors must always remember that permanent fixes are needed instead of bandaids. Counselors are like doctors. Let us not just stitch up someone's wounds and ignore his hemorrhaging. Sad to say, but true, too many counselors do not go the extra mile.

The time needed is not just based on the need; it is also based on the counselor's ability to counsel. It may take one Baptist counselor only five minutes to take care of a problem which would require a secular counselor 50 years to fix.

**3. The wise counselor will ask the person seeking counsel to bring a list of the things he needs to discuss.** Romans 12:3 says, "*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*" Notice that this Scripture mentions "thinking." Making a list will force the one seeking counsel to think at least long enough to write out his problems. If a counselor can get a person to write down what troubles him, he may realize what the problem really is. The least he can do is to take the time to see if he can figure out what is wrong.

As a counselor, I am willing to help a person determine what is wrong because one of the very first solutions to solving any problem is knowing what the problem is. For instance, professionals say it is very difficult to get an alcoholic to admit he has a problem. If they can get him to admit that he is an alcoholic, they may be able to help him solve his problem.

When I suggest to the person seeking counsel to write down his questions on a card and bring it with him, I am trying to provoke him to think. The most difficult problem I counsel is the one that does not exist. I believe writing out the problem helps a person to organize the facts in his mind.

A wise counselor will ask the person seeking counsel for the list prior to the appointment. Knowing what is on the list will enable him to control the appointment. Why? Often when people get around the man of God, they get a little nervous and lose their train of thought. Also, many people seeking counsel don't understand proper priorities and the importance of which questions should be asked first.

For instance, if someone came to my office and said, "Brother Owens, I have three items which I need to discuss," I would automatically follow this procedure. I would say, "Give me the most important item on your list

first. That way, we can work on the biggest problem first.” In some cases, a person does not know which is the priority. I ask him for the list so I can study it and answer questions based on my knowledge of priorities.

When I have taught these principles, I have been asked, “How are they going to know to bring the list with their written questions?” The wise counselor will teach them. When a person comes to request an appointment, the wise counselor will immediately say, “Before you come, I would like for you to take some time to write out any questions you may have and bring them with you on the date we schedule.”

The wise counselor will program this routine in his preaching from the pulpit. He might say, “Someone came to my office for counseling this week, and he was very wise. He had all of his questions written down on a card. That was so helpful!” What might be the result? Folks in the congregation will know that it is wise to prepare for a counseling session by writing out their questions in advance.

**4. Counseling should be about personal problems, not doctrinal issues.** The immature mind immediately questions this point. However, according to II Timothy 4:2, pastors are to preach doctrine. “*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*” No church member should need to seek out what his pastor believes from the Bible. What a pastor believes should be so clear-cut that questions don’t need to be asked about what he believes from the Bible.

If people constantly come to a pastor’s office asking questions about doctrine, then he is not doing his job on Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, and Wednesday nights. He is to preach the Word of God from his pulpit.

Recently, in my Advanced Homiletics class, I said, “I will not preach doctrine I am unable to prove with the Bible.” In other words, I will not stand before a group of people and say, “I know for a fact such-and-such is true” if I don’t know for a fact it is true. We must know what we believe from the Bible. No wise pastor will automatically believe everything someone tells him.

The Word of God equals truth. A counselor will often find that if a person comes to his office to ask about doctrine, in most cases he only wants to challenge a doctrinal issue. I would sit down with someone and have a personal counseling appointment concerning doctrine when that someone is considering joining my church. Let us say my church is in Alabama, and the person wishing to join is from California. That person

may come by my office and say, “My family and I are looking for an independent, fundamental, King-James-only, Bible-believing Baptist church. Before I bring them to your church, I want to know what you believe on some topics.” To be honest, I would be impressed with that kind of man, and I would answer his questions.

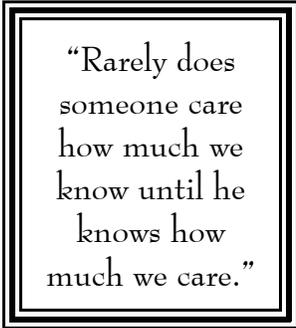
A pastor’s regular members should be learning doctrine from his preaching of the Word of God. I am not saying that every person who wants an appointment about doctrine will be someone challenging his pastor’s doctrine. There may be instances where a counselor will answer doctrinal questions; however, for the most part, the people should get the idea that counseling is about personal problems, relationship problems, and situations of that nature.

If a person won’t come to church on Sunday nights or Wednesday nights to learn the doctrine I preach, I am unwilling to take time for counseling with him personally about doctrinal questions. I would counsel with him on other areas of his life.

5. **Before the actual appointment, the wise counselor will take time to “investigate” the person with whom he will be counseling, especially concerning business appointments.** Proverbs 18:15 teaches, “*The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.*” The Bible teaches us that we should seek knowledge, and a prudent man will seek wisdom. *Prudent* means *exercising good judgment or common sense.*

The prudent man will seek and find desired information. Gathering information as a point of personal contact will help familiarize the counselor with the person seeking advice. A wise counselor will do some investigative work. How very embarrassing it is for me when a person comes to my office for his appointment time, and I have to ask him for his name!

Of course, a man of God will counsel total strangers with the Word of God, but I believe it surely is helpful to know a little something about the person because a counselor should be personable. For instance, I find out what type of business a man operates. What position does he hold? Do I personally know any of his business associates? Is he married? Do he and his wife have any children? Since people are generally proud of their



“Rarely does someone care how much we know until he knows how much we care.”

accomplishments, knowing about any of these makes a great point of contact.

Knowing this type of background information will make the person being counseled feel like I am sincerely interested in him. A person being counseled wants answers, but he also really wants someone to care about him. He would like for someone to love him while he is being helped. Rarely does someone care how much we know until he knows how much we care.

**6. The wise counselor won't automatically assume that a businessman is a success in all areas of his life.** A man may do very well with his business but still be terrible in handling his personal finances. A successful person often finds others assume he is doing as well with his personal finances and would not even consider he may need help in this area of his life, too. We can't assume; we must assist!

**7. The wise counselor will love everyone the same.** We must be sure that people know and understand that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. To be effective in their ministries, pastors must love the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, the lovely and the unlovely the same.

**8. It is not always necessary for a counselor to give a complete answer in one counseling session.** More than likely, the counselor will not necessarily solve a problem in one sitting. Most of us realize that people do not change overnight. A problem that has been building over a period of ten or more years will not be solved in a ten-minute counseling session. A counselor may need to help solve a problem with a five-part answer, i.e., five different counseling sessions. I have found that too much too fast will overwhelm and stymie an already hurting person.

At this point, let me recommend that a counselor be very careful in scheduling regular appointments with a member of the opposite gender. I would even recommend that if a young lady needs several counseling appointments, the counselor have his wife present in those sessions. I preach that it was not wise for Joseph to remain alone in the house time after time with Potiphar's wife. I Thessalonians 5:22 says, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*" As men of God, we must always be on guard.

**9. A wise counselor will spend some time thinking through his promises before making them to the person seeking counsel.** A counselor with a big heart will want to help another in a variety of ways. He must be sure that he does not promise something that he cannot produce because his own name and character can be at risk.

**10. The wise counselor will not always do for the one seeking counsel what that person should do for himself.** The counselor who continuously solves problems for the one seeking counsel is not helping him. That person will face the same situation again in the future; he will still be unprepared to confront the situation because he has been robbed of the experience of dealing with his own problem.

A counselor should be kind and be generous, but he should not produce an atmosphere of "Christian welfare." He needs to help the one seeking counsel to help himself and to be dependent on God, not on man.

**11. The wise counselor will be prepared to settle disputes between two people.** Romans 12:10 is God's answer to disputes: "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.*"

I have a fairly effective way to deal with disputes using Romans 12:10 philosophy. I advise party number one to tell party number two what he thinks is right, but to do what party number two thinks is right. Then, I turn the table around and ask party number two to tell party number one what he believes is right but to do what party number one wants to do. I am practicing the Bible teaching in Romans 12:10 which says, "*...in honour, preferring one another.*"

Let me explain Romans 12:10 by using a hypothetical situation. Joe and Bob are two men in my church who cannot solve their differences. Privately, I say to Joe, "Joe, I think you should tell Bob what you think is right, and I believe you should do what Bob wants." Then I go to Bob and privately say, "Bob, I think you should tell Joe what you think is right, and then I believe you should do what Joe wants." When I have two people willing to give in to each other, it is showing Biblical honor by preferring one another. Instead of arguing about who gets his way (which is selfish), these two men are more apt to argue about who does not get his own way.

This Biblical solution will work because the "problem" wasn't the big issue; the big issue was pride. If a counselor can get the pride out of the way, the contention will cease. It is very wise to solve two-party problems by having each party give in to the other. I have found this simple way of dealing with disputes to be very effective.

