

Characteristics of the Biblical Counselor (part 3)

Week 9

Purpose of the Lesson - The purpose of this lesson is to help believers develop the Christlike character necessary for effective biblical counseling. By doing so, they become instruments God can use to bring spiritual growth, restoration, and hope to those they serve.

MacArthur – “Biblical counseling is simply an extension of discipling. There is no sharp distinction between the two. Discipling might be described as teaching basic Christian principles to a believer, whereas counseling is using those principles to deal with specific situations in a person’s life.”¹

- I. Counselors need to be good listeners.
- II. Counselors need to ask good questions
- III. Counselors need to be patient.

IV. Counselors Must be _____

A. What does “grace” mean?

1. In theological terms, *grace is the favor and goodness of God that has been shown to sinners who have not earned it or deserved it. Grace is a free gift that God has given to man that provides salvation to the sinner and is entirely based on the goodness of the “giver” (God) and not on the goodness of the recipient (sinner).*
2. At its core, graciousness involves extending kindness and benevolence toward others, showing willingness to forgive and offer unearned blessings.
3. Grace is what produces salvation in a sinner’s life (Eph. 2:8-9), and grace is what sustains the believers growth (2 Cor. 12:9).
 - a. **2 Peter 3:18** — *but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.*
 - b. **1 Corinthians 15:10** — *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*
 - c. **2 Corinthians 12:9** — *And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

B. Why is grace necessary in counseling?

1. Couselees can let you down. Sometimes you can pray and prepare for them, set time aside, adjust your schedule, bend over backward to help, and get a text 5 minutes after you are supposed to meet letting you know they can’t make it.
2. You can prepare homework for them, pray daily for them, and meet up the next time, and they have not done any work.
3. They can say and do wrong things. Their attitudes can be offensive.
4. They can show a very ungrateful attitude toward all you pour into them.

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *MacArthur Pastor’s Library on Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005), 93.

5. Always remember “ministry is messy”; sometimes Christians will struggle with sin repeatedly, with being unfaithful, and just not doing what is right.
6. Many Christians are not effective at discipling people because they do show grace to those they are ministering to.
7. Just as parents show much grace in raising children, it will take grace with helping raise _____ children.

C. Counselors are to _____ in a gracious way.

1. **Colossians 4:6** — *Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*
2. Graciousness is fundamentally incompatible with rudeness or inconsiderate behavior.
3. MacArthur – “When Jesus opened the minds of His disciples to understand the Scriptures, He taught them to minister like their gracious Master; therefore, biblical counseling carries a gracious message.”²

D. When you struggle to be gracious:

1. Remember how _____ has been gracious and forgiving to you and where you would be if it were not for grace.
 - a. **Ephesians 2:4–5** — *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5; even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*
 - b. **Titus 3:3–5** — *For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. 4; But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, 5; not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,*
 - c. **Psalms 103:10** — *He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.*
 - d. **Lamentations 3:22–23** — *Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. 23; They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.*
 - e. **Matthew 18:33** — *Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’*
2. Remember how _____ have been gracious and forgiving of you over the years.
 - a. **Colossians 3:12–13** — *12; Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13; 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. **Ephesians 4:32** — *32; And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*
 - c. **Galatians 6:1** — *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.*
 - d. **How have people been gracious to you as they mentored/disciplined you?**

² MacArthur Jr., *Pastor’s Library on Counseling*, 251.

V. Counselors must be _____.

A. Why would love be essential in ministering to those we counsel with?

B. What does Paul teach about the essential importance of love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3?

1. **1 Corinthians 13:1-3** - *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*
2. **Could this be applied to counseling as well? How beneficial will counseling be without love?**
3. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7 gives 15 qualities of love;** we learn that love is patient, kind, and is not jealous, arrogant, rude, selfish, easily angered, doesn't keep record of wrongs, doesn't rejoice in sin but rejoices in the truth, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.

