

BETHEL CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY



CC401 - INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

INTRODUCTION

Counselling is defined as: a systematic method or a process of helping people through wise and sound advice. Thus, the counsellor is called people's helper or an adviser. The importance of counselling in the church cannot be overemphasized. People come to the church today with various problems that demand more than just ordinary prayers. Counselling people with their problems is everybody's business. Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Social workers, and other professionals have special expertise in this area, but in one way or another all of us are involved in it. Perhaps almost every day.

For example: Guiding our children through a crisis, counseling a bereaved neighbor, helping one's mate to cope with a difficult work situation and guiding a young Christian through a period of doubts. All of these are counseling situations, whether we realize it or not.

In order that the Church might cope with the verse situation as the only body set aside by Christ to remedy the world of crisis, the Pastors as trained counselors, should not be left to handle this situation alone in the Church. There have to be trained laymen to help cope with this problem i.e., counseling. Christ was the greatest counselor the world ever produced.

COUNSELLING AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

Shortly before leaving this earth and going back to heaven, our Lord Jesus gave His famous mandate to the little band of followers who had gathered with Him on the mountain in Galilee. "Go and make disciples of all nations" He said, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" – Matt. 28:18-20. Christ assured the disciples of His power and of His presence "to the end of the age."

Counselling entails discipleship. And good qualities of a disciple are obedience to his master's order, love and fruitfulness. This is what counseling demands. See Jn. 8:31. 13:35.

THE GOALS OF COUNSELLING

The goals of counseling are:

- (a) To help people function more effectively in their daily lives.
- (b) To find freedom from spiritual, psychological, and interpersonal conflicts.
- (c) To be at peace with themselves and to enjoy a growing communion with God.
- (d) To develop and maintain smooth interpersonal relations with others.
- (e) To realize their fullest potential in Christ and to be actively involved in becoming disciples of and disciplers for Jesus Christ.

THE QUALIFICATION OF A CHRISTIAN COUNSELLOR

Christian counselors are different from other ordinary professional counselors, thus, for him to function properly in this great task of peoples helping, that is to say, helping people out of their crisis and guiding them to Christ he or she must have the following qualifications:

- (a) He must be born again. Jn 1:12, 13, 13:3-16; Rom. 10:9-10. Because counseling work demands helping out their troubles and directing them to Christ, the counselor must be a regenerated man or woman of God. The unregenerate counselor is like blind leader of the blind. Matt. 15:14 and like wells without water –II Pet. 2:17.
- (b) He must love the Lord Jesus: I Cor. 9:16-22; II Cor. 5:14-15. The love for Christ is the believer's sustaining strength – Rom. 8:35-39. Christ is our living example. He loved us; He gave His life for us. He accomplished His task of love on the cross and triumphantly exclaimed, "IT IS FINISHED" (Jn. 19:30). This should be the aim of counsellor's love, to accomplish this task for Christ.
- (c) He must love souls: It is one thing trying to help people and another to love those to whom you want to help. Other professionals – lawyers, Doctors, Nurses etc., can work without absolute love for people concerned e.g., Client, Patients. But the counselor can never be a worker for Christ without deep passion for those he helped. See Matt. 20:34; 14:14; 15:32; Mk.1:41; 5:19.
- (d) He must be committed to Christ: The ability to help others depends on the closeness of Christ to the Christian Counsellor, hence this quality. He must be rich with the knowledge of the person of Christ. Rom.12:11; 2 Cor. 6:10.
- (e) He must be sensitive to the Spirit leadership. Rom. 8:14. Not only must the counselor be filled with the Holy Spirit, but he must be sensitive to the Spirit, which is the Holy Spirit leadership. Christian counseling demands the total leadership of

the Holy Spirit if he must succeed. It is possible to answer no to the above quality or point, successful secular therapists demonstrate this every day. But counseling which leaves out the Spiritual dimension is ultimately futile.

It may build treasure on earth for the helper, but it does nothing to prepare help for eternity or the abundant life which comes only with commitment to Christ. See Jn. 10:10

THREE APPROACHES TO COUNSELING

In addition, the Christian counselor must take a different view of the whole helping process. Consider, for example, three broad counseling approaches frequently used today, only one of these is truly Biblical.

- (a) **Humanistic-Secular Approach**: This approach to counseling provides no place for God. In this approach, the counselee moves towards goals which improve his personal well-being, and the counselor intervenes for a while to help with the achievement of these goals.
- (b) **God as Helper Approach**: In contrast, this counseling is labeled the "God as helper" approach. Here the goal is still the same, but God is seen as a helper and perhaps even a co-therapist who, in response to prayer helps the counselor and counselee in their work.
- (c) **Theocentric Approach**: This approach is different from others. This assumes that an eternal God exists who has ultimate purpose for mankind. In counseling, God comes into a relationship and uses the counselor as His instrument to bring changes in the counselee's life. These changes hopefully restore harmony between the counselee and his God, improve his personal relationship with others, reduce his inner conflicts and instill the peace that passes understanding.

The disciple who is also a helper strives for this theocentric approach. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, he is willing to develop the characteristics, pay the costs and bear the responsibilities of discipleship. In turn, he becomes God's instrument for bringing changes in the lives of those with whom he counsels.

Note: It is unrealistic to expect that we will ever arrive at one Biblical approach to counseling, any more than we have discovered one Biblical approach to missions, evangelism or preaching. To a large extent, counseling techniques depend on the personality of the counselor and the nature of the counselee's problems, but we should seek to uncover the various techniques and several counseling approaches which arise out of or are clearly consistent with the teaching of the Scripture.

The place to begin building a Christian approach to counseling is with the Bible and the great Commission given by Jesus Himself. This is the blueprint for building the Church and it forms a basis on which to build lives and interpersonal relationships by helping people through counselling.

I. IMPORTANCE OF COUNSELING

In the church abounds a great number of people who hide their troubles behind a self-respected wall. Pulpit preaching alone has not succeeded in meeting men's specific needs. And as long as these needs are there, people's struggles are not frequently met and addressed, especially individually, they are bound to be:

- (a) decline in spiritual appetite.
- (b) drastic drop in prayer life
- (c) drop in fellowship.
- (d) legalistic lifestyle
- (e) apathy in witnessing
- (f) disinterest in Spiritual things.