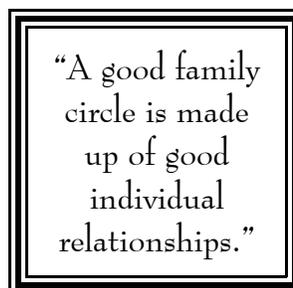
**12. The wise counselor will know good general advice and guidelines about childbearing.** For instance, I would generally advise a couple to have their first child no sooner than three years after marriage and no later than the wife's thirtieth birthday. I personally believe every newly married couple should have a couple of years after marriage to enjoy one

another, to get to know each other, to have privacy, and to learn to adjust to each other.

At the same time, the married couple needs to realize that when the wife reaches her mid-thirties, childbearing can become more difficult and complicated. Some women have had children in their forties, but I believe the best time to have a child is by the age of 30. Why? When new parents are 30 years of age or younger, they will still have plenty of good years as husband and wife to be alone again when their children leave home. I believe the latest the last child should be born is by the time the wife is 35 years of age. I don't believe God intended for "grandparents" to raise children, and often it becomes very difficult for a 55- to 60-year-old man to relate to his 18-year-old son. A younger father may go out with his son to play ball with him. However, that kind of activity can be seriously curtailed when a father is 60 years old.

That scenario brings me to this oft-asked question: "What if my wife and I got married when we were 35; do we need to wait three years to make adjustments before we have a child? If we wait three years, we would be 38 or older before the birth of our first child." Medical statistics show that the longer a wife waits to have a child, the more difficult conception can be for her. The odds are against a married couple over 35 years of age who wait for three years before trying to have children. It may be wise to have children right away. Besides, a couple in their mid-thirties should be mature enough by that time to make some immediate adjustments to one another.

**13. The wise counselor teaches that individual relationships in the family are more important than the family circle.** Let me explain. A good family circle is made up of good individual relationships. Some people who have good family times together do not spend any individual time with their children. If a choice has to be made between having a family time together and individual times together, I recommend taking the individual times. However, I believe we can have both.



"A good family circle is made up of good individual relationships."

If I thought I was spending quality time with my wife by taking her on a date with our children, I am fooling myself! My precious wife is not receiving the quality time she needs from me.

One of the biggest home-breakers in the world is a child. When a wife

begins to take care of the children and forgets all about dad, or dad wants to take care of the children and forgets about mom, we have a problem—a big problem! Before long the child has “stolen” all of the attention and affection the parents once lavished on each other. Their marriage is slowly being pulled apart, often without their realizing what is happening!

When the children grow up, marry, cling to their own spouses, move away, and have their own families, the husband and wife will once again be alone, and the tragedy is they no longer know each other. Sometimes a husband and wife are close, but then a child enters the home and they lose track of each other. Twenty years later, they meet once again and have to start all over again.

That separation is why many couples cannot wait for their children to leave so they can get a divorce. I have watched this situation happen again and again. The couple have enough character to stay together long enough to rear their children. However, they don't have enough character or a strong enough relationship to stay together after the children leave home. In other words, they have let the children be the motivating factor in their marriage relationship. Children should never be the motivating factor in any marriage relationship. A husband can love both his wife and his children; a wife can love both her husband and her children at the same time. How very important it is for a counselor to teach proper marriage concepts.

## XVI

# COUNSELING AND Being Fair to Other Preachers

**F**ROM TIME TO TIME, a person from another church may request counsel. I believe a counselor must consider the home church pastor and his feelings, so I follow seven rules about counseling with a member of another church.

1. **A wise counselor will not counsel with a member of another church without the prior permission of that person's pastor.** A counselor should always be fair with other preachers. It is sad to say, but true, that some preachers can be very unethical and impolite and show no manners. One may say, "I am an independent Fundamentalist; I'll do whatever I feel led to do." However, I say, "Don't do whatever you want with **my** members." Without thinking, some preachers do things that are very inappropriate, which is why there are many unnecessary battles in Fundamentalism. One area where many preachers are especially unethical and ungentlemanly is in their counseling practices.

I feel the best way to get permission from another pastor to counsel one of his members is to require a written note from him, giving permission to counsel his member. Preachers need to decide they won't counsel members from another pastor's church without his permission. Pastors need to have a fixed rule about this matter. We should consider the fact that

there just may be a reason why a person is looking for a new counselor and avoiding his own pastor.

2. **A wise counselor will not be one of many counselors.** If a counselor wants to be fair with other counselors, he won't become one of many. He will not allow himself to become a part of a system where people do what I call "counsel hopping." In many cases, a person who frequently changes counselors often manipulates one against the other. Too many counselors working on one problem also causes confusion, for the person being counseled as well as the counselors.

3. **A wise counselor will not counsel contrary to another good counselor's advice.** Not everyone begins at the same place in his counseling. It is far wiser to let a counselor start and finish his counseling sessions, rather than to interrupt midstream. If the other counselor is a Bible-believer and a sincere person, a counselor needs to keep his nose out of the other counselor's counseling.

4. **A wise counselor will advise a person with whom he is counseling to follow his pastor's recommendations.** If one wants to be a loyal follower and finds that he has given advice contrary to that of the pastor of the person seeking counsel, he needs to tell the person seeking counsel to follow the advice of his pastor. For instance, I am on the pastoral staff at First Baptist Church of Hammond. If I counsel someone and find out later that he has already sought counsel from the pastor, I immediately say, "Look, the truth is that our pastor is so much wiser than me. Please follow his advice and ignore mine." However, some are too proud to admit that fact, and that pride keeps the person seeking counsel from the best advice available to him. The wise counselor will bow out and say, "Go see the pastor." Some good men will be disloyal because of not following this crucial advice.

5. **A wise counselor will not believe accusations about other preachers.** I wish each reader would underline in this book the word "accusation." Of course, I believe a man can be proven guilty of a sin. If a man admits his sin, we can believe that he is guilty. However, I am referring to accusations where someone said that someone else said that another person said that still another one reportedly said that he saw so-and-so sin. No wise counselor will believe such accusations.

Did you know that you can hear someone give a report and not have to make a judgment call of whether or not the truth has been told? I would rather be wrong by having too much faith in the integrity of a person than

by having too much doubt in that person. People are hurt much more by a counselor's premature judgment than by a counselor being a little too patient.

The question often arises, "Are we covering sin?" How I thank God for the blood of Jesus Christ which covers sin! I don't believe that everyone needs to know all the facts about a tragedy. No one needs to hear the latest rumor.

Most will not follow or believe this point about "not believing accusations about other preachers." However, I believe that when the first long-tongued "Jezebel" in your church comes after you and says, "I had an affair with the pastor," and she's talking about YOU, you will wish that every pastor friend wouldn't believe the accusation!

Let me pose some questions: Were any accusations made that weren't true about Jesus? Can we believe the accusations made against Jesus?

As we sit in our robes of self-righteousness, we say, "Well, so-and-so should live above reproach so an accusation like that couldn't be made." So, we don't believe Jesus lived above reproach?! Or as we sit in our seat of judgment, we might say, "Well, he should never have placed himself in such a situation." So, we don't believe that Jesus ever should have gotten in that kind of situation?! Jesus was the holiest Person on earth, and accusations were made against Him!

Let's be fair with each other. I believe I can honestly say that if someone came to me today and told me that a dear friend of mine had committed a sin, I will not believe that bad report.

**6. A wise counselor will not criticize another preacher's counseling.** I happen to believe that if a person wants to talk bad about me, he may do it all he wants; but I beg that person to please talk about me on his knees and to the Lord. Unfortunately, most do not share their bad reports with only the Lord.

**7. A wise counselor will not recommend humanly impossible cases to seek further advice from another counselor.** Some cases are only solved by the divine intervention of God and His choosing to work a miracle. With God, we know all things are possible. "*But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.*" (Matthew 19:26)

Since time represents life, counselors owe it to themselves to guard their time, as well as the time of other counselors. They need to be prudent

and wise in their counseling of members of other churches so as to guard that pastor's time whereby he has given a part of his life to his member. No wise counselor will want to waste the time of another man of God.

## XVII

# COUNSELING

## AND

# Being Fair to the Person Seeking Counsel

**F**OLLOWING THE SEVENTEEN points presented in this chapter will help build strong relationships between the counselor and those with whom he counsels.

1. **To be fair, the counselor should not counsel by mail.** *“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”* (II Corinthians 3:6) When a counselor writes a letter to someone as a way of counseling him via the mail, the recipient cannot see the compassion on the counselor’s face. I can assure you that people will be hurt by mail counsel. To be fair, a counselor must advise people in person, which is always the best way.

2. **To be fair, the counselor should not counsel by phone.** From time to time, a counselor may need to do a little counseling on the telephone. However, he should not make a habit of counseling on the phone because that practice is not fair to people—not to the counselor’s family if he is at home, nor to the person with whom he is counseling.

The person being counseled needs to be looked square in the eye. He needs to see the counselor’s tears, hear the pathos in his voice, and watch

his facial expressions. A counselor can learn so much just by watching how the person seeking counsel responds to his words and advice.

**3. To be fair, the counselor should not counsel when he is excessively weary.**

The times when I am the least patient and understanding with people is when I am the most weary. A counselor hurts himself if he counsels while tired, and he also hurts his people—sometimes irreparably. People who seek counsel deserve to receive sound counsel from a counselor with a sharp, rested mind.