C. Consider the following counseling situation in *The Christian Counselor's Casebook* by Jay Adams:

Clara comes to you stating that she has filed for divorce on the grounds of mental and bodily cruelty. Clara returns for the third session. "I tried to get him here but he had *other* things to do," she begins. "You know what his other things are, of course. I told you all of them." "I don't want to hear such charges behind Marty's back," you respond. "This continuing hostility toward him, even though you told him you forgave him, seems to indicate that you made little or no attempt to bury the issue and start afresh. I don't think that you understand forgiveness. You ..." "Forgive him! You know there is a limit. After he has beat me, and his drinking away our money maybe, but when I came home and found him in my bed with that woman, I can never bury that! He is just an immature, immoral, animalistic pig," she declares. You tell her that it will be necessary for her to change her language about her husband and that you are here to help but not to salve her self-righteous attitude and listen to her ever-increasing charges against her husband. "Why are you siding with him? I'm the one that belongs to this church!" She breaks into tears³

1. **Why do you think this counseling situation was headed to a seemingly bad conclusion?**
 - a. **The counselor moved to quickly to confrontation instead of showing compassion.** The response minimized her suffering and trauma which caused her to feel unheard.
 - b. **Failure to Establish Trust** - Effective biblical counseling requires establishing trust and rapport so that the counselee is willing to receive correction.
 - c. **Poor Timing in Addressing Forgiveness.** The issue of forgiveness is biblically important, but it appears to have been raised too early and too bluntly. Forgiveness needs to be walked through by highlighting the seriousness of the offense, the biblical guidelines of forgiveness, and how it is to be applied.
 - d. **Failure to Address the Husband's Serious Sin.** The counselor focuses almost entirely on Clara's wrong speech and bitterness while appearing to dismiss or avoid addressing the husbands abuse, drunkenness and sexual immorality; all of which are serious offenses (Eph. 5:18, Heb. 13:4, Mal. 2:16).

³ Adapted from Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Casebook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 186.

- e. **Adversarial tone:** The conversation became confrontational rather than loving and pastoral, leading to Clara’s emotional breakdown and making productive counseling difficult.
2. **What do you think of the the following statement from MacArthur:** *“Counselors cannot allow themselves to become exclusively problem-oriented. Rather, they need to be person-oriented.....In counseling, as in any other relationship, we must remember that our impact and influence in people’s lives is usually related to their perception of us.”*⁴
- D. How can we show counselees we love them through counseling them?**
1. **Making _____ for them.**
 - a. What does it say to people when you make time for them?
 - b. John 4 – Jesus made time for the Samaritan women at the well and the people of Sychar.
 2. **Communicating truth in _____.**
 - a. **Ephesians 4:15** - *but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—*
 - b. What are some unloving ways to communicate?
 3. **Not ignoring their sin.**
 - a. Why is confronting sin a loving thing to do?
 - b. **Revelation 3:19** — *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

VI. Counselors must be _____

- A. What is compassion?**
1. Compassion fundamentally means “to feel passion with someone” or “to enter sympathetically into one’s sorrow and pain.”⁵
 2. The term involves sympathy so genuine that one suffers alongside those in pain, extending to weeping with the grieving, rejoicing in others’ honor, hurting with the criticized, and grieving shared sorrows.⁶
 3. In Scripture, compassion operates as a defining characteristic of God’s nature. God’s compassion is revealed through Jesus Christ who had compassion on the crowds (Matt. 9:36; Mark 6:34), the sickly masses (Matt. 14:14), the hungry people (Mark 8:2), and the blind men (Matt. 20:34).⁷
 4. The etymology of the word: passion = suffering; com = to have in common: making compassion literally “shared suffering”.
 5. How much compassion did Paul have for the Jews in Romans 9:1-3?

B. How to increase your compassion in counseling?

⁴ MacArthur Jr., *Pastor’s Library on Counseling*, 102.

⁵ Don H. Stewart, “Compassion,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 324–325.