More often these are outcomes of 'spiritual accidents' encountered along the Christian journey and the 'causality rate' is high because of want of trained counselors in the church and over reliance on the pulpit ministry to meet all needs, hence there is now an urgent need for trained lay counselors to augment the pulpit ministry.

To reduce the 'rate of causalities' in the church, spiritual first aid and therapy' should be applied immediately to members with conflicts and problems in their personal lives.

Counseling is therefore defined as "a systematic method or process of helping people through wise and sound advice."

II. LEVELS OF COUNSELING IN LOCAL CHURCHES

There are three levels of counseling in a local church. The first is Counselling by Encouragement; the second is Counselling by Exhortation and the third, is Counselling by Enlightenment.

Counseling by Encouragement:

This depends upon the awareness of painful emotion in a member of the church and the concern and sincere efforts to understand those emotions and hurts based on attitude of compassion and desire that the afflicted will find normal peace in the Body of Christ. This level of counseling could be practiced by all members of the church, it is just that their sincerity, concern, and compassion must be transparent otherwise the helpee may not open up classifying the helper as another busybody. (Not even using the scripture).

Counselling by Exhortation:

This involves essentially knowing the spiritual strategies for handling such a given situation. Once a problem is diagnosed, the precedence of how similar conflicts were resolved is applied.

This invariably means that the counselor should be versed in biblical principles in conflict matters affecting man. E.g., By citing the Scriptures – Phil. 2:12-13, Isaiah 40:31.

Counseling by Enlightenment:

This requires trained and matured Christians to take up. Level one counsellor identifies and sympathize with person's problems whereas, level two assesses what behavioral patterns which violates the biblical principles. (E.g., by carefully explaining situations)

BASIC PRINCIPLES TO COUNSELING

TEXT: - COL. 3:17

INTROUDUCTION

Like every other trade, counseling has its basic principles, whether in the professional realm or layman angle. The discipleship approach to counseling is expressed in terms of six general principles, which I will refer to as "people helping principles".

These six principles to counseling are properly examined below:

1. **Counseling Principle One:**

In any helping relationship, the personality, values, attitudes, and beliefs of the helper/counselor are of primary importance. In writing to the Church in Galatia, Paul instructed the brethren to "restore (bring to a wholesomeness) any individual who was having personal difficulties – Gal. 6:1. This principle states that the life of the counselor plays a very significant role in helping people. Apparently, some of the Galatians were lapsing into sin and were having problems because of this. These men and women of concern to the Apostle but notice who was to help them: "You who are spiritual".

This first principle of counseling clearly revealed the following personality traits of the counsellor:

- (a) See scripture as stated above-gentleness.
- (b) Compassion - having sympathetic feelings for others.
- (c) Alertness – to the temptations that comes when one is involved in an intimated counseling relationship.
- (d) Humbleness – this demands self-recognition that the source of his strength is from God and not acting in a superior, holier-than-thou manner.
- (e) Self-examination – This involves realistic self-appraisal and avoiding comparisons with others.
- (f) Patience – The Christian counselor if aware of God and of spiritual influences in human behaviors and is patient even when the helping task is long and arduous. He recognizes a responsibility to do good to all people by "especially to those who are of the household of faith". See Gal. 6:1-10.

The success of counseling is grouped into three words: **Empathy**, **Warmth** and **Genuineness**.

- i. **Empathy**: - comes from the German word 'Einfühlung' which means to feel into or to feel with'. Example of the car and the passenger is not out of place here. Where the passenger sitting very close to the drivers will almost be involved in driving with the driver when there is the need to slow down. So is the counselor. He should be able to ask, "How does he view the situation?" "If I were him, how would I feel?"
- ii. **Warmth**: is somewhat synonymous with caring. It is friendliness and consideration shown by facial expression, tone of voice, gesture, posture, eye-contact and more like none verbal behavior as looking after the helpee's comfort. Warmth says, "I care about you and your well-being". That is, action speaks louder than words.
- iii. **Genuineness**: means that the counsellor's words are consistent with his actions. He or she tries to be honest with the helpee/counselee, avoiding all statements that could be termed insincere. Jesus did it, but with care - see Jn. 11:21-38.

Note: Christ showed empathy, warmth and genuineness, and the successful Christian counselors must do the same. It is possible, however, that each of these can be overdone. We can show much empathy that we lose our objectivity, so much warmth that the counselee feels smothered, and so much genuineness that the counselor loses sight of the counselee's needs.

2. **Counseling Principle Two:**

The counselee's attitudes, motivation and desire for help are also important in counseling. This states that counseling is a process of assisting another person to change and grow, but such growth is easiest when the counselor and counselee have had the frustrating experience in trying to work with someone who is stubborn, uncooperative, or not interested in changing his behavior.

Because the counselee is the best-informed individual in the world when it comes to his situation, he or she has to assist the helper obtain the set objectives. These principles demand that the counselee should cooperate and open if he must be helped out even if the process is painful. See Mk. 5:34; Matt. 9:29; Mk.9:23-27. Christ could do nothing in His hometown – Matt. 13:58. Why? Because of their lack of cooperation.

3. **Counselling Principle Three:**

The helping relationship between counselor and counselee is of great significance as every counseling student soon learns, good rapport is essential for successful counseling, so essential that one writer even described counseling as primarily a "helping relationship, between two or more people" as stated earlier on.

However, helping relationships differ both in their nature and depth. When two people come together they do not have their personalities, values, attitudes,

insecurities, abilities etc., at the door. All of these enter into the relationship. See example of Christ – how He related to people:

- i. With Nicodemus – it was intellectual.
- ii. Pharisees – it was confrontational.
- iii. Mary and Martha – relaxed
- iv. Children – warmth and loving.

A good counselor should not approach every counselee in the same manner.

There are various degrees of closeness between counselor and counselee. This is stated in the way Christ relates to His disciples. To John, and James it was closed and tender, to other disciples, it was extended relationship. That is what is demanded of counselors.

4. **Counseling Principle Four:**

Counseling must be focused on the helpee's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors – all three. In many of the secular and Christian approaches to counseling there is an emphasis on either emotion, thinking or behavior, but rarely on all three together.