**4. To be fair, the counselor should never make his people wait unnecessarily.**

I fully realize there are just so many days in a week and so many weeks in a year, and only so much can be done. However, a counselor should not be unfair to his people and make them wait an inordinate amount of time in order to prove his busyness. What seems to be an emergency to a person may not be an emergency to a counselor, but that is not an excuse to make someone wait. A counselor must always do his best to meet his people's needs quickly and efficiently.

**5. To be fair, the counselor should always ask God for wisdom before he counsels.** A counselor has no right to counsel God's people without first asking God for His wisdom and power. He would be better off eliminating his counseling sessions when he is not ready spiritually. Better still, every counselor should stay ready spiritually! A non-spiritual counselor is not right with God.

**6. To be fair, the counselor must listen to the person seeking counsel.** He should let the person seeking counsel give his side. He must not predetermine his advice and jump right in, using statements such as "I know what you need!" He should hear the story completely before making a judgment. Someone has said, "To be shut off, not to be heard is to be rejected. Listening is not only hearing words, but receiving what the other person means and feels. We must listen with our hearts."

**7. To be fair, the counselor should not interrupt the person seeking counsel while he is speaking.** Did you know that it is rude to interrupt people while they are talking? When a person has a chain of thought, a counselor needs to let the person seeking counsel finish his

"A friend is  
someone who  
knows your past  
and your  
present and still  
loves you."

—Dr. Carl Hatch

thought. A counselor is surely going to be upset with him if the person seeking counsel interrupts every time the counselor gets halfway through a statement! Even though a person's life might be in shambles, he is a human who deserves to be heard. Counselors earn the right to be heard by listening.

I know some men who would love for their wives to listen to them when they are trying to say something. The problem is that they won't give their wives the time of day when it's their turn to talk. Once again, let me reiterate that a counselor earns the right to be heard by being a good listener.

**8. To be fair, the counselor should take occasional notes while the person with whom he is counseling is talking.** The word *occasional* is the key word in this statement about fairness. If I write the entire time the person seeking counsel is talking, he may think that I am more interested in writing than I am in his situation and problem. An occasional note on a 3 x 5 card is enough of a reminder for me about items I need to comment on at a later time when he is finished talking.

**9. To be fair, the counselor should attentively look at the person seeking counsel.** There is nothing quite like seeking counsel from a person who is looking out the window, reading a book, or playing with a pen!

I learned this point from my pastor. He looks at you so thoroughly that you wish he would never look at you again! I feel as though he looks right through me! Why? He is intense, and he gives me his undivided attention. A person receives more attention in a 30-minute appointment with him than what many will receive the rest of their lives from any other counselor.

Therefore, a counselor must decide that he will give anyone who seeks counsel eye-to-eye contact. The person being counseled deserves the complete mind of his counselor. Too often, when a counselor is supposed to be with a person in a counseling situation, he is not really there. In truth, that counseling session needs to be treated as the most important appointment happening anywhere in the world. In order to be a good counselor, every counselor must approach his counseling with his mind set on ignoring his own personal problems, the personal problems of loved ones, and the problems he has seen and heard all day. When a person comes for counsel, the good counselor is interested in that person only at that time.

**10. To be fair, the counselor would never act superior to the one**

**seeking counsel.** After all, the counselor is not trying to prove anything to those seeking counsel. He is trying to lead them to solving their problems. Many people seeking counsel are already fearful; they do not need belittling, too. Depending on the persons with whom we compare ourselves, we are all inferior. The Bible says, "...*but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*" (II Corinthians 10:12)

When one follows the Bible and starts looking to Christ, he will find out how inferior he is. A counselor has no right to look down at anyone. He is to help the one seeking counsel. His job is not to feel superior while helping. He is not trying to impress the person seeking counsel with his knowledge; he is trying to impress upon him the answer to his problem.

**11. To be fair, the counselor should treat the ones being counseled with dignity and respect.** I know pastors who treat someone who has fallen with no respect whatsoever. I'm so glad God treats me with respect, even though I am filthy and I have fallen. I'm so glad God will lift me up and treat me with dignity.

I have found the times when people are most apt to treat a fallen person with a lack of dignity is when someone has fallen in an area where they have not fallen. However, if that area happens to be one in which they have fallen, they tend to have a little more patience. Just because one happens to be "Mr. Perfection" in that one area, he has no right to belittle the person wanting help.

Let me also address in this particular point how a counselor should treat ladies. I don't care if the wealthiest woman in town is seeking counsel or if a harlot is seeking counsel, the ground is level at the foot of the cross! Both must be treated like ladies! Whether or not a lady behaves like a lady should have no bearing on whether or not the counselor should be a gentleman. It is required of a counselor to do what he should do because it is right, not because of what somebody else does.

**12. To be fair, the counselor must keep everything said in strictest of confidence.** People want a counselor who can be trusted. They surely don't need someone who gossips about them and their problems. A person who needs counseling won't return to a counselor for help if he betrays his confidences.

**13. To be fair, the counselor must not decide his feelings beforehand.** I cannot stress how very unfair this practice can be to people. It is preposterous to think one can already decide how he feels about a situation when he has not even heard what the person seeking counsel has

to say! One does not need to decide anything until he has heard the entire story and has the entire picture.

**14. To be fair, the counselor must not make decisions based on the reputation of the person with whom he is counseling.** As I said before, “The ground is level at the foot of the cross.” A counselor must make his decisions based on the facts that he has and upon the Bible principles he uses—NOT on a person’s reputation. During the years I have counseled, I have found that a person is known by four “reputations.”

- ***His personal reputation.*** How often have we heard, “He’s got a reputation for doing thus-and-so!” Yes, he may be disreputable; but when he comes to a counselor’s office, the counselor needs to allow him to present the problem and solve the problem at hand. A counselor is not trying to change that person’s reputation at that moment. Counselors try to fix hurts, which is what counseling is.
- ***His spouse’s reputation.*** If his wife is a long-tongued gossip in the church, a good counselor will not decide about her husband’s problem based on her reputation. However, it is very easy for any counselor to do this. If the husband is a whoremonger and his wife seeks help, one must be just and deal with her based on the problem she has—not her husband’s reputation.
- ***His children’s reputation.*** No counselor has a right to hold the reputation of a rebellious child against his parents. One needs to deal only with the present problem and try to fix what is broken.

I wonder how many times a person seeking counsel about a particular need or decision has instead received counsel about past needs based on their reputation. Let me ask a question. How would you feel if you ask someone one question, and he instead gives you answers for all the problems he thinks you might have? I would be overwhelmed, and, no doubt, so would the person seeking counsel.

- ***His parents’ reputation.*** The counselor should realize that many young people who seek counsel are wholesome, decent, God-fearing teenagers who are doing their best, even if their home situation is unpleasant. Therefore, if their parents are not doing their best, one should never counsel that teenager based on his parents’ reputation. One must never make blanket statements like, “Your daddy’s the one who embezzled money, and your mom has been spreading gossip. You are probably just like them.” No one deserves that type of stereotyping or unfounded criticism.

**15. To be fair, the counselor should not condemn or preach to the one seeking counsel.** When someone comes for counsel, he has come for exactly that—COUNSEL! As a counselor, one cannot vent his feelings behind a PA system in his office, while swinging his Bible, throwing things everywhere, and ending his four-point outline with an invitation and an altar call! No! A counselor must treat those who seek counsel with dignity and respect. There may be times when a counselor will need to raise his voice, but those times will be very rare.

**16. To be fair, the counselor must always look for good motives in any wrongdoings committed by the person seeking counsel.** How easy it can be for one to always gravitate toward the negative. Take, for instance, the daily news. Nearly all news broadcasted is negative. If I said the man pastoring the largest Sunday school in the whole world got drunk yesterday, I have no doubt the word would pass from here all the way around the world and back to us in a matter of 24 hours. On the other hand, if I reported the man who pastored the largest Sunday school in the world broke another record attendance last week, few would hear. **Bad news spreads fast.** Why? More than likely because of man's carnal nature.

Therefore, a counselor needs to look for any good motive in any wrongdoing. Of course, having a good motive while doing wrong is still wrong. Wrong is wrong, and right is right. Some people do wrong because of a lack of training, not because of a wicked and rebellious heart. Once again, one should always listen to the whole story.

**17. To be fair, a wise counselor will seek to find a way to praise a person before advising him.** A counselor should always look for something to praise—a good deed or being a help, etc. Someone may say, "Brother Owens, this guy is the most wicked, ignorant, foolish person I have ever met in my life! I can't think of anything about which to praise him. Everything he is doing is against the Word of God!!"

I contend that since that "wicked, ignorant, foolish person" is seeking counsel, he can be praised for being intelligent enough to seek counsel! A statement such as, "You are very wise to seek help; a lot of people wouldn't have been farsighted enough to do so," can be very encouraging.

