

Counseling

Methodology & Empathy

Detailed Outline
Part 1 of 3

Introduction

A Christian comes to the congregation with eating disorders—bulimia or anorexia. We understand that he/she should not be going to a secular psychologist. The question, then, is where should he/she go for treating their eating disorder? Historically, church leaders have been the ones who have handled this. However, over the past some years now they are getting increasingly tied up with handling church buildings and committee meetings, with no time for people.

The way to work around this is through a plurality of elders who work with others who have the skills to handle such situations.

I. Counseling Methodology

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28 NASB)

A. Paul is dealing with elders (plural), who are to oversee (pastor) and feed the flock (singular).

B. Three separate titles given to these men

1. Elders (v. 17)
2. Overseers (v. 28, sometimes translated bishops from the Greek “*episcopos*”)
3. Shepherds (v. 28)

“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears.” (Acts 20:29–31)

C. Modeling behavior

1. He was modeling “counseling.” The word admonishing or warning can also be translated “counsel.” He counseled the Ephesian elders.
2. We also read that Paul was counseling the people with tears.
3. The context has Paul talking to the elders and providing a role-model on being a counselor.
4. The reason Paul says is so that they are built-up.

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” (Acts 20:32)

5. So we see here that Paul is giving the elders instruction about counseling.

II. The Necessity of Empathizing

“Being empathetic is to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.”

A. Practicing Empathy

1. How is empathy practiced? How do you put yourself in another’s shoes?
2. Often, one or the other extremes happen among elders.
3. One elder or a single pastor might argue that it is impossible to get close to the 100 in the congregation and so they choose to remain aloof.
4. One or two extremes usually occur:
 - a) Some become distant from everyone. “Since I can’t get close to everybody, I won’t get close to anyone.”
 - b) Alternatively, one may try to “close” with everybody and end up burning out.
5. This issue is again solved within the biblical concept of the multiplicity of elders.
6. Elders must realize that they cannot be close to everyone, but they can choose to be close to some.

B. Learning Empathy

¹ For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. ³ For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. ⁵ For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— ⁶ nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷ But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸ Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thess. 2:1–8)

1. Note the empathy in Paul’s words and actions in vv. 7–8.
 - “We proved to be gentle among you.”
 - “As a nursing mother tenderly cares.”
 - “You had become very dear to us” (both in v. 7 and again in v. 8).
 - “Having fond an affection for you . . .”
2. The Greek emphasis of this verse is that they were “close to his breast.” That is what he felt for the Thessalonians.
3. Notice the phrase:
 - a) “Our own lives to you”
 - b) The word for lives is “psyche,” from which we get the word psychology.

4. “We even parted our emotions to you,” says Paul.

¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹ just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children . . . (1 Thess. 2:10–11)

5. Get the full picture. Paul says:
 - a) I treated you as a mother, “close to my breast,” and
 - b) As a father exhorting, encouraging, and imploring.

C. Paul as a model of empathy for elders

1. We should be doing likewise—holding people close and imploring them.
 - a) He first talks about the mother, before he talks about the father.
 - b) There is a holding close to the heart before imploring. Imploring without holding close to the heart will not produce any positive results. There will be resistance.
2. What made Paul empathetic?
 - a) In this context, what caused Paul to be empathetic?
 - b) The answer is “trouble.”
3. How we learn empathy?
 - a) We learn empathy not by reading Jonathan Edwards or the Puritans.
 - b) God has designed that we learn the hard things of life the hard way so that we are sensitive to his people.

Conclusion

Do you want to be a good elder? Get ready for difficulty. That is how God has designed to conform you as an elder.

Counseling

Referrals & Vulnerability

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Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness . . . (1 Peter 5:1–2 NASB)

Peter is an elder, and he is exhorting and challenging other elders to shepherd or pastor the flock. He wants a plurality of elders to pastor the flock. You will never find in the Scriptures where it is one person's responsibility to pastor the flock. That is because one man can't do it all. We must arrive at this biblical proposition of plurality of church leadership.

God working through his people can do an enormous amount of good for the people of God.

I. Should Elders Refer People to Counseling?

A. When, if ever, should elders refer counseling to others?

Are there situations where this may be necessary? Let's look at some practical ways to do this.

1. Life at risk situations:
 - a) If dealing with someone who has suicidal thoughts, it may be wise, especially if none of the elders have any experience or have themselves suffered from suicidal thoughts.
 - b) Getting people involved who have done some research or have some expertise in dealing with such issues will be wise.
2. Same applies to eating disorders, anxiety issues, depression, cutting, guilt, obsessions, compulsions (OCD).
3. Illustration: Obsessive compulsiveness is one of my tendencies. This morning I got on the treadmill but did not have it on the list, so I wrote it down and crossed it out, and felt good about the task completed!
4. We are all fallen creatures; all of us are dysfunctional. It is only a matter of where and to what degree. Even small kids are fallen and dysfunctional.
5. So when do we refer to others besides the elders?
 - a) The answer is when we are not acquainted with the situation or in areas we are not equipped to handle. That may be a good time to refer them to someone who has been trained in that area.
 - b) Illustration: As a Christian counselor, my responsibility is to come alongside the elders to help them work through the issue.