When we look into the scriptures, we see that feeling and behavior are all of great perhaps equal, importance. Consider first the emotional aspects. Jesus Himself wept on at least two occasions and sometimes gets angry. He did not deny feelings, nor did He condemn people for experiencing and expressing their emotions.

There were times, however, when He put more emphasis on rational thinking e.g. Thomas – Jn. 20:27. John the Baptist doubted during his last days in prison – Matt. 11:2-6. Jesus provides the rational facts which were needed. Nicodemus, the woman caught in adultery etc.

The emphasis on emotions, thinking and behavior is seen in the book of Acts and through the New Testament Epistles. See Phil. 4:4-8; 4:9-13. Feelings, thinking and acting, all three are important in the scriptures and each must be considered in counseling.

When we have problems, for example, our thinking and actions are affected. This principle takes care of these three aspects of human behaviors.

5. **Counseling Principle Five:**

States, helping involves a variety of counsellor's skills. This word "Skill" might be viewed from two perspectives. On the one hand, there are the counseling techniques, things like listening attentively, watching carefully or questioning

wisely as the helpee or counselee describes his problems. This principle deals with counseling techniques as stated below:

Listening:

This involves giving our undivided attention to the counselee and showing this attention through your eye contact, a relaxed posture, the use of encouraging statement e.g., “that makes good sense”, “I see what you mean”, “tell me more”, etc. Christ is a good listener.

Some Guidelines for Listening:

- Prepare to listen intellectually. Physically, since listening is a hard work, take enough rest before you face it. Mentally realize that if you really want to listen to another person, this will increase your effectiveness etc.
- Judge content as well as delivery. We look at the speaker and often concentrate on what we see rather than on what we hear.
- Control your emotions.
- Resist distraction.
- Pay good attention – be interested.
- Ask questions sparingly.
- Try not to interrupt.
- Use the speaker’s word to get your own point across.
- Go slow in giving advice.
- Do not argue with your helpee.
- Do not be too curious. The counselor only helps by issuing statements that will help your helpee open up.

This is supporting which implies that you ask “is that so” etc., this makes for easy counseling process.

Five Steps to Progressive Counseling as Illustrated in the Bible:

- (a) Building a relationship between counselor and counselee (Jn. 6:63; 16:6-13; I Jn. 4:6).
- (b) Exploring the problems, tries to clarify issues and determine what has been done in the past to tackle the problem. (Rom. 8:26).
- (c) Deciding on a course of action. There may be several possible alternatives which could be tried one at a time. (Jn. 14:26; I Cor. 2:13).
- (d) Stimulating action which helper and helpee evaluate together. When something does not work, try again. (Jn. 16:13; Acts 10:19, 20; 16:6).
- (e) Terminate the counseling relationship and encourage the counselee to apply what he has learned as he launches out on his own. (Rom. 8:24).

Much of this beautifully illustrated by Jesus on the road to Emmaus. When He met the two men, He used a variety of techniques to help them through their crisis and period of discouragement. Notice that this counseling situation did not take place in the office.

There were no fifty (50) minutes, hours or Ph. D diploma on the wall or high fees Jesus' counseling took place on a dusty road as the three of them walked along. See Lk. 24

In each of the approaches described above including that of Christ on the road of Emmaus, there was enough time for listening and report-building. Beginning counselors are often too anxious to come up with answers or to push the counselee to action. There is a need to give a long period of understanding and exploration before we start jumping to a solution.

6. **Counseling Principle Six:**

The ultimate goal of helping is to make disciples and disciplers of our "counselee". This statement could be greatly misunderstood.

It seems to imply that counseling is concerned only with spiritual matters or that the most important goal is to "get people saved" rather than to help them with their problems.

To clarify this sixth principle, let us think for a moment of Christian physician. Like every other believer, he too has responsibility to be making disciples, but in the emergency room he does not pull out his Bible and start preaching. He starts with people, where they are hurting. He demonstrates the love of Christ through his actions and concerns realizing that the alleviation of suffering is honoring Christ and is often a step towards evangelism (Pro. 14:31; Matt. 10:42). The Physician does not avoid talking about spiritual matters, but this is not a major part of his treatment. This principle demands that in helping people that are not Christians, we should not frighten them first with the Gospel, rather, to help them first and then introduce them to Christ for a permanent solution and a victorious life in Christ.

These are the basic Principles of counseling. They concern themselves with the importance of the counselor and counselee, the attitude of the counselee, the helping skills and the goals of discipleship.

ACCEPTING THE COUNSELEE

One hurdle which every counselor faces is his own attitude toward the person he is counseling. Counsellors are often prone to judge others rather than patiently gain an understanding of the forces working in their lives. Until a counselor eliminates condemnatory attitudes, he cannot possibly offer his best. Blaming a person is no solution.

What are some of the attitudes that one must erase before he can counsel effectively? There are many, but here are the typical ones, careful examination will help a counselor evaluate his own attitudes.

He Should Have Known Better:

Undoubtedly all of us have, at some time, allowed this attitude to throw up a barrier between us and the counselee. But this point view also suggests, I did know better. I am much wiser than he'. Naturally, this attitude of superiority does not aid us in establishing rapport with a person.

If he had stayed away from the wrong crowd, he would not be in trouble.

Here, we show our resentment, not only of the counselee, but of his friends. Yet there evidently is something in his associations that meets his basic needs. A person is usually drawn into certain friendships because they seem to offer him something that he lacks. The fact that a person associates with the wrong people should be a clue to the counselor.

A little plain, common sense would have prevented this trouble.

Common sense is important. But most people do not function or make decisions on the basis of what they know. They act on how they feel. Certain experiences may have wiped their outlook. Part of the counsellor's responsibility is to help them gain different attitudes. When they feel different, they will act differently.

The right kind of discipline would have straightened him out.

Discipline plays an important rôle. But self-discipline is even more desirable. It is true that some parents contribute to delinquency. But many have sincerely done the best they have known. It does little good to blame parents. Even if parents are at fault, we cannot undo the past. Our challenge is to work with the problem as we find it.

Concerning punishment, people in trouble usually suffer for their own deeds – many times over. And when they come to a counselor, they respond to acceptance rather than further rejection. They deserve to be understood and helped.