I can say assuredly that if a counselor finds a little something good in the person and praises him, he will earn the right to tell him where he needs improvement. He already knows he has been disobedient or his reputation is somewhat disreputable, but he still wants to feel like he is worthy in his counselor's eyes.

## XVIII

# COUNSELING AND Being Fair to People Other Than the Person Seeking Counsel

**T**HE FOLLOWING TEN principles are an aid for the counselor to be just and equitable to all parties involved in any counseling situation.

1. **The counselor needs to hear both sides.** When the counselor is mediating in a two-party problem and listens to only one party, he is not being impartial. That situation is unfair to the person not present.
2. **The counselor must not form an opinion after hearing just one side.** When there are other sides involved in a situation, some counselors form an opinion without hearing both sides. This pre-formed judgment is unfair to the other party involved. Perhaps the whole story has not been presented. Perhaps the whole truth has not been told.
3. **The counselor cannot do marital counseling with just one party present.** A successful marriage is built with two people; therefore, the presence of both marriage partners are required for a successful counseling session.

**4. The counselor should never counsel through a third party.**

The counselor who counsels hypothetical situations brought by a third party will someday pay a price. Suppose a person came to me and said, "Preacher, I have a hypothetical situation about which I need some counsel to help someone. Please tell me how you would handle this." If I did give an answer to that situation, that person would more than likely run back to someone and give my answer to him. More than likely what I advised would be incorrectly quoted or even taken out of context.

When someone says to me, "Dr. Owens, I know someone who has this problem. Would you be willing to help me help him?"; I say, "Yes." If that person says, "Here's the problem," I say, "No! I don't want to know the problem. I am not going to help your friend by telling you what to tell him. Your friend may come to see me." I do not like third-party counseling because the third party usually carries only half of what was said to the person who needs the help. That kind of counseling will cause chaos and will hurt more than it helps. Also, that particular kind of counseling is unfair to the counselor, as well as to the person needing counsel and to the person seeking counsel for his friend.

**5. The counselor should counsel only when asked for advice; otherwise, he should not give his views.** When counseling and trying to help someone, a counselor should answer only the questions asked. Someone has so aptly said, "Unsought advice is seldom heeded."

**6. The counselor should never allow a child or teenager to tell his side of the story in the presence of his parents.** Far too often, young people show a lack of respect. I require young people to be respectful to their parents. However, if I am going to hear a youth's side, I will hear his complaint in private in order to be fair.

**7. A counselor should never volunteer counsel; however, he should volunteer his availability.** In other words, I am not going to walk up to a person who has an obvious difficulty and say, "You must counsel with me because your life is falling apart! Come see me right now." Since I want that person to know I care, I may say, "I want you to know that I am available if you need me." As I said before, unsought advice is seldom followed and usually resented.

**8. The counselor must be fair to his family.** For the sake of his family, the counselor should not counsel in his home on a daily basis. At times an emergency can arise where the pastor needs to counsel in his home once in a great while. However, the pastor's home should be his haven.

In order to be fair to his family, his wife and children need their privacy. The family also needs their home to be a haven, and it is not right for the pastor's family to give up their home to a counseling ministry. The pastor's wife needs a home just like every other member of the church. Therefore, the counselor must schedule all his counseling at the church or on the church property; otherwise, before long the sacredness of the home could be lost as the pastor (or counselor) is trying to salvage others' homes. If my wife leaves me or my children rebel because they do not have any private life with my wife and me, my ministry will not be a help to anyone. I must protect the sanctity of my home by being wise in where I counsel.

**9. To be fair to himself, the counselor must not counsel in the home of the one seeking advice.** When counseling in someone's home, the counselor loses the right to strongly correct the person seeking counsel. It would be very difficult for me to counsel someone in his home and tell him all the things that he needs to hear. When I am on his turf, I need to keep a certain amount of respect and a certain amount of propriety. When the counselor is in someone's home, he must be a gentleman.

However, when a person requesting counsel is on my turf, WATCH OUT! There is a mystique about the pastor's office that people respect, which makes it the best place to counsel.

Once again, I am trying to be fair—to myself and to the person being counseled. I am not being fair to myself if I must curb the words that should be said. I am not fair to the person being counseled if he does not hear what will help him.

**10. The counselor will wisely tell the person being counseled only those details he would want repeated to others.** If the counselor chooses to share a personal illustration from his life, everyone in church will more than likely know that story by Sunday! In order to be fair to himself, he should not reveal that which he would not want everyone to know nor that which could hurt his testimony with others.

## XIX

# COUNSELING WITH Children

**I**N LUKE 2, AN account is given of Mary and Joseph taking 12-year-old Jesus with them to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When the celebrations were over, Mary and Joseph started home, not knowing Jesus was not with them. When they discovered His absence, they returned to Jerusalem, where they found Jesus in the Temple. *“And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.”* (Luke 2:46) In essence, the Child Jesus was counseling with His elders as He asked questions and answered theirs.

Times definitely do arise when a child has need of counsel. Jesus was asking questions because He knew, even at such a young age, that He needed to be about His Father’s business. *“Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.”* (Psalm 34:11) I apply the following rules to counseling with children:

1. **A wise counselor will be a friend to the child.** He should not try to become a counselor to the child; instead, he should become his friend. A child can understand the concept of friendship, and often he will respond. However, most children do not understand what a counselor is.

2. **A wise counselor will not counsel a child without parental**

**permission.** In our day and age of false accusations and vicious attacks, it is no longer safe for a man of God to be alone with a child. Therefore, I always prefer a parent's attendance in appointments with a child. I also want and expect a parent to participate in an appointment.

3. **A wise counselor will praise a child for the good that he does.** Every child desires praise and attention. If bad behavior brings a child the attention for which he is seeking, he may do bad rather than good, just for the extra attention he receives. A wise counselor will praise the good and hope the praising of the good behavior will cause the child to reproduce good acts.

4. **A wise counselor will often remind the child that he is loved.** I John 4:8 says, "...for God is love." Because God loves us, He has provided others who will love the child as well.

5. **The great need of a child is training.** Often a child is untrained or unprepared for the responsibility given to him or expected of him. I find that many times adults assume far too much of a child. Teaching a child will determine whether or not he is confused or he is rebellious.

6. **The wise counselor will have faith in a child's ability to do right.** A counselor should show the child he believes he will do right. The child must see that the counselor believes in him and that he believes he wants to do right.

7. **When giving a child instructions, the wise counselor will make the instructions easy to understand.** Listing a ten-point plan for success will confuse a child. The counselor must give instructions that will help a child to accomplish one thing at a time. I once read that adults should keep their instructions to children as simple as the obedience commands that are taught to dogs, such as "stop," "sit," "walk," etc. That is probably oversimplified, but I wonder how much heartache adults would save children if they kept their instructions simple.

8. **A child's two main counselors should be his father and mother.** It is rare that a child would need to go to someone other than his mom or dad for individualized counsel.

9. **The wise counselor will teach the parents how to help their own child.** If the child needs counsel, it is best if he receives the advice from his own parents.

10. **A counselor must be careful not to put words in the child's mouth.** Children want to please adults. The child may say what his counselor wants to hear rather than what he truly believes or feels. Even at

a very young age, a child learns not to be sincere. Asking simple questions will often get to the root of the situation.

**11. The counselor should treat and advise someone else's child the same way he would want his child to be treated or advised.** He should always utilize the golden rule, which says, "...*whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them...*" (Matthew 7:12)

**12. An appointment with a child should be of a much shorter duration than one with a teen or an adult.** Since a child's attention span is fairly short, an appointment should be scheduled with that fact in mind.

**13. Extra patience is often needed when working with children.** A child lacks the vocabulary of a teen or adult. The counselor will need to employ simple illustrations so the child will understand what is needed or expected of him.

**14. Parents should seek counsel about counseling their children ten times more than they should take their child to a counselor.** One way to seek counsel, which is often overlooked by most, is to read and study books about child rearing. Parents can listen to preaching tapes. They also can receive counsel by giving careful attention to what the preacher preaches Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings.

As a general rule, children want to please adults. Many times, parents need to give some extra time to a child who is experiencing some difficulties. Often, that extra attention is all that it takes to keep the child in a harmonious frame of mind.

## XX

# COUNSELING WITH Teenagers

**A** TEENAGER IS MORE adult than child, but many adults fail to realize this fact. The last thing a teenager wants is to be treated like a baby or child. One of the biggest mistakes one can make when counseling and working with teenagers is to treat them as children.

So, when a person treats a teenager like a child, that teenager has no recourse but to act like a child or withdraw. A counselor is far better off treating them like young adults by giving them some respect and dignity. He can make a difference in their lives.

How often have we heard teenagers say, "I'm not a baby! Please don't treat me like a baby!" Many times, a parent treats a teenager like a child because the parent has not realized his child has grown up. The parent has not been allowing the youth to grow in his own mind.

The following points are some I try to follow as I work with teenagers.

1. **When counseling with a teenager, the counselor should not become a teenager. Instead, he should let the teenager become an adult.** I Corinthians 13:11 says, "*When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.*" I do not believe the counselor should go down to the teen's level in

a counseling appointment in order to have a “meeting of the minds.” I expect the teenager to rise to my level where I meet and treat him like a young adult and look him eye to eye.

