

## Characteristics of the Biblical Counselor

### Week 7

**Purpose of the Lesson** - To equip believers to cultivate the character qualities necessary for faithful biblical counseling; specifically Christlike listening, wise questioning, humility, and patience—so that they may lovingly apply God’s Word to the heart, avoid harmful assumptions, and serve as instruments of spiritual restoration for the glory of God.

- Have you ever been counseled by someone? If so what were the qualities that were important for you when seeking their counsel in a problem or challenge you were facing?
- What are things that can hinder someone from being an effective counselor?

#### I. Counselors need to be good \_\_\_\_\_.

##### A. Why Is Listening Essential in Counseling?

###### 1. God’s Word Calls us to Listen.

- a. **James 1:19** — *So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;*
- b. **Proverbs 18:13** — *He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.*
- c. **Proverbs 20:5** — *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, But a man of understanding will draw it out.*
- d. Biblical counseling focuses on the heart, and you cannot apply biblical truth if you do not understand their heart issues.

###### 2. Because the \_\_\_\_\_ is the target.

- a. Nouthetic counseling aims at heart change (Prov. 4:23; Mark 7:21–23).
- **Proverbs 4:23 — 23**; *Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life.*
- b. What are things that listening can help uncover? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Without careful listening, we risk addressing \_\_\_\_\_ instead of the heart.

###### 3. Bad listening can result in wrong assumptions.

###### a. Example of \_\_\_\_\_ and Hannah

- i. **1 Samuel 1:12–14** — *And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth. 13; Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. 14; So Eli said to her, “How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!”*
- ii. Why was Hannah praying?
- iii. What wrong assumption did Eli have?

###### b. Example of \_\_\_\_\_

- i. How many questions did Job’s friends ask him verses how many assumptions they came to?

- c. Have you ever had someone come to the wrong conclusion about you based on not getting the full story or all the details? How did it make you feel?
- d. The stakes of poor listening are significant. When counselors assume they understand a problem without gathering sufficient information, they risk reinforcing misconceptions even when clients attempt to correct them, ultimately worsening the situation rather than alleviating it.<sup>1</sup>

**4. Because of what listening communicates.**

- a. When someone is willing to really listen to your pains, heartaches, struggles, and burdens, what does their listening say to you?
- b. Listening is an act of love. It communicates, “You matter.”
- c. Norman Wright – “Listening is one of the most loving gifts you can give to another person, whether it be counselee, friend or family member.”<sup>2</sup>

**B. Listening to Understand vs. Listening to \_\_\_\_\_.**

**1. Listening to Respond:**

- a. Formulating your answer while they are talking.
- b. Waiting for a pause so you can correct them.
- c. Interrupting frequently.
- d. Assuming you already know the issue.
- e. Hearing selectively.

**2. Listening to Understand:**

- a. Seeking clarity before correction.
- b. Asking, “Help me understand what you mean.”
- c. Trying to grasp both content and emotion.
- d. Distinguishing facts from interpretation.
- e. Listening for heart themes (fear, control, approval, bitterness, etc.).

- 3. Hearing serves primarily to gather information for oneself, whereas listening involves genuine care and empathy directed toward another person.

**C. How can you be an “active” listener?**

- 1. Active listening is not passive silence; it is engaged attentiveness.
- 2. Respond with Follow-Up Questions:
  - a. “What were you thinking when that happened?”
  - b. “Why do you think that affected you so deeply?”
  - c. “What were you hoping would happen?”
- 3. Repeat or Reflect Back What They Said
  - a. “So what you’re saying is...”
  - b. “It sounds like you felt betrayed when...”
- 4. Non-Verbal Communication
  - a. What are ways to have good non-verbal communication?
  - b. What are ways to have bad non-verbal communication?

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., *MacArthur Pastor’s Library on Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005), 131.

<sup>2</sup> H. Norman Wright, *The Complete Guide to Crisis & Trauma Counseling: What to Do and Say When It Matters Most!* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011), 34.

5. Resist Premature Correction

- a. **Proverbs 15:28** — *The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.*
- b. Studying to answer implies thoughtful delay.