He Is A Trouble Maker:

When we do not understand the causes of behavior or know how to help a person, it is easy to chalk up all trouble to a "mean streak," or a "bad disposition". But this suggests no remedy. We still do not know why he is a troublemaker or what makes him act the way he does. Problems are usually deeper than a person's actions.

He Got What He Deserved:

True, "our sins will find us out" and "the way of the transgressor is hard". But counselors are not to meet out punishment. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord". The counselor's role is to help uncover the causes of behavior, then aid counselee in gaining new direction in life.

He Was Just Weak and Easily Led:

God's words tell us, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" – Jer. 17:9. This applies to the total human race: not just individual. We all have weak natures.

In addition, some people have had unfortunate experiences. If a person has been led into trouble, our concern is to learn why and then help plan a program of rehabilitation. Side-stepping an issue by calling a person “weak” offers no solution, nor does it cast any new light on human nature.

He Is Only Trying to Get Sympathy:

This is often true. The human heart reaches out desperately for friendship and understanding. In fact, one of the basic psychological needs of man is love and affection. But some people have been denied this essential need at every turn in life. As Christian counselors, we can lead a person to Christ who alone fully meets the need of love and affection.

There Is Something Physically or Mentally Wrong with Him:

Since there are many related causes of behavior, this is quite possible. Studies show that many behavior, emotion, and mental problems have their origins in physiological disorders. In a recent study of delinquent boys, for example, more than twenty-five percent were found to have neurological impairments (brain injuries). But such causes do not excuse us from counseling effectively. Our responsibility may lie in referring clients to a specialist.

He’s Just Low Class. That Kind of Person Will Always Be That Way:

Some people do come from families classified as “Lower Class”. In such cases, their experiences and values may differ greatly from ours. But this information should only help us to understand them better. Knowledge of a person’s background should give us more insight and patience.

WHY DOESN’T HE SNAP OUT OF IT?

Undoubtedly if he could. But this is precisely the reason he is talking to you – he can’t. Most people in trouble are trapped; they are emotionally and mentally immobilized. They must be helped out of their situation. And this is the great privilege of counsellors.

He Must Be Lacking in Good Spiritual Training:

Some people have an excellent spiritual training. But like others (even David), they have been “drawn away of their own lust and enticed” – James 1:14. If a person is a Christian, he needs restoration – renewed fellowship with Christ. If he is unsaved, he needs to be born again. We have a spiritual obligation to everyone with whom we counsel.

A Good Lecture Should Straighten Him Out:

Although instruction is always a valuable part of adjustment, people rarely respond favorably to lectures. They already feel condemned. They need a process involving a number of counseling sessions. They must gain new attitudes and new skills. They stand in need of a new nature through Christ. And these are not obtained through lectures.

Why Didn't Someone Help Him Long Ago?

Undoubtedly someone should have. On the other hand, he may not have wanted help earlier. Now he is ready and is seeking help. Perhaps God has brought you into his life to assist him. You may become a great blessing, both to the counselee and those who are close to him. Through this experience, you may also become a stronger, more mature person yourself.

Although a counselor may not condone, it is not his place to condemn. God hates sin, but He loves the sinner. Jesus set an example of acceptance when He did not condemn the woman taken in adultery. Even in a clear-cut case of immorality Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more". Likewise, the counselor may reject the unfavorable conditions that brought about the problem, but he accepts the counselee.

HELPING IN CRISIS

As we go through life, all of us at times encounter crises. The death of a loved one, the birth of a deformed child, the breakdown in a marriage, the failure to be accepted into college, the occurrences of an automobile accident – all this are among those events of life that shake us and can make us feel threatened, anxious confused, and depressed.

DEFINITION

Stated somewhat formally, a crisis is any event or series of circumstances which threatens a person's well-being and interferes with his routine of daily living.

The Major Kind of Crisis: Crisis can be divided into three broad categories.

- Development Crises
- Accidental Crises
- Existential Crises

1. Development Crises:

These are those which occur at predicted times as we journey through life e.g. facing the first day in school, coping with adolescence, adjusting to marriage, adapting to retirement – all these are situations which require extra effort on the part of the individual learns to adjust to a new stage in life.

2. Accidental Crises:

As the name implies, these are much less predictable, and as a result, they often hit with greater force. A sudden loss of status or possessions, the traffic death of a loved one, the unexpected ending of an engagement the sudden loss of a job.

Any of these can put extreme demands on an individual and create confusion as he ponders what to do next.

3. **Existential Crises:**

These often overlap the above, come when we are forced to face such disturbing truths as the realization that; I am a failure, I am too old to reach my life goals, I've been passed over for a promotion, I am now a widow and single again, my life has no purpose, my marriage has ended in divorce.

Apparently, these above dilemmas in one's life take time and effort to assimilate. They are changes in self-perception which can be denied temporarily but which in time must be faced realistically.

Reacting to Crises:

Usually, the person under crisis turns first to his habitual ways of dealing with problems. Very soon however, he discovers that the old coping devices do not work. The initial tension is there, but in addition the person feels a sense of frustration because of his inability to cope. At this point, all inner resources are mobilized. The person tries a number of trial-and-error methods to deal with the problems, and this fails, and the problem continues, he eventually collapses either physically or mentally or both. Very often this results in a nervous breakdown. All resources and stamina to cope with the situation have been exhausted. This leads the person into a world of unreality or persists irrationally in some behavior which may deny the problem but does nothing to solve it.

The Uniqueness of Each Crisis:

Every crisis situation is unique. The circumstances, personalities, and psychological makeup of the people involved in one's past experience (or lack of it) in handling crises, the availability of others who can help with all of these influences what happens in a given situation. The major characteristics in a given unique crisis are:

- (a) The feeling of anxiety (b) Frustration (c) Helplessness
- (d) Loss of self-esteem and decreasing efficiency including irritation and anger which is sometimes directed toward God.
- (e) Dependence on others for a way out

Coping In a Crisis:

In many respects a crisis is more than an increase in tension or an upset in our daily pattern of living. A crisis represents a turning point which has a bearing on one's future adjustment and mental health. If we are able to cope with the crisis, to adapt to our new circumstances, or to find efficient ways of solving them then we have developed a greater skill or self confidence in view of future greater problems or crisis. But if on the other hand we fail this can result in more crises hence the church and its counselors are needed in this connection to help people out of their crisis.