The Bible says, “*When I was a child, I spake as a child.*” In other words, a child acts like a child; but if we are going to be young men, we need to put away childish acts and deeds. The counselor should expect this type of behavior in his office. Counselors should not try to use the teen’s expressions.

I find it humorous when a counselor tries to use a typical teen’s expressions. Usually, he is about 20 years behind times! When the counselor replies, “Oh, that’s groovy!” the teen says, “It’s what?” Anyone who works with teens knows that a teen’s vocabulary is constantly changing.

Counselors need to talk like men and be themselves. They need not try to force teens to follow their standard of vocabulary. If a counselor will let a teen seeking counsel be on his level, he will have more respect.

**2. The teenager should be allowed to give his side of the story.** Many teens have no hearing at home. Proverbs 18:13 says, “*He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*” By patiently listening to the teen, a counselor will win the right to talk at a later time. The average teenager at home never receives an opportunity to tell his side. Most parents are stuck in the “I’m-always-right” syndrome.

The average teen will be shocked to death to hear, “Tell me your side of the story.” If for no other reason, teenagers need a chance to talk because they are human as much as their parents are. Having the opportunity to express their feelings is a very important part of their development and should be nurtured and encouraged in the proper channels.

**3. A counselor should hear out the teenager, but he should always insist that the teen remain respectful.** While he is sitting in a counselor’s office, a teen needs to know that no matter how angry he is at an authority figure, he must show respect. A counselor cannot allow a young person to transfer his anger about his situation into disrespect for anyone—especially his counselor.

**A. A counselor should never allow a young person to become disrespectful toward his parents.** Deuteronomy 5:16 is a command that we are duty bound to honor. “*Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD*

*thy God giveth thee.*” It is so easy for a young person to calmly tell his side of the story and suddenly lose control and begin making unnecessary statements about his parents. The counselor should stop the young person with a statement like, “We can talk about this situation without your saying those things.”

I demand that the teenagers I counsel remain respectful. I will not let them dishonor their parents by name-calling or using any other discourteous talk. If I let a teen get away with it, he will think it is fine to be disrespectful at home as well.

Not only that, I want the teen with whom I counsel to live a long, fruitful life as Deuteronomy 5:16 says: “...*that thy days may be prolonged...*”

**B. A counselor should never allow a teenager to be disrespectful about his authorities.** A certain amount of admiration and respect are due those who are our elders and authorities. Leviticus 19:32 says, “*Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.*” I must be careful so that I don’t let a teenager, while telling his side, constantly attack his authority figures—teachers, bosses, coaches, principals, etc.

**C. A counselor should require the teenager to remain respectful to God.** Proverbs 3:9 says, “*Honour the LORD with thy substance...*” I expect the honor factor to be uplifted while a teen is in my office because that is how adults behave. I will not allow a teen to rudely come into my office spouting off statements like, “I can’t believe God is treating me this way! He’s not fair!”

I immediately stop his talk with a statement like, “Wait a minute. You are talking about God. We can talk about your situation, but we are not going to talk about God the way you are. I want to help you.” I will hear out any teen on any issue if he talks with some self-control as a young adult. If a teen feels upset at God, we can deal with his feelings. However, I always make it a practice that we are never rude toward God while dealing with hurt, heartache, and anger.

**4. A counselor should take the teenager seriously.** Though we are often oblivious to it, a young person’s problems are just as serious to him as an older person’s problems are to him. What happens with many adults is that since they have already been through the teenage years, the problems of a teen are seemingly unimportant. We can forget how big they were to

us! However, I contend a counselor must never forget a teen's problems at 17 are as big to him as the counselor's problems are big to him at 47. Adulthood is something new for a teen to face and in which to find his place.

A counselor is very unfair to a teenager when he says, "Oh, that's so petty or silly." When we were their age, our teenage problems were very real and very big to us. Every teenager should feel like he can go to the preacher and be treated with dignity and respect.

**5. A counselor should never categorize the teenager with whom he is counseling.** I have found that most teenagers are typically classified into one of three categories. A counselor needs to guard against placing the teens into these groups.

**A. *The Rebel.*** How quickly we categorize and label teens as we make a blanket statement such as, "Oh, you're nothing but a rebel!" I have found that most teenagers are "*simple*," as stated in Proverbs. They don't always know how to judge between right and wrong. Sometimes a teen does wrong because he truly didn't know what was right.

I find that it is usually the adults who are rebels because adults have been trained and taught and still choose what they want to do. Teenagers are usually more burdened than rebellious. Therefore, a counselor needs to help them and to love them.

**B. *The Sissy.*** I have to admit that I do not have a great deal of toleration for an effeminate boy. I believe every boy should be manly; however, if he is not manly, I usually find it is not the boy's fault. I do not know what all contributes to a boy becoming a sissy. The cause may be the absence of a father and the presence of a domineering mother or perhaps an over-domineering father. Whatever the cause, a counselor needs to help a boy become manly by teaching him how to throw a ball; how to walk, sit, and stand like a man; how to act like a man, etc.

**C. *The Liar.*** Adults are often far too quick to label a teenager a liar. I know of mothers and fathers who are liars. As a matter of fact, I find that adults are far more versed in lying than teenagers are. Adults are much better at lying because they have been doing it for years! For instance, they have been lying about their taxes, though they wouldn't call it lying. Truthfully, adults are liars about many things. We shouldn't be guilty of not giving a teenager the

opportunity to prove he is not a liar.

**6. The counselor should find ways to identify with the teenager's heartache.** Most won't want to hear a sob story about how the counselor used to walk 20 miles to school every day in the wind, snow, and rain. Instead, a counselor should share about the times he was a teen having heartaches over relationships. He needs to let the teenager see that he is human, too. He should use his own experiences to let the teenager see that he is normal, and that both share struggles in common.

**7. The counselor should ask the teenager for advice about his problem.** I often ask a teenager, "What would you advise me if you were counseling with me about this same situation?" Allowing a teenager to think through a situation and express an opinion will help him believe the counselor has confidence in him to think for himself.

In II Samuel 12:1-6, the Bible gives an example of God allowing King David to unknowingly assign his own payment for wrongdoing. *"And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."*

Of course, we know that Nathan, the man of God, said, *"Thou art the man."* (II Samuel 12:7b) If we continue to study the life of David, we find he did pay fourfold—in the lives of his children and with great heartache. Nathan gave David the opportunity to give advice.

A counselor can help a teenager understand justice and also to learn to develop a right attitude concerning the acceptance of advice. It does not matter to me who devises a solution. If the teenager's advice is good, I tell him to follow it. As a matter of fact, they are more apt to follow their own advice! A counselor should always remember that every teen struggles with the desire to be considered an adult. Allowing him to formulate his own problem-solving strategies will help him on the way to adulthood.

**8. The wise counselor will show the teenager the logic behind his counsel.** Proverbs 4:1 says, "*Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.*" There is nothing wrong with a counselor explaining to a teenager the *why's* of his advice. Teenagers get tired of being told, "Because you're supposed to do such and such." If a teen is trying to mature and become an adult, it surely would be helpful if he knew what he was doing and why.

I believe the average parent will not explain the *why's* because he doesn't know the *why's*. Is there anything wrong with explaining why? Absolutely not! We need to show our teens why we believe the way we believe.

**9. The counselor should let the teenager win in at least one point.** I want a teen to win or be right in at least one area. A counselor should not let a counseling session be a "shutout." When I talk with a teen, I don't approach our counseling session as follows: "I, as the counselor, am completely right; you are completely wrong."

I have had some people ask, "What do I do if I cannot find one area in which the teen is right?" I always say, "At least he was right enough to seek counsel!" A counselor should praise him! No person likes to be wrong all the time; and the truth is, no one is.

**10. The counselor should always control his voice.** He should never preach at the teenager nor raise his voice while counseling. Proverbs 15:1 says, "*A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*" Teenage hearts are tender, and, even behind a hard face, there is a reachable teenager. A counselor should not provoke them to wrath by dealing with them roughly. "*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" (Ephesians 6:4) Adults need to always talk with teens in a decent tone of voice. I believe adults need to tell them what is right in no uncertain terms, but I also believe they should tell them in the right way.

**11. The counselor should not take sides when counseling a teen.** A teenager almost always expects an adult to gang up on him. The wise counselor will explain that he is on the side of the right. "*Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.*" (Ecclesiastes 4:4)

**12. The wise counselor will not decide his counsel before the teenager has his appointment.** How unfair! The teen should know beforehand that he has the opportunity to talk and state his side. "*He that*

*answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.*" (Proverbs 18:13) I have found if a teenager has one good friend who will love him and be fair, as well as believe in him, he can usually make it.

**13. The wise counselor will find a way for the teenager to choose between two good things when advising him.** A counselor should let him exercise his ability to choose. He should let him choose which answer he wants and make him feel like he had a part in the decision-making for his life.

If I had a teenager in my office seeking counsel, I may say, "Here are your options. Whichever one you choose to do is fine with me."