⁶ Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *The Outline Bible Five Translation: Practical Word Studies in the New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1998), 359.

⁷ David H. Engelhard, “Compassion,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 109.

1. Put yourself in the counselees shoes. How would it feel if you experienced what they were going through?
2. View them as being part of your family.
 - a. **1 Timothy 5:1–2** - *Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.*
 - b. Mack – “When I counsel, I deliberately try to imagine how I would treat one of my close relatives.”⁸
3. Consider your own sinfulness.
 - a. **Galatians 6:1** - *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, **considering yourself lest you also be tempted.***
 - b. Peter boldly declared he would never deny Christ; but the humble believer should recognize that if it were not for grace, so go I.
4. Think about how you can practically be compassionate to them.
 - a. Compassion is much more of a choice of the will than an emotion. Some people are much more emotional than others, they can instantly cry with others, while some don’t have strong emotions often.
 - b. Expressions of compassion don’t have to be emotional, rather compassion can be shown by:
 - i. **Listening attentively to them** (James 1:19; Proverbs 18:13).
 - ii. **Praying for them** (Colossians 4:12–13; James 5:16).
 - iii. **Telling them you care for them** (Philippians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:25).
 - iv. **Being kind to them** (Ephesians 4:32; Luke 6:36).
 - v. **Speaking graciously to them** (Colossians 4:6; Proverbs 16:24).
 - vi. **Bearing their burdens with them** (Galatians 6:2).
 - vii. **Encouraging them with Scripture and hope** (1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14; Romans 15:4).
 - viii. **Showing patience with their struggles and weaknesses** (1 Thessalonians 5:14; Ephesians 4:2).
 - ix. **Offering gentle and humble correction when needed** (Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 2:24–25).⁹

VII. Counselors must have a _____-heart.

- A. Why would it be essential to have a servant’s heart when counseling others?
- B. MacArthur – “Service to others is essential in establishing integrity and authenticity in biblical counseling. The counselor must be a servant in the home, in the church, even in positions of leadership.”¹⁰
- C. Those we disciple are those we are ultimately serving. We serve them with our time, energies, wisdom, understanding, etc.
- D. Did Jesus serve the disciples? How so? (John 13:12-17)

⁸ MacArthur Jr., *Pastor’s Library on Counseling*, 105.

⁹ Adapted from Wayne Mack, “Developing a Helping Relationship with Counselees,” in *Pastoral Counseling*, 104–6.

¹⁰ MacArthur Jr., *Pastor’s Library on Counseling*, 93.

- E. To serve others means you listen to them; to effectively mentor others you must serve them with your ears.
1. How have you seen mentors in your life serve you?
 2. How have you served someone you have disciplined?

VIII. Counselors must have _____ Confidentiality

- A. What happens if someone you counsel feels they cannot trust you?
- B. What are things a counselor can do to break their counselee's trust?
- C. What does Matthew 18:16-17 teach about biblical confidentiality?
- **Matthew 18:15–17 — 15;** *“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16; But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ 17; And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*
- D. Are counselors to provide absolute confidentiality?
1. Consider the following wisdom provided by Jay Adams on providing **biblical confidentiality versus absolute confidentiality**.
 - The implication of this biblical requirement to seek additional help in order to reclaim an offender is that Christians must never promise absolute confidentiality to any person. Frequently it is the practice of Bible-believing Christians to give assurances of absolute confidentiality, never realizing that they are following a policy that originated in the Middle Ages and that is unbiblical....Is it right, then, to refuse any confidentiality at all? No, confidentiality is assumed in the gradual widening of the sphere of concern to other persons set forth in Matthew 18:15ff. As you read the words of our Lord in that passage, you get the impression that it is only reluctantly, when all else fails, that more and more persons may be called in. The ideal seems to be to keep the matter as narrow as possible....What then does one say when asked to keep a matter in confidence? We ought to say, “I am glad to keep confidence in the way that the Bible instructs me. That means, of course, I shall never involve others unless God requires me to do so.” In other words, we must not promise *absolute* confidentiality, but rather, confidentiality that is consistent with biblical requirements¹¹
 2. Why is this so important?