HERE IS A TABLE TO SHOW HOW TO HELP PEOPLE OUT OF THEIR CRISIS

HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY WAYS TO MEET A CRISIS

Unhealthy Ways to Meet Crisis

- i. Deny that a problem exists
- ii. Evade the problem (via alcohol for example,
- iii. Refuse to seek help or to accept it
- iv. Hide the fact that you have feelings of sorrow, anger, guilt etc.
- v. Do not think through the crisis and expect that somebody else is totally responsible for curing it.
- vi. Give no thought to practical ways in which you might deal with the crisis.
- vii. Blame others for causing the crisis and expect that somebody else is totally responsible for curing it.
- viii. Turn away from friends or family
- ix. Refuse to pray about the crisis
- x. Convince yourself that crisis is evidence of God's punishment or disfavor.

Healthy Ways to Meet Crisis

- i. Face the fact that there is a problem.
- ii. Attempt to understand the situation more fully.
- iii. Open channels of communication with friends, relations, pastors, or others who might be of help.
- iv. Face up to your negative feelings of guilt, anxiety or resentment and consider actions and alternative way of viewing the situation so that you can deal with these feelings.
- v. Separate the changeable from the unchangeable in the situation and accept that which cannot be changed.
- vi. Explore practical ways of coping with problems, and take steps (however small) in managing the problem in a practical way.
- vii. Accept responsibility for coping with problems, even problems which seem to have arisen from situations beyond your control.
- viii. Draw closer to friends and family especially those who are helpful.
- ix. Pray about the matter honestly, sharing your concerns with God.
- x. Do not forget the sovereignty of God, who loves mankind and is both aware of our crisis and concerned about us.

Having examined previously the method and ways in coping with a crisis, which is the unhealthy and healthy ways to meet a crisis, we shall look into the crisis intervention in this part of this lesson.

Crisis Intervention:

There can be no standard formula or cookbook approach for helping a person in crisis. There are some things, however, which can be done in almost every case.

Make Contact:

It is difficult to be highly effective in crisis counseling if the helper is half a country (or even half a block) away from the helpee. As Christians, we believe that we can intervene from afar through prayer, and this must not be overlooked, but whenever possible we should also show personal concern by our presence, words of mouth and willingness to listen. The sooner we can be there, the more likely we are to help.

Reduce Anxiety:

Contrary to some popular belief, this is not done by encouraging the helper to think about something else. The possibility of getting the helper of the incident that has happened through other discussion centered on other subjects than describing what happened in order to reduce anxiety cannot work properly. Because they often want to talk about the situation expressing their emotion of sadness, grief, remorse, or anger.

What the helper should do is to demonstrate calmness, concern and acceptance. He can bring the comfort of the scriptures and pray with the helpee. Sometimes anxiety reduction will involve hearing the brunt of the helpee's anger, helping him to see his problems, commending him for steps already taken to face the crisis and helping him to see that all is not hopeless. When several people are involved in a crisis, it helps if you can deal with the most anxious person first and send away the curious onlookers.

Focus on the Issue:

In the midst of crisis, it is easy to see a mass of issues all of which seem to be overwhelming. The helper can do several things at these points. First, he or she can do help the person in crisis to explore the present situation by describing his feelings, thoughts and plans (if he has any) his view of the events that have taken place, and his efforts to solve the problem.

This is a process of sorting out the problems one at a time, finding out what is threatening and seeing what has been done or might be done about the situation.

Note: Remember that people in crisis are often very suggestible, so we must be careful not to push for our own solutions. We must also help people to be realistic and practical; the last thing a person in crisis needs is to add failure to his other problems. Indeed, the fear of further is what immobilizes many people in times of crisis; hence they need help and encouragement in deciding to act.

In these connections the church could be mobilized or community aid. Massive prayer support cannot only sustain a person through a crisis, but it is also an encouragement that people really care. See Jm. 2:15, 16.

This means that a tangible way of helping could be displayed by giving money, supplies, babysitting, helping around the house or other down-to-earth assistance.

Encourage Action:

All of this assumes of course that the helper and helpee are the only ones involved in meeting the crisis situation. We should remember however that most crises begin with a series of environmental events or circumstances. Very often the most effective way to take action in a crisis is to change their community to help rebuild a house or provide the medical expenses etc. This will reduce tension and encourage the helpee out of the problem.

Help with Acceptance:

Paul Tuevniier suggests in one of his books that acceptance is the first step toward dealing with a serious problem. (Paul Tournier (12 May 1898 – 7 October 1986) was a **Swiss physician and author** who had acquired a worldwide audience for his work in pastoral counseling). Sometimes a crisis will bring permanent change. The death of a loved one, the destruction of property or the discovery of a terminal illness, for example are all events which must be accepted and dealt with. To do otherwise is to deny the problem and to delay its solution until later. Acceptance like healing takes time. Often it involves painful conscious thinking about the situation and re-adjustment of one's lifestyle. But whatever the case, our Savior advises us to take our problems to Him. He alone can give stability in times of crisis. Matt. 11:28-29; Ps. 55:22; 32:8. We should remember however that when a person casts his burden on the Lord, the Lord may sustain him through other human beings.

Jesus as a Crisis Counsellor:

A familiar example of crisis counseling is recorded in Jn. 11. It involves terminal illness, personal dangers, and the loss of a loved one.

Notice: How Jesus handled the situations:

- (a) He explained what was happening to the confused disciples (vs. 4, 14).
- (b) He let Martha express her feelings in confusion (vs. 21, 22).
- (c) He reassured her in a calm manner and instilled hope (vs.23, 25, 26).
- (d) He pointed her to the person of Christ (vs. 25).
- (e) He let Mary express her feelings which might have contained some anger (vs.32).
- (f) He did not stop people from grieving but on the contrary, expressed His own sorrow (vs. 33-36).
- (g) He calmly bore the hostility of many of the saddened mourners even though it deeply moved Him (vs. 37-38).
- (h) Then Jesus took action – action which changed the sadness into joy brought glory to God and caused many people to believe in Christ (vs. 38-45).