What if he doesn't choose the very best option? I would rather have a teen choose the one he wants to do and do it than for me to pick the very best option and have him rebel and not do it. Every teen struggles with the right to be an adult and have some decision-making power. Within the realm of right, I try to give every teen I counsel a part of the decision-making process. After the teen makes his decision, I say, "I'm proud of you. That is a good choice."

**14. The teenager's ideas shouldn't be opposed.** Instead, the counselor should try to build on them. He will not regret building on the teen's own ideas because the teen will feel like the counselor is treating him as an adult. Every teen wants someone to realize that he can think for himself. I believe that if a counselor builds on a teen's ideas and adds to his ideas, he can help him.

If a teen's own solutions are not well conceived, a wise counselor will have built on his relationship with the teen to the point that he can proceed with new suggestions without a battle. A good counselor will express feelings of confidence in a teen over any little growth and change he makes.

**15. No wise counselor will make the teenager's relationship with him hinge on the teen's following the counselor's advice.** This point is to stress a counselor's unconditional love, which means, "Teenager, I love you if you will not do what I say. I will love you if you will do what I say. I love you, period." If a teen believes his counselor's love for him hinges on whether or not he will do what he is told, the counselor will lose him.

A teen will not always do what he is told; therefore, he will be insecure in his relationship with a counselor. He should think, "I cannot get away from his love! He loves me no matter what I do."

**16. If a teenager is trying to make premature marriage plans, the counselor should seek to postpone them rather than block the plan.** If

the young people are too immature to be married, time will more than likely eliminate the seriousness of their relationship. If a counselor feels nine months would help them come to their senses, he can tell them he will perform their wedding ceremony in 18 months. He can bargain with them by meeting them halfway at nine months. If he dogmatically tries to block the marriage and they are of legal age, they may run off together and get married. I find this bargaining tactic is very successful.

**17. No counselor should ever give a teenager a bunch of orders.** Instead, he should give them responsibilities; i.e., tasks to carry out which will help them be a success. No wise counselor will become a drill sergeant.

**18. Teenagers should not be counseled in public.** This tactic is rarely successful because a teen is too concerned about what his peers will think. Instead of accepting the counsel, more than likely he will resent the advice. A counselor should politely ask the teen to step aside with him and advise him in private. Better yet, he should make it a practice to always counsel in private.

**19. The wise counselor will not scold immediately upon learning of an infraction.** A teen's pride and desire to be treated like an adult will result in a standoff. The counselor should wait until the teen has let down his guard. Then, the counselor can maturely talk with the teen about his offense. Sometimes as much as a week or two should elapse before the conversation takes place.

**20. As the teenager talks, the wise counselor will not continually interrupt and disagree with him.** No matter how disorganized or how illogical the teen's thoughts are, a counselor should still let the teen make his points. If a counselor constantly disagrees, he will cause a teen to become even more frustrated. As a result, his temper may flare.

**21. The counselor should not despair.** If he does despair, he surely should not let the teenager know it. A counselor's despair can multiply a teen's insecurity. A counselor must remember a teen's problems are probably insecurity problems stemming from the transition between childhood and adulthood. A counselor must never fall apart or lose control in the presence of a teenager.

**22. No counselor should ever give up on a teenager.** I mean he should never, never, never give up on a teenager. In Hebrews 13:5, the Bible says, "...I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If Jesus would make such a promise to His loved ones, surely a counselor can determine to do no less.

**23. The wise counselor will not act pious in the presence of teenagers.** A teen needs a spiritual friend, not a holier-than-thou, headstrong counselor. The adage is so true: "Some of us are so heavenly-minded that we are no earthly good."

**24. Every teen needs to hear his counselor say, "I love you."** Every teen needs to hear these words from someone who truly cares. As a matter of fact, we all do. However, adults should not expect a teen to return love with the same words or in the same way. They need to accept whatever expression a teen chooses to give as a sincere one.

**25. The counselor does not need to solve all the teen's problems in one counseling session.** At this stage in his life, the problems can be a little overwhelming. A counselor does not help the teen by preparing a list of 20 areas in which he is struggling and solve them all in 60 minutes! There are no little pills to take by mouth to give instant relief. Changing lives requires time. If a counselor does not want to pay the price, he will never be a good counselor. He needs to feed young people answers a spoonful at a time rather than a truckload at a time.

I have found these pointers to be very successful in counseling with teenagers these many years. Above all, adults need to remember to treat teens as adults.

## XXI

# COUNSELING

## AND

# How to Choose What Advice to Give

One of the most difficult jobs of a counselor is sorting through the information received from the person seeking counsel. Once the counselor has categorized the information, he then needs to decide exactly how to advise the person. The following are principles I use when choosing how to give advice.

1. **If there is a Bible principle, a counselor should let that Bible principle make the decision.** Psalm 19:7 says, “*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.*” If the Bible dogmatically teaches that something is wrong, I personally believe that I have no decision to make. I just advise the person to do what the Bible says since God made the decision for me. The Bible has something to say about anything that arises in life. The problem is that many are not spiritual enough to study the Bible like they should to know exactly what God wants them to do.

2. **The wise counselor will let Bible examples help make the proper decision.** I Corinthians 10:11 says, “*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom*

*the ends of the world are come.*” If a counselor does not know of a Scripture that dogmatically makes the decision for us, the next step is to study Bible examples. He can advise the person with whom he is counseling by telling him that someone in the Bible suffered a negative result by doing what he is about to do. For example, Peter warmed by the Devil’s fire, and the negative result was that he denied Christ. David did not go into battle, and the negative result was his sin with Bath-sheba, resulting in the death of her husband and God punishing David fourfold in the lives of his children. These God-given examples are to help us learn by someone else’s example, which is the best teacher.

**3. Letting life-learned principles make our decisions is taught in the Bible.** Proverbs 6:23 says, *“For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life.”* When our principles make our decisions for us, there is less chance of making mistakes. The following is an example of how we develop a principle from life. If I counsel a certain problem 100 times, and the answer to that problem is “no” 99 times out of the 100, I always counsel “no” as the answer to that problem 100 times out of 100. The advice that helped 99 people will help number 100 as well. Ninety-nine times out of 100, I have given the best advice that I could Scripturally give.

Some might say, “I want perfection—100 out of 100.” I am sorry, but that scenario will never be. A counselor who has not learned to counsel by principles will irrevocably hurt a lot of people. How can one possibly choose the “one” out of every 100 where the answer might have been “yes” instead of “no.” A counselor should always give the best advice available, and that best advice is advice from Biblical principles.

I have learned many of the principles found in this book from Dr. Jack Hyles, Dr. Lee Roberson, and others who have successfully counseled tens of thousands of people. They have successfully counseled some of the same situations several hundreds of times. If a counselor can find someone who has had enough experience to help him establish these principles, he can save himself and the ones with whom he is counseling much heartache. A person seeking counsel deserves tried-and-true advice and instructions as opposed to a counselor’s trying to make the decisions on his own. The approach to counseling by life’s learned principles is this: Those things that are almost always right are not ever wrong. The counsel given may not always be 100 percent best for one individual, but the counsel is always in the realm of good and right. That Biblical principle will always help the

person seeking counsel.

**4. If I can find no Bible principle nor example, I ask God to control my mind.** *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”* (Philippians 2:5) Just because I do not have an answer does not mean there is no answer. I must have hope and bathe it in prayer as well.

**5. When a counselor does give advice, he must be honest about his degree of certainty.** *“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”* (Romans 12:17) If a counselor is certain about his advice, he still may need to say, “I feel good about this advice.” If he is *not* certain, he may need to say, “I need time to pray about this,” or “I need to get a second opinion.”

A good counselor wouldn't think of saying to someone, “I know for a fact...” when he does not know for a fact. A wise counselor wouldn't think of saying, “I'm positive this is right,” when he isn't positive his advice is right. We call this lying. The only way a counselor can be 100 percent sure his advice is correct is when it is found in the Bible. Bible truth is always right. How foolish it is for a counselor to say, “I know for a fact she is the one for you to marry.” **You do?** Where is that written in the Bible?

“Well, I know for a fact that you are supposed to start a church in that town in West Virginia.” May I ask, “How do you know that for a fact?” Please, show me a chapter and a verse where that directive is found. A counselor needs to be honest. He needs to tell the truth. People won't trust counselors who claim to know more than humanly possible. I call the statement, “I know for a fact because God told me,” the “Baptist word of knowledge.”

What God tells a counselor for sure will definitely be found somewhere between the book of Genesis and the book of Revelation. Any other of his so-called facts just might be a revelation from the pepperoni off of his pizza!

## XXII

# COUNSELING ON How to Rebuild a Life

**T**his chapter will teach how to rebuild the life of the one who may have lived wickedly for many years before he received Christ as Saviour later in life. *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.”* (Isaiah 61:1, 2) These verses speak of the opening of a prison where captives are bound. A person who is seeking to rebuild his life has been like a captive in prison; he has been captive to sin. People who have been living in sin and are hurt by sin need to be salvaged. The following will help a counselor rebuild another’s life.