D. What can the tendency be for someone who has a gift of “teaching”?

Strengths	Potential Weakness
Precision	Over-correction
Long answers/over-talkative	Struggle to be a good listener
Confidence in the truth	Insensitive in delivery
Love to share the truth	Premature solution given
Logical thinking	Discomfort with emotions (which can become irrational/contradictory)

1. Wayne Mack – “Pastors, in particular, may find it difficult to listen to counselees. Gifted in teaching and accustomed to speaking from the pulpit, a pastor tends to take a one-sided approach in counseling. Pastors need to be aware of the differences between preaching and counseling and take care not to approach them in the same way.”<sup>3</sup>
2. **2 Timothy 2:24–25** — *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25; in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth,*

E. How does **Philippians 2:3-4** speak to why the humble person is a good listener?

- **Philippians 2:3–4** — **3;** Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. **4;** Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

F. Sometimes the answer to the person’s problem is not simply the “truth” you want to share with them, but an ear of compassion and love that cares about their pain.

1. Often people will not receive the answer we can give them if we are not willing to listen to them.
2. This doesn’t mean we allow someone to constantly unload on us, but we teach them how to take those burdens also to the Lord.

G. Am I a Good Listener – Self Assessment

1. Rate yourself (1–5) on the following (1 – never up to 5-always)
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ - I regularly interrupt people.
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ - I feel impatient when someone is slow to explain.
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_ - I mentally prepare my answer while they are talking.
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_ - I assume I know where they are going before they finish.
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_ - I ask clarifying questions before offering advice.
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_ - People describe me as patient.
  - g. \_\_\_\_\_ - I remember details from previous conversations.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur Jr., MacArthur Pastor’s Library on Counseling, 131.

- h. \_\_\_\_\_ - I can accurately summarize someone's concern.
  - i. \_\_\_\_\_ - I feel genuine compassion when others share pain.
  - j. \_\_\_\_\_ - Those closest to me (spouse, children, close friends) feel heard by me.
2. Total score: \_\_\_\_\_/50

#### H. Reflection Questions

1. When was the last time someone said, "Thank you for listening"?
2. Am I more excited about giving truth than understanding the person?
3. Do I ever cut people off because I believe I already know the biblical answer?
4. Would my wife or closest friends say I am easy to talk to?
5. Do people come to me voluntarily with struggles?
6. Do I grow frustrated when counseling sessions feel inefficient?

## II. Counselors must learn to be good at asking \_\_\_\_\_

- A. Tripp – "Why don't we ask better questions and take the time to really listen? Why don't we ask people more often what they meant by what they said, or why they did what they did? Why don't we ask people to define their terms or explain their logic? Why don't we ask people more about what they were thinking and feeling? Why don't we get them to talk more about the purposes and desires that shaped their decisions? There are many answers to these questions, but one in particular seems to get in the way of our call to function as the Lord's ambassadors. It is the problem of assumptions. When you assume, you do not ask. If you do not ask, you open yourself up to a world of invalid conclusions and misunderstandings."<sup>4</sup>
- B. How can "assumptions" about a person's situation cause you to give bad advice?
1. Dan comes to you for counsel and says that his wife has been distant and doesn't act like she wants to be married to him anymore. She hasn't been respecting him, she doesn't want to talk, when they do it turns into a fight. You have known Dan to be a spiritual guy at Church who is always friendly and this comes as a shock because you thought they had a solid family.
  2. What may be some wrong assumptions that you could come to if you did not ask enough questions?
    - a. His wife is the primary problem.
    - b. She is being rebellious or unsubmitive.
    - c. Dan is an innocent victim.
    - d. She has "changed" spiritually.
    - e. Dan is being spiritually mistreated.
    - f. Since Dan is spiritual publicly, he must be loving privately.
    - g. But:
      - i. Public spirituality does not equal private faithfulness.
      - ii. Friendly men can be harsh husbands.
      - iii. Active church members can be emotionally distant at home.
  3. **What are some good questions you could ask Dan?**
    - a. How long have you guys been struggling?

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<sup>4</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, Resources for Changing Lives (P&R Publishing Company, 2002), 168.

- b. When did you notice that things began to change?
  - c. How might you be contributing to this?
  - d. If they were here, what would they say?
  - e. Is there anything you need to own?
  - f. What do you believe the problem to be?
  - g. What How has your spiritual lives been at home?
4. After you spend time asking Dan questions, he begins to open up that he has been drinking over the last 6 months, he and his wife have been having intense arguments, and they have been sleeping in separate rooms. Dan also admits he has been talking with a women at work who seems to really understand him and his wife knows about it. He claims it is innocent but she doesn't believe that.
  5. How does this increased information help you in understanding more about this situation?
  6. Always remember there are 3 sides to every story, his side, her side, and the \_\_\_\_\_.
  7. How do the following verses apply?
    - a. **Proverbs 18:13** — *He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.*
    - b. **John 7:24** - *Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment."*