Encourage Action:

Sometimes with or without help a person will decide on some course of action but will then be afraid to move ahead with the plan. This is where he needs encouragement from the counsellor's skills to enable him to take the right action. But care has to be taken that one does not do things for the helpee all the times. It is easy for all of us to sit back and let somebody else do it and then to complain about the quality of the service. He needs to evaluate his actions with the

counsellor's help and if necessary to come up with different or better alternatives when an earlier plan is unsuccessful.

Crisis Helping Today:

The same is true of most crises today. They are painful traumatic experiences, but they can also be growing experiences which provides good opportunity for learning. As we have seen, however, people in crisis are often confused, suggestible, guilty, and self-condemning. Very often they feel so hopeless about a situation that they contemplate suicide as one of their most reliable alternatives.

The Spiritual Implication of Crisis:

When faced with the death of Lazarus and the danger of his own life Jesus did not deny the spiritual implications of what was happening. He used the situation to teach spiritual truths to show how to cope with crisis and to demonstrate the power of God in the lives of His children. However, in pointing to the spiritual, He did not play on people's emotions nor did He rob them of their freedom to doubt (Jn. 11:16) to criticize (vs. 35), to resist (vs. 46-53) or to turn to aim and believe (vs. 45). God uses crisis to bring people to Himself, help Christians grow unto mature disciples.

GETTING PEOPLE TO COME FOR COUNSELING

The following suggestions will help a counselor to improve his counsellor personality.

Comfortability:

People usually turn to someone they know. It is only natural that people take their problems to a person with whom they feel comfortable. It is uncommon to see people talk over their problems with strangers or people poles apart in vocation. The more any counselor mixes with people and increases his personal contact, the more likely people are to seek his help.

Friendliness:

People take their problems to someone they like. Most people definitely would prefer taking their problems to someone who projects himself as a friend. Counsellors should therefore work towards becoming warmer and friendlier people.

Competence:

People turn to someone or counseling whom they feel is competent. Counsellors should therefore endeavor to increase their skill and knowledge on this all important ministry.

Respectability:

People take their problem to someone they respect. The person a congregation or community hold in high esteem is one who is wise and discreet, for a counselor, it would mean anyone who lives an exemplary life.

Approachableness:

People take their problems to counselors who indicate their interest in counseling. When members do not know how to approach their minister, either because he is not interested in counseling them or he is consistently unavailable, they will turn to someone else.

Confidentiality:

People feel secure when their secrets are kept secret. They will turn to some who keep secrets secret. A minister who leaks out personal confidential information dissuades people from coming to him.

Nearness to God:

People will turn to a counselor who knows God. Someone who can take their case to God and tell them what God says about their case. Counsellors should strive to be transparently holy and prayerful.

SUICIDE AND REFERRAL COUNSELLING

INTRODUCTION

Of all the types helping people through counseling, suicidal counseling is the most difficult way of helping people. This system of counseling is not common to Africa countries, but peculiar to overseas countries where you have people announcing their intention to take their lives. In countries like America, you have suicide clinics all over the continent with specially trained counselors to handle cases of this nature. Almost everyone attempting to commit suicide give some clues of his intentions beforehand. Sometimes these clues or reasons are clear enough to alert counsellors to take proper action on where to refer such people to for solution. Suicidal counselling, entail referral procedures which we shall look into in later part of this lesson.

The Nature of Suicide:

The occurrence of suicide is as old as recorded history. It is described in early Egyptian, Hebrew, and Roman writers, the Greek philosophers discussed it, and it has been of concern to a number of authors and theologians throughout the Christian era. The Bible records seven suicides:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| (a) - Abimelech – Jdg. 9:53, 54. | (b) - Samson – Jdg. 16:28-31 |
| (c) - Saul – I Sam. 31:1-6 | (d) - Saul's arms-bearing – I Chro. 10:4, 5 |
| (e) - Ahithophel – 2 Sam. 17:23 | (f) - Zimri – I Kg. 16:18 |
| (g) - Judas Iscariot – Matt. 27:3-5 | |

In no place in the scripture do we see direct evaluation of suicide, though murder is clearly condemned and, to the extent that suicide could be considered self-murder, it is a sin against God. He created life through His son – Heb. 1:1-3, He sustains life and presumably He – not we have the sole right to take a life in accordance with divine sovereignty.

For many people, however, there comes a time or times in life when crises are bad, and situations appear so hopeless that death is seen by them as the only way out.

Based on his experience, Farberow Shneidman and a psychiatrist named Robert Litman have done a great deal to teach the rest of us about suicide attempts and to show. suicide can be prevented.

Always a suicide attempt is a cry for help a non-verbal way of saying” I am under a lot of pressure, and I do not know what else to do”. The counsellor’s job therefore is twofold: (i) to judge how serious.

the person is about killing himself or herself, and (ii) to take some kind of action based on this evaluation.

Evaluating Suicide Potential:

As stated earlier on, almost everyone who attempts suicide gives some clues of his intentions beforehand. Sometimes the clues are pretty cloak-as when a person announces that he is “thinking about committing suicide”. More often, however, the clues are much more subtle than this and the helper (counselor) has to be alert, or he might miss them. In general, the clues are of five types:

- (a) verbal (what he says)
- (b) behavioral (what he does)
- (c) descriptive (what he is)
- (d) situation (what has happened) and
- (e) symptomatic (how he is coping)

Potential for suicide, the counselor must try to keep all of these things in mind. Let us take a look at these clues closely:

Verbal Clues:

These can be of two types. Sometimes the person comes right out and says that he is contemplating suicide. Such a threat should be taken seriously. The old man idea that says, “If he talks about it, he wouldn’t do it” is an old wives’ tale that has no basis in fact.

The second type of verbal clue is more subtle. Such statement as “I won’t be at work next week”, or This is the last exam I’ll ever study for”, don’t mention suicide but they strongly hint that it is a possibility. Questions like “what could I do about a friend who is thinking of killing herself?” Could also be seen as a verbal clue to the questioner’s own intentions.

Sometimes it is appropriate to ask a potential suicide victim, if he has ever thought about how he would kill himself. In general, if he has thought about the time, place and method, he is serious about his intentions, especially if his method is something like using a gun is loaded and the balcony high enough), unlike slashing one’s wrist or taking a few extra aspirin tablets. If he already owns a gun or has bought rat poison, the threat is even greater.