1. **A counselor should have a regular weekly appointment with the person seeking to rebuild his life.** Anytime a person is going through a rebuilding process, he needs someone who has personal consistency to help him. The weekly appointment will help with building consistency. A person who has been in sin is spiritually fragile. The rebuilding process in his life will be frustrating, and frequently he will need spiritual encouragement and direction. I liken the counselor to a nurse or doctor caring for a patient

in the intensive care unit of the hospital.

Concerning having regular weekly appointments, the wise counselor will heed the following rules:

**A. It is unwise for a male counselor to meet regularly with a woman.** On the average, a woman does not have a regularly scheduled appointment with her own husband. A woman thrives on security, and security comes from consistency. When a woman who doesn't have a regular weekly time with her husband suddenly begins seeing a counselor for a regular weekly appointment, often problems arise. On a regularly scheduled basis, the counselor who is a leader and has the appointment on schedule and treats her like a lady represents a very attractive security. What should a male counselor do? He should not schedule appointments with a woman at the same time every week or on the same day.

**B. It is unwise for the counselor to allow another to control his schedule.** The scenario is dangerous, especially if the counselor finds himself at all attracted to that woman desiring counsel. If this is the case, he must not even think of counseling her.

One might say, "I don't think a man of God should be worrying about a situation like this." Neither do I; but we must face the fact that we live in a wicked time. If a woman to whom a counselor is wrongfully attracted never comes to his office for counsel, he will never have to say "no" to temptation. Let me reiterate: Women are attracted to security and power. Some women seeking counsel are only attracted to the power and security represented by the office of the pastor or counselor. I do feel a warning is apropos, and the wise counselor will heed a warning. Counselors must not place themselves in situations where they are apt to fall.

**2. The wise counselor will identify himself with the person who is seeking to rebuild his life.** If, from his life, he can think of a situation similar to his, he will have a common point of interest and can build a relationship from that point. However, I always recommend a counselor never tell anyone in confidence what he doesn't want the world to know. Identifying with the person seeking counsel will help that person to feel more at ease with the counselor and therefore give him more influence in the situation.

**3. The wise counselor will remind the person seeking to rebuild his life of Bible characters whose lives were salvaged from sin.**

He should teach the following: (1) what sin the Bible person committed; (2) the fact that these Bible people were once again used by God; and (3) illustrations of how each one overcame his sinful condition in order to be used again.

By using Biblical illustrations, a counselor is trying to encourage the one seeking counsel and helping him to see that even people in the Bible who had sinned were still capable of being used. God gave us these examples to help Christians live a victorious Christian life.

**A. David.** When confronted with his sins of adultery and murder, David got right with God. Though he paid a price and though it seems he wasn't used as greatly after his fall, he was used again. *"And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die."* (II Samuel 11:2, 15)

**B. Moses.** In a fit of anger, Moses killed a man. After fleeing and spending 40 years in the wilderness, Moses got right with God and was used to lead millions of people to the Promised Land. *"And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand."* (Exodus 2:12)

**C. Abraham.** In James 2:23, the Bible says "...Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God." Abraham, who left his home and kin to seek a city—the man who was called the friend of God—did not have enough faith to believe that God would give him a promised child. Though both Abraham and Sarah doubted, backslid, and left the will of God, God brought Abraham back into a position of usefulness. *"And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."* (Genesis 17:19) *"Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay; but thou didst laugh."* (Genesis 18:15)

**D. Jonah.** Even a preacher who is running from God can still be used. Jonah ran from the responsibility of preaching. *"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof,*

*and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.*" (Jonah 1:3) However, God put Jonah in a "taxi" called the belly of a whale, and took him to the bottom of the sea to show him what was there—his sins. *"He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."* (Micah 7:19) Jonah took that "taxi" back to dry land, and a three-day journey to Nineveh became a one-day journey for the preacher wanting to be back in God's perfect will for his life. Jonah preached a great revival and proved he was still useable for God's glory. *"And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"* (Jonah 4:11)

**E. Peter.** Though one of the twelve Apostles, Peter denied Christ, denied he was a part of Christ's team, cursed, and lied. Still, God again used him to preach at Pentecost. *"But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end."* (Matthew 26:58) *"But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words."* (Acts 2:14)

**F. John Mark.** Though John Mark was chosen to travel with Paul on a missionary journey, he turned back. However, God still used him to write the Gospel of Mark. *"Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem."* (Acts 13:13)

**G. The maniac of Gadera.** The Bible does not give the reason why the man was a maniac; however, he was a vile man. After Jesus came, he put on clothing and returned home to witness to his family. *"And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee. And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs."* (Luke 8:26, 27) If people like the maniac of Gadera can be used, likewise can the person who is seeking counsel to rebuild his life. *"Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid."* (Luke 8:35)

**H. Others like Job, Jacob, the woman at the well, Thomas, Paul,**

**Samson, and Adam.** Hearing the names of these great people in the Bible who at one time had fallen, yet had been restored and remained useable to God, is an encouragement to a person seeking to rebuild his life.

**4. The wise counselor will assure the person who is seeking to rebuild his life that God forgives.** *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”* (Isaiah 55:7) This verse is the answer to the person who says, “I have sinned too much for God to ever use me again.” The counselor can say, “But God abundantly pardons!” This verse is a wonderful promise for the person who wants to rebuild his life into a life of service for God.

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* (I John 1:9) We need to convince the person seeking help that our God is faithful, just, and forgiving. There is no sin a saved person can commit that will stop the love of God. As long as he is alive, he will have the opportunity to get right with God, Who will always forgive.

**5. The wise counselor will assure the saved one that he is still saved.** *“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”* (I John 2:1) We are not supposed to sin, but we do. Someone stands between us and God. Our salvation is secure because of our Advocate, Jesus Christ!

*“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.”* (Romans 4:5) We are not saved by our works; we are saved by our faith. Once we are saved, we are always saved.

*“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”* (John 6:37) In other words, if we have sinned, God will always forgive.

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”* (John 10:27–30) When we get saved, we are placed in the hand of Jesus, and Jesus is in the hand of God. A person cannot pluck himself out of the hand of God!

*“Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.”* (I Corinthians 2:12–15) As a result of a sinful, backslidden condition, a person may have lost a lot of rewards or opportunities. However, he is still saved! God does not take away a person’s salvation because he is backslidden. We need to keep in mind that the further away from God we get, the further away from feeling secure we get.

A counselor needs to take the person seeking counsel through the plan of salvation and ask, “Was there a time and a place when you trusted Christ as your Saviour?” If he says, “Yes,” tell him, “According to the Bible, you are saved.” The one seeking counsel may say, “Yes, but I have lived such a rotten life.” The Devil would love to confuse a Christian about his salvation. Since the Devil cannot take a saved person to Hell, he would love to keep him discouraged about his Christian service. In no way does the Devil want a saved person to live a secure, victorious Christian life.

No one works to get saved, and no one works to stay saved. The absence of positive service to God in the Christian life does not mean the person has lost his salvation. A Christian may lose his joy as David did and wrote in Psalm 51:12a, “*Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.*” A Christian may lose his joy, his security, or his friends, but he can never lose his salvation.

A counselor should always remember, if the person seeking counsel is not saved, he needs to help him get saved before he leaves his office.

**6. A counselor needs to assure the person seeking to rebuild his life of the forgiveness of most Christian people and church members.** He might as well be truthful and tell the one seeking counsel that not *all* Christians are going to behave the way God would want His children to behave toward a fallen person. Some will be slow to forgive, and some won’t ever forgive. Those who are unforgiving are not Christ-like. I am happy to say that most Christians will forgive.

**7. A counselor needs to warn the one seeking to rebuild his life that some will criticize.** I have discovered that there are three general reasons why people criticize:

**A. Some people criticize because they enjoy criticizing.** Proverbs 1:22 says, “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?” This verse clearly says some folks delight in criticizing another.

**B. Secondly, some people criticize because of their pride.** Proverbs 21:24 says, “Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.” One of the elements of a critic’s character is being full of pride. I tell the person with whom I am counseling, “You must understand there will be some who will criticize you. What that critic does not realize is that he could have been the one who fell instead of you.” A person usually criticizes another because he feels superior to him. I find a critic first compliments his “victim” just before he stabs him in the back. The kind of statement the proud critic may say is, “Oh, I know that he is probably a much better Christian than I am, but let me tell you what I happen to know.” The critic often uses a compliment as a springboard into his verbal attack.

**C. Lastly, people criticize because they have little self-control and big tempers.** The key part of Proverbs 21:24 is the last part of the verse, which says, “*who dealeth in proud wrath.*” This verse gives a description of an angry person which says he is proud of his anger. Show me someone who has a temper problem, and I will show you someone who has a mouth-control problem. How many times has one lost his temper and said something that never should have been said to his boss, his wife, or a friend?

I believe the person who hates sin the most is the one who has the most potential to love people. The one who loves people the most is going to preach most against sin. I want to protect the person whose life I am trying to help rebuild. If someone criticizes us and attacks us, we should not hate him; we simply need to realize it is sinful for a person to be critical.