**C. 3 sources that can produce a wrong assumption:**

1. **Your \_\_\_\_\_ experience.**
  - a. Sometimes we think, "I know exactly what they are going through, I went through the same thing". But the counselor must remember, the person you are counseling is not you. You have not been where they are, and you do not know what they are going through. You may have similar experiences, but as Paul Tripp warns, "do not confuse similar experience with identical experience."<sup>5</sup>
  - b. Instead of saying I know exactly what you are going through; listen so well that the person would say to you, "You understand what I am feeling." Let the counselee affirm your empathy, do not assume or assert it.
2. **Your observations and \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - a. Because of your formal training or some case study you had you may assume you know what they are experiencing. The counselor must remember the person you are counseling is not the person you learned about in the book or in the classroom.
  - b. One man said, "I don't counsel "alcoholics" or "adulterers", or "survivors", I counsel Dan (who gets drunk), Julie (who committed adultery), and Sam (who was abused as a child). People are not "case studies", categories, or DSM codes, they are individual people.
  - c. Our observations, trainings, case studies, etc. can be very helpful, but we must not substitute them in place of the person before us.
3. **A Previous \_\_\_\_\_.**
  - a. After you have counseled for years it is easy to conclude, "I know what they are going through because I counseled someone in the exact same situation." But the counselor must remember who you are counseling today is not who you counseled in the past.

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<sup>5</sup> Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 168.

- b. God's truths never change, but we must not put people into a "one size fits all" mindset. We must realize each person is unique and avoid assumptions that can lead to counseling one person who is entirely different from someone else who went through a similar circumstance.

**4. Instead of assumptions:**

- a. Treat the person as a unique individual.
  - i. **John 10:3** - *To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*
  - ii. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** - *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*
- b. Show compassion that shows them you truly care which allows them to open up to you.
- c. Be an active listener.
  - i. **Exodus 3:7** - *And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows.*
- d. Restrain yourself of any final conclusion until you have thoroughly listened to the counselee.

**III. Counselors must be \_\_\_\_\_.**

**A. Paul spoke of the importance of patience when dealing with people.**

- 1. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** - *Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be \_\_\_\_\_ with all.*
- 2. **2 Timothy 2:24** - *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,*
- 3. **(NASB) 1 Corinthians 13:4** - *Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant,*
- 4. Lambert and Scott in *Counseling the Hard Cases*: "Whether the person is unruly, discouraged, or needing practical help, patience is a requirement to truly help. This means that God frowns on ministry done out of frustration. This has absolutely everything to do with showing love in counseling ministry because patience is a defining element of love in the Bible (1 Cor 13:4). Therefore, if we claim to be loving ministers of the Word, we must minister to people in a patient way whether they are high-handed sinners, strained saints, or weakened sufferers"<sup>6</sup>

**B. What does it mean to be "patient"?**

- Being patient in counseling means maintaining a posture of sustained, loving presence regardless of the counselee's circumstances or behavior. It reflects a commitment to remain engaged and emotionally stable when dealing with difficult people or prolonged struggles.

**C. Have you ever struggled to be patient with someone you are counseling? Why?**

**D. How did Jesus have to show patience with His Disciples?**

- 1. How does a parent have to show patience when raising a child?
- 2. How can this apply to raising someone in the Lord?

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<sup>6</sup> Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott, "Concluding Reflections," in *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture*, ed. Stuart Scott and Heath Lambert (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), 306.

3. What are things that can “test” our patience when working with someone we are discipling?

**E. The key to having patience with a new believer is to:**

1. Remember the patience that \_\_\_\_\_ has shown you. Whenever you get frustrated with someone you are trying to disciple because of their sin or lack of desire, always remember in those times how patient God has been with you over the years.
  - a. **Colossians 3:12–13** - *Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*
  - b. **2 Peter 3:9** - *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*
2. Remember that sanctification is \_\_\_\_\_ (Phil. 1:6).
  - a. Growth takes time.
  - b. Even the disciples took a long season to grow.
  - c. Patience is not passivity, rather it is steady faith in God’s timing
3. Remember the patience that \_\_\_\_\_ have shown you in the past. It is easy to forget the patience others have had with us when we were first saved.

### Conclusion

- How can you work on listening in your day to day life?
- How can you work on asking good questions this week?
- How can you work on patience this week?

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