B. What to look for in a counselor outside the church

Ask the following questions:

1. Is he/she a Christian?
2. What is their philosophy in counseling?
3. Do they have any Christian references that can be contacted? (Take three)
4. What are their doctrinal beliefs?
5. What associations are they part of?
6. Who are they licensed with? (State, federal, etc.)
7. Do they understand the concept of Christian elders overseeing their people?
8. Are they willing to sign of a waiver that elders will be kept informed? This is important because they must understand that elders have been kept as overseers over them.

II. Should Elders Become Vulnerable with the Congregation?

The question is, “Should elders be open by sharing the hurts and problems with the people they oversee?” “Is there any benefit from doing that?”

A. Personal vs. public sharing

1. There may be times when it may be necessary to share with a few people what you are struggling with; however, when you share publicly (preaching etc.), they listen.
2. People listen to personal struggles more than they would to mere information and facts.
3. People want to know if you were ever hurt in the area they are struggling in.
4. Therefore, there is a time to be vulnerable, and you must under the Holy Spirit’s ministry know when that is appropriate.

B. Problems with no vulnerability

1. If we are never vulnerable we will be seen as being superficial. This will be especially so with the younger generation—teenagers.
2. Teenagers and wives have built-in radar screens.
3. Wives can pick up on things that are not obvious to us, and teenagers can pick up phonies in no time.
4. It is our prayer that we will not be superficial, phony elders.

Conclusion

- When, if ever, should elders refer counseling to others?
- What to look for in a counselor outside the church?
- Should elders become vulnerable with the congregation?

Counseling

Relational Ministry

Detailed Outline
Part 3 of 3

Jesus is our primary focus and counselor, and we must study him if we want to learn how to counsel. There are also three Old Testament books that we must study when we prepare to counsel.

They are:

- Psalms: Gives perspectives on counseling
- Proverbs: Gives wisdom on counseling
- Ecclesiastes: Gives purpose to the person being counseled

People struggle with purpose, and we see in Ecclesiastes that Solomon is struggling with it too.

III. The Relational Ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ

"The apostles gathered together with Jesus . . ." (Mark 6:30a NASB)

A. Being close

1. "With Jesus" - this prepositional expression is interesting to note and is repeated many times in Mark.
2. As elders, this should be our testimony.
3. But, also, we want to be with the people that God has given us to shepherd.
4. We should be sincere as we ask this question: "Are we close to the flock that God has entrusted to us?"

B. Closeness helps cultivate openness

1. Men rarely open up in a counseling session. It is like the interrogation lights have come on and they are blinded.
2. In informal settings men open up.
3. Illustration: I used to go hunting with an 80-year-old man. If we were in a counseling session together, he would never have opened up to me. We are all afraid of that. But this fellow opened up to me in the woods, and talked with me while we were walking down the pathway. He opened up about his desire to date an 80-year-old woman.
4. This is the geographical office of Jesus: "He is with his people."

C. The necessity of plurality of elders in relating to the congregation

1. You can't be with everyone all of the time.
 - a) Jesus was not with all of them all the time.

- b) Even among the twelve he is with Peter, James, and John, the three in particular.
 - c) And then again among the three, Jesus seems to be closer with John or Peter.
 - d) That is a model for us to follow, both for Christian living and Christian leadership.
 - e) We don't have the energy to be with all the people who need help.
2. How plurality of leadership helps
- a) With leadership plurality, it is not possible to be friends with everyone.
 - b) Elders can have specific people whom they are "closely connected" with; this should be done without creating divisions.
 - c) It becomes possible to connect with each of them when the numbers are divided up among the leadership.
 - d) Switch the names around yearly or so to avoid isolation.
 - e) This is because one person cannot be the "thing."
3. Encourage the organizers in your group to organize this.
- a) Are you an over-organizer or under-organizer?
 - b) If you are not an organizer, call on those who are organizers; they will help you organize.
 - c) Encourage the organizer to organize the shepherding.

IV. Know the Different Personality Types

A. Within the American population there are:

- 1. 3% highly dominant
- 2. 11% influential, social - they like to mingle and mix with people.
- 3. 17% analytical - these are the engineers and chemists. They often conflict with the social types.
- 4. 69% stable - they will not be happy if there is no stability within the flock.

B. It helps to know the personality types of the congregation. The elders are then able to meet their needs accordingly, to the glory to God.