**8. A counselor needs to warn him about some things he may have forfeited.** Some say, “Anyone who gets right with God can do anything for God.” I disagree with that statement. In no way do I believe a former child molester should teach a child’s Sunday school class. It might not be wise to place a person convicted of embezzling in charge of the church finances. When a person speeds, resulting in a car wreck, and has his license revoked, it is obvious the government has enough sense to know that person forfeited his right to operate a motor vehicle. We need to understand and utilize the same principle in our churches. Some people may

get the idea when they are going through a rebuilding process, “If I come back to God, I am going to have all the opportunities I used to have.” Probably not! If he does, it is going to take a long time for him to ever get them back, and, in many cases, he may never have it all back. God can and will use anyone, but He won’t use just anyone for everything.

**9. A counselor needs to warn the person whose life he is seeking to rebuild that the confidence of Christians must be re-earned.** The public will expect a fallen person to re-earn public confidence. He must regain their respect and earn the right to any position that he would like to have. If a counselor warns the person seeking counsel in advance, it will not shock him when he learns that people don’t trust him immediately.

**10. A counselor needs to warn him that he may sin again.** “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for our’s only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:1, 2) Someone who has been practicing a pet sin for a long period of time may have a difficult time suddenly giving it up immediately. For instance, sins like alcohol addiction and drug addiction are sins that control. If a person has never been addicted to drugs or alcohol, it is difficult to understand the mental dependency and physical attachment of the addict to his drugs. An addict struggles severely from withdrawal pains. It is certainly possible that someone may fall within a week of forsaking his addiction. By no means do I approve of that fall; I am merely preparing the person that he may have quite a struggle. If he is not an overnight success, the counselor must not give up; he must keep on trying. He must assure the struggling one that no little setback will keep the counselor from helping him rebuild his life.

**11. The counselor may want someone to daily pray and read the Bible with the one who is seeking to rebuild his life.** I won a man to Christ who was a heroin addict. After he got saved, he was still having a difficult time with his addiction. He would come to my office weeping, “Brother Owens, I did it again. I know I shouldn’t, and I am so convicted, but I did it again.” When I was helping him, I went by his house every day for two weeks, and I read the Bible with him for a few minutes and prayed that he would have victory. In a sense, he was making himself accountable to me. Since he knew I was going to visit, he would refrain from taking the drugs. After these two weeks, I sent some good Christian men who knew of his problem to see him. We were putting him through a “spiritual detox”

program by making him accountable for his actions. Today, that man is an assistant pastor. It works!

**12. The counselor may need to daily call the person seeking to rebuild his life.** I once counseled a young lady who had gone through a terrible, tragic divorce. She thought she was having a nervous breakdown as a result. I called her every day for two weeks. I would just say, "I called to see how you are doing." If I was out of town, at the airport, at the college, or at the church, I would still call. After those two weeks, she wrote a letter saying that she could make it.

**13. A counselor needs to help the person seeking to rebuild his life to find one good spiritual friend of the same gender.** The fallen person may need more help than the counselor can offer; he may need an additional spiritually-minded friend. It is unwise to find someone to help who is still getting over the same type of sin. The last thing a counselor needs is for two people who are being rehabilitated from a life of drug use to help each other. A counselor wants spiritually-minded people to help the ones who are weak.

**14. A counselor needs to get the person seeking to rebuild his life to church activities.** I did not say to invite them; I said to get them there. No doubt getting them to church functions will take effort and organization. If the person doesn't feel welcome, he may more than likely make up excuses. The counselor needs to offer to personally transport them to activities. He needs to let them be seen with him and to let them know he is willing to associate with them. Being a friend is not a matter of our agreeing with their sins, it is a matter that we love them and are trying to rehabilitate and help them. They need to be involved in everything the church has to offer because the church, Jesus, and the Bible is the only answer to rebuilding a life. A counselor must bring them in because they don't have the character to come on their own.

**15. A counselor needs to let the person who is seeking to rebuild his life know that he does not expect total immediate victory, but he does expect to see growth.** "*Be ye therefore perfect...*" Matthew 5:48 can be translated as "be ye *becoming* perfect." No one will achieve perfection, but everyone should have the attitude that he wants to be perfect. A counselor should explain, too, that all Christians should strive for perfection. Surely no one ever achieves perfection, but everyone surely should be achieving growth. Therefore, the person seeking to rebuild his life needs to experience growth, and the person counseling him needs to help him.

16. **A counselor needs to get good books into the hands of the one seeking to rebuild his life.** Of course, the counselor may need to buy the books or he may need to lend them. If the person the counselor is trying to help is backslidden, has been living in sin, and is away from the church, he will not know what books to read. Of course, the counselor wants him to read his Bible, but I am talking about other reading material that will be an asset to him and help him in his growth.

17. **A counselor needs to get good preaching tapes into the hands of the person seeking to rebuild his life.** Preaching tapes will help to rebuild lives. Every preacher should be preaching messages on how to rebuild. For instance, I have two messages entitled "Let Your Burden Become Your Bridge" and "Biblical Habit Breaking." Often I give one of these tapes to a person who is trying to overcome a particular problem. Brother Hyles preaches a message called, "You Can Fail and Not Be a Failure," which is great for someone who is rebuilding his life.

18. **A counselor must warn him not to go too fast.** At times, someone who wants to get right with God can get overly confident. He may want to stand before the church and tell of all the great things that he is about to do. Usually, he dreams far beyond what he is capable of doing, which often brings failure. He then becomes depressed about that failure and falls backward. A counselor needs to help pace the one who is seeking to rebuild his life. The one thing he needs to do is to stay faithful in attending church on Sunday morning, Sunday evening, and Wednesday night. He needs to remain faithful to his place of employment. A counselor should not let him get right with God on Sunday and run off to Bible college on Monday. It is rare that this kind of behavior will bring success.

19. **A counselor needs to get him to church.** Titus 1:3 says, "*But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.*" A counselor needs to go by and get the person who is seeking to rebuild his life. Some people who have been backslidden are afraid to return to church. Others who have been away from God will make up excuses not to go. The key word is "get." The counselor who cares will not "invite" or "promote"; he will **get** the person to church.

20. **A counselor needs to remind him to set a time each day to read the Bible.** Romans 10:17 says, "*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" The main reason why I suggest to someone to read the Bible at the same time each day is because scheduling brings

security. A person who lives by schedule will be more consistent because his schedule demands consistency. I remind the person seeking to rebuild his life that he may not understand everything he reads, but he has still read the Bible, whether or not he understands what he read. The spiritually sick do not understand the “antibiotic” of the Bible; when its Words are in our system, they fight the disease, and the sin is eliminated.

I teach a lesson entitled “You Don’t Have to Understand the Lamp to Get Light Out of It.” Psalm 119:105 says, “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*” By faith, we all flip a light switch expecting light. We don’t have to understand that light switch or the lightbulb. We need to flip on that light by faith to get light. Whether or not we realize it, through reading the Word of God, God is able to shed light in some area of our life. The Word of God is more powerful than our ability to understand what we are getting. “*For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.*” (Psalm 119:89) Because the Word of God is perfect, pure, and infallible, it will do a work in the life of the person seeking to rebuild.

**21. A counselor needs to remind him of the Holy Spirit and His availability.** “*But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*” (Romans 8:9) “*Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.*” (I Corinthians 6:18–20) “*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?*” (I Corinthians 3:16) The fallen one needs to be reminded that the Spirit still dwells within him, and he should yield to the prompting of the Spirit. When he is tempted, the Spirit of God will say, “Don’t.” He should also listen when the Holy Spirit says, “Do.”

**22. A counselor needs to tell him how important it is to be close to the man of God.** We can liken this point to an injured person getting to the doctor. I say to my “patient,” “Please let me help you. If church people are not quick to forgive or to trust you, I will.” If a counselor is on the pastoral staff, he should promote the pastor’s wisdom. He needs to point the people who need their lives rebuilt to the pastor. The pastor may want a pastoral staff counselor to deal with some of those who want to rebuild their lives, and he may want his staff to work with them. Certainly, that is a fine opportunity; however, if the pastoral staff ever do get in “over their heads,”

they must send the person seeking counsel to the pastor. They shouldn't be afraid to say, "I don't know what to do."

**23. A counselor should not talk above the person seeking to rebuild his life.** For most of us, this particular point won't be a threat! To the best of his ability, a counselor needs to use vocabulary that is on the level of the person seeking help. I am not talking about being crude. A counselor needs to make sure those seeking counsel understand what he is saying.

**24. A counselor doesn't need to act better than the person seeking to rebuild his life.** No counselor needs to appear pious, nor does he need to prove how wonderful he is. What the one rebuilding his life does need to know is that the counselor sincerely cares about him and loves him. The counselor must always keep in mind that if it were not for the grace of God, he could be the one receiving the counseling to help rebuild his life.

By effectively utilizing these points, counselors can help set the captives free from their bonds of sin. As counselors, we can help them become useful, active Christians in full-time Christian service.