

How to be Helpful In Counseling

Galatians 6:1-3 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 HCSB Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so you won't be tempted also. (2) Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (3) For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he is deceiving himself...Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

You want an opinion? Go down to any local pub, ask three people and you're sure to get at least five opinions. Everyone has opinions and some of them are actually sincerely held! Sincerity however, is no guarantee of accuracy.

This is why the same fundamental questions should be asked either of yourself (if you are the one being asked for counsel) or of the person you are considering as a potential counselor.

1. What is your foundation for truth?
2. What basic principles and approaches do you use in problem solving?
3. How successful are those two elements in your life?

If someone comes to you for help, you better make sure that your foundation for truth is the Word of God. As it says in 1 Kings 22:5, first ask what the Lord's will is on the matter. After all, "the grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God remains forever."¹

What is godly counseling?

Godly counseling is wise advice, opinion or instruction given by a knowledgeable or experienced, and preferably successful person (Galatians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11). Having said that, godly advice should not be limited to a professional elite. Each of us is called to "carry one another's burdens" as well as to "encourage one another and build each other up."

Biblical counseling implies total reliance on the Word of God as a primary source material. (Hebrews 4:12-13) Anyone who actually handles the Scriptures for any length of time understands the value of this approach,

- **Hebrews 4:12-13 HCSB** For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints, and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart. (13) No creature is hidden from Him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.

Christ-centered counseling understands that the greatest advice is nigh on to useless unless the Messiah has saved the person and the Holy Spirit is empowering that person to exercise real, lasting change. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

- **2 Corinthians 5:17 HCSB** Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.

Unless Jesus is your King and the Holy Spirit lives in you, you can turn over a new leaf as often as you like – the fundamental, underlying, core issues will remain and will pop up again in some new, slightly different form.

What are the qualifications needed?

¹ Isaiah 40:8

A counselor teaches out of their own experience. You can't teach what you don't know; what you haven't experienced or learned. "For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart."² "A wise heart instructs its mouth and increases learning with its speech."³

- **Luke 6:45 HCSB** A good man produces good out of the good storeroom of his heart. An evil man produces evil out of the evil storeroom, for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.

Therefore, to be a wise, godly counselor,

1. You must have a relationship with God. (Matthew 7:21-23)

- **Matthew 7:21-23 HCSB** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *only* the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?' (23) Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you! **Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!**'

2. You must have a personal, comforting relationship with God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

- **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 HCSB** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. (4) He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

3. You must love Christ and care about the needs of others. (Galatians 6:2)

- **Galatians 6:2 HCSB** Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

4. You must handle the Word of Truth accurately. (2 Timothy 2:15)

- **2 Timothy 2:15 HCSB** Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.

5. You must be able to recognize and not exceed your personal limits:

a. **Your skills** (Romans 12:3; Proverbs 26:12)

- **Romans 12:3 HCSB** For by the grace given to me, I tell everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he should think. Instead, think sensibly, as God has distributed a measure of faith to each one.
- **Proverbs 26:12 HCSB** Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

b. **Your spiritual/emotional/physical reserves** (2 Corinthians 8:12-14)

- **2 Corinthians 8:12-14 