Behavioral Clues:

Sometimes people do not mention suicide, but their emotions and actions point in this direction. Consider first the emotions. Most people who consider suicide are depressed and feel that life is hopeless. Once they decide to kill themselves, however, they feel more relaxed.

A decision has been taken or made, some of the pressure has been lifted and they show a sudden and noticeable change in mood. Relatives sometimes are encouraged by this until the suicide attempt occurs.

Sometimes a person's actions reveal his intentions. Paying bills, updating insurance policies, giving away prize possessions like a stereo or golf club, and ceasing to communicate with a counselor could be behavioral indications that the person is to go away permanently.

Descriptive Clues:

These refer to who the person is, and such clues may or may not be helpful to the counselor. As we have seen, people of all ages and status commit suicide, but some are more prone to do so than others.

In general, men commit suicide more often than women, and people over forty do so more than those who are younger. Young girls may talk about it and even make halfhearted attempts, but men over thirty who talk about suicide is a greater threat.

To some extent the person's lifestyle is also important. Some people are chronic threateners. Like the little boy who cried "wolf" they threaten often and as they get older the likelihood of their carrying through increases. In general, however, threats from these people are not as serious as those which come from people who have had stable lives and marriages. These people can often be helped over crises, but right now they are dead serious suicide, and if not watched carefully they might just be dead.

Situational Clues:

Before people start thinking about suicide there are usually some crises or stress which they cannot handle. Loss of a loved one, discovery of a malignancy or other serious illness, separation from children, loss of a job or status, divorce, despair over the inability to control drinking or sexual excesses, arrest, criminal involvement, destruction of property, loss of money – all of these can put a person under extreme stress. Even good things – like a promotion or graduation from college – are stressful to most people. Stress, therefore, must always be seen from the helpee's point of view, since he or she may view a situation much differently than we do. When the stress is intense, the likelihood of suicide is probable also high.

Symptomatic Clues:

The issue of how a person copes with stress is as important as the stress itself. According to Shneidman there are several symptoms that indicate that the person is not coping very well. These symptoms include depression and hopelessness, disorientation or confusion, a tendency to be complaining or dissatisfied, and sometimes a defiant attitude which says in essence, "I may be down but at least I'm in charge of ending my life when I please". Alcoholics, drug addicts, and people who are seriously ill become high suicide risks, especially if they feel overwhelmed by these conditions.

THE AVAILABILITY OF HELPERS

When a person is lonely, worried, and has no one to talk to, life is a lot more difficult, and suicide more likely, than if he has relatives and friends who are nearby and who really care. Even when such people exist, they cannot help much if they have no indication that a person might be thinking about suicide. Consider for example, dentists, physicians, and lawyers – all of whom have higher – than average rate of suicide event though they come into contact with people every day. What these professions have in common is the lack of people or other people to turn to during times of stress. People do not believe that successful professionals would contemplate suicide, and they are reluctant to talk about their own inner turmoil.

In contrast, when there is someone to talk to, the likelihood of self-destruction is lowered considerably. Friends and relatives are the most obvious helpers, but these are other resources – neighbors, co-workers, church members, pastors, teachers, family physicians, private counselors or even barbers and hairdressers. These resources can help people.

Below is the summary of the more common suicide clues already talked about.

SUICIDE EVALUATION CHECKLISTS

VERBAL

- Open talk of suicide.
- Talk of not being present in the near future.
- Question about suicide.
- No longer talking to counselors.

BEHAVIORAL

- Severe depression (including apathy, insomnia).
- Sudden improvement in mental attitude.
- Guilt, shame, embarrassment.
- Feelings of hostility, revenge.
- Tension and anxiety.
- Poor judgment.
- Knowledge of available methods.
- Clearly-thought-out plans.
- Proposed method available (gun, drugs etc.)
- Giving away possessions.
- Buying or updating insurance.
- Paying long-standing bills.
- Putting personal affairs in order.

DESCRIPTIVE

Male

Over 40 years old

One or more almost-successful past attempts.

Sudden, first-time decision to kill self.

SITUATIONAL

Loss of person by death, divorce, separation.

Loss of money, prestige, job (including retirement).

Sickness, serious illness, surgery, accident, loss of limb.

Threaten of criminal prosecutions.

Change(s) in life situation.

Failure of counseling.

Success, promotion, increased responsibilities.

SYMPTOMATIC

Feelings of hopelessness.

Dissatisfaction.

Confused thinking.

Tendency to complain.

Defiant attitude.

Drug or drinking problems.

Inability to control impulses.

RESOURCES

No sources of support (friends, relatives etc.).

Family, friend available but unwilling to help.

No church or community contact.

Living alone.

SUICIDE AND REFERRAL COUNSELING AND PREVENTING SUICIDE

For most of us, it can be pretty scary to realize that at some time we might be talking with someone who is seriously contemplating suicide. It is not unusual therefore for a potential helper to back off, hoping that he has not heard correctly or that may be the person will go someplace else with his problem. In one research study it was found that two-thirds of all suicidal persons communicated their intentions before killing themselves, but that the people who received the communications either panicked or did nothing. Friends, relatives, and others were tense, worried, or not sure what to do. Apparently, they hoped that the problem would go away, but in so doing they needed a cry for help. After the suicide, these people probably felt very guilty.

The decision to commit suicide is primarily an indication that someone is in a crisis. The crisis intervention techniques discussed in previous lesson are therefore useful in dealing with suicidal helpee. Basically, someone is crying for help, and our task is to provide this help by listening and responding with concern and honesty. What we really need, it has been suggested, are “sharp eyes and ears, good intention, a pinch of wisdom, an ability to act appropriately, and a deep resolve.