IX. Counselors must model _____.

- A. **1 Corinthians 11:1** - *Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.*
- B. **Philippians 4:9** - *The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.*
1. It is essential that the Christian counselor make a conscious effort to be like Christ. The more closely the counselor patterns his manner of dealing with clients after the manner in which Jesus dealt with the people of his time, the more successful he will be. One of the most striking features of Jesus' ministry is the variety of attitudes he displayed. At times he was gentle and passive. On other occasions he was active and friendly or kind but firm. If the circumstances warranted, he could be downright stern. In other words, Jesus adapted

¹¹ Jay Adams, *Handbook of Church Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 30–32.

himself to the specific situation. Reflecting Christ's ministry, the hallmarks of Christian counseling are kindness and gentleness (2 Cor. 1:3–4; 10:1; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 2:7, 11; 2 Tim. 2:24; Titus 3:2)¹²

- C. How effective will your counsel be if you are not actively living it out in front of them?
- D. Often the counsel we will give others will flow out of the counsel we have received from the Lord. "You said you are struggling with anger and anxiety, one of the greatest ways the Lord has helped me overcome anger and anxiety is by applying....."
- E. Does your testimony line up with what God would want and does it set a pattern for a newer believer to follow? Though you won't be perfect, you should seek to be like Jesus in all you say and do.
- F. What areas of a person's life do they need to be faithful before they counsel others?
- G. Before you can teach others to be faithful, what do you need to learn to be faithful to do? Why is this so important?

X. Counselors must _____ Counsel.

- A. As you examine what kind of counsel you give, it should be built solely upon the Word of God.
- B. Even if there are principles you give them, those principles must be rooted in Scripture.
 1. **2 Peter 1:3** - *as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue,*
 2. **Isaiah 8:19–20** - *And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*
 3. **2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hosea 4:6**

XI. Counselors must _____ for their counselees.

- A. **Ephesians 6:18** - *praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.* (James 5:13-16); Supplication is simply talking to God on behalf of another person.
- B. Why is it important to open a counseling session in prayer?
- C. You may be in the middle of a session with someone, and you may not have an answer for what they are going through at that moment, what is a good thing you could stop and do for them?
- D. It is good not only to open in prayer, but to also close in prayer.

Conclusion

Biblical counseling is far more than giving advice—it is a ministry of Christlike care for the souls of others. Knowledge of Scripture is essential, but the effectiveness of that knowledge is greatly shaped by the character of the one who gives it. When counselors demonstrate grace, love, compassion, humility, faithfulness to God's Word, and dependence upon prayer, they reflect the heart of Christ to those who are hurting or struggling with sin. As we seek to counsel others, our goal should be not merely to speak truth, but to embody it—serving people with the same patience, mercy, and faithfulness that the Lord has shown to us.

¹² Frank Minirth, *The Minirth Guide for Christian Counselors* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 177.

Bibliography

- Adams, Jay E. *The Christian Counselor's Casebook*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974.
- Adams, Jay E. *Handbook of Church Discipline*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986.
- Engelhard, David H. "Compassion." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 109–10. Electronic ed. Baker Reference Library. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996.
- Leadership Ministries Worldwide. *The Outline Bible Five Translation: Practical Word Studies in the New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1998.
- Mack, Wayne A. "Developing a Helping Relationship with Counselees." In *Pastoral Counseling*, edited by John F. MacArthur Jr. and Wayne A. Mack, 103–115. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994.
- MacArthur, John F., Jr. *MacArthur Pastor's Library on Counseling*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005.
- Minirth, Frank. *The Minirth Guide for Christian Counselors*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003.
- Stewart, Don H. "Compassion." In *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, edited by Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England, Steve Bond, and E. Ray Clendenen, 324–25. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003.