HINTS ON PREVENTION OF SUICIDE

- (a) Take seriously every suicidal threat, comment, or act. Suicide is not a joke. Do not be afraid to ask the person if he is really thinking about committing suicide. The mention will not plant the idea in his mind. Rather, it will relieve him to know that he is being taken seriously so that he is better understood than he suspected.
- (b) Do not dismiss a suicidal threat and underestimate its importance. Never say “oh, forget it. You do not or will not kill yourself. You cannot really mean it. You are not the type”.
- (c) Do not try to shock or challenge the person by saying, “Oh go ahead and do it”. Such an impatient remark may be hard to hold back if a person has been repeating his threats or has been bothersome to have around. But it is a careless invitation to suicide.
- (d) Do not try to analyze the person’s behavior and confront him with interpretations of his actions and feelings during the moment of crisis. That should be done later by a professional.
- (e) Do not argue with the individual about whether he should live or die. That argument cannot be won. The only possible position to take is that the person must live.
- (f) Do not assume that time heals all wounds, and everything will get better by itself. That can happen, but it cannot be counted on.
- (g) Be willing to listen. You may have heard the story before but hear it again. Be genuinely interested, be strong, stable, and firm, promise the person that everything possible will be done to keep him alive because that is what he needs most.

NOTE: It is not idle talk to remind the Christian helper that we have a divine source of strength and wisdom to help us and work through us as we talk to troubled people. Remember that the best way to help people is to be a friend and to use every available resource to help the troubled person cope successfully with the crisis. Often this friendship is the first step to witnessing, discipling and showing the individual how he/she can have life in all its fullness (Jn. 10:10) in spite of one’s present difficulties.

MAKING REFERRALS

It is a mature recognition that none of us can help everybody. Many people can get assistance in a better way from someone with specialized training or expertise in an area where we lack competence. If we are really interested in helping people, we will not be resistant to the idea of making referrals.

For instance, if we learn that someone has taken an overdose of pills, we obviously do not sit with him showing empathy and warmth. We take him to a hospital or contact his doctor if possible or his relations or an ambulance. This is referral counseling. The question now is; where and how do I refer? And when do I refer?

Where To Refer: Ministers and professional counselors often have a file of people and places to which our helpee can be referred. It could be to a higher minister of God, the police or the fire service or community agency, like mental health agency or clinics, marriage clinics, drug centers, employment agency, legal aid society or welfare agency.

TABLE OF WHERE TO REFER

Problems

Consider Referral To:

Alcoholism	-	Alcoholic, Anonymous, General Hospital, Physician, Psychiatrist, Salvation Army.
Child abuse, need	-	State Department of Children and Family Service, Child Welfare Agency.
Depression, behavior, anxiety And confusion etc.	-	Christ the greatest Psychologist.
Drug problem -		General Hospital or Counselling clinic.
Financial problem -		State of local welfare, Churches and Loan Company.
Handicap person	-	Society for the blind, Retarded Children's society.
Legal problems -		Lawyer, legal aid society
Marriage problems	-	Marriage Counsellor, Pastor, or Counselling clinics.
Missing person -		Police department
Physical problem -		Physician
Poisoning problem	-	General hospital, Pastor

Pregnancy	-	Physician, Pastor
Spiritual problems	-	Pastor
Suicide threat	-	Suicide prevention center, Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Pastor.
Vocational -		Private employment agency, state department of vocational rehabilitation, school guidance counselor Psychologist.

When To Refer: Referral is necessary when the present helper or counselor lacks the time, the emotion stigma or stability and the skill or experiences to continue the counseling. More specifically, it is important to look for outside help for counselees who: -

- are in legal difficulties.
- have severe financial needs.
- require medical attention.
- are severely depressed or suicidal.
- will require more time than we can give.
- want to shift to another counselor.
- show extremely aggressive behavior.
- make excessive use of drugs or alcohol.
- arouse strange feelings of dislike, sexual stimulation, or threat to the counselor.
- appear to be severely disturbed.

Symptoms of Severely Disturbed Person

- (a) The person believes that others are attempting to harm him, assaulting him sexually or influence him in strange ways.
- (b) He has delusions of grandeur about himself.
- (c) He shows abrupt changes in his typical pattern of behavior.
- (d) He hears voices, sees visions or small odors which do not exist.
- (e) He has rigid, biased ideas and fears which cannot be influenced by logic.
- (f) He engages in a repetition pattern of compulsive actions or obsessive thoughts.
- (g) He is disoriented (unaware of time, place, or personal identity).
- (h) He is depressed to the point of near-stupor or is strangely elated and/or aggressive.
- (i) He withdraws into his inner world, losing interest in normal activities.

When symptoms such as these appear, referral would be a wise alternative.

How To Refer: Referral is not something that helpee always accept enthusiastically, especially if they originally came to you for help and good relationship has been built-up. It is important, therefore that the helpee should not feel rejected or “pass off” to somebody else. To make the referral process as smooth as possible, several guidelines might be kept in mind.

Firstly, involve the helpee in the decision to refer. As co-workers, trying to solve some problems, you should decide jointly on the issue of referral.

Secondly, the counselor can pave the way by finding out what community resources are available, what the cost, and whether or not they have a waiting list. It is better if the helpee makes his own appointment with the new counselor, though this is not a rule.

Thirdly, discuss the relationship that you will have followed the referral. In professional counseling or circle, the former counselor usually takes a “hand off” attitude when the new counselor takes over with Pastoral or peer counseling, however, this is not always necessary.

There can still be contact especially on a friendly supportive or pastoral basis though the new counselor accepts the major counseling responsibility.

BIBLE EXAMPLE OF REFERRALS

This whole idea of making referrals is as old as the Bible. Perhaps the most interesting example occurred when the children of Israel were camped at the foot of Mount Horeb in the middle of their wilderness travels (Ex. 18). Moses discovered that he was spending all his time judging the people, hearing complaints and settling disputes.

Undoubtedly, this was mostly legal counseling, but perhaps some personal problems were brought to Moses too.

Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, was visiting at the time and watched all of this with increasing concern because Moses was apparently wearing himself out as a people helper (Ex. 18). Finally, Jethro intervened with some advice of his own. Choose some able, God-fearing helpers, Jethro suggested, who are truthful, honest, available at all times, and willing to help with the counseling. When the problems get too difficult, these helpers will make referrals to a more experienced counselor – Ex.18:2-6.

This is a good model for today. Skilled, spirit-filled men and women of God have the privilege of helping each other. But with this privilege involves the responsibility of referring difficult cases to others with greater expertise. Referring to refer is sometimes the best way to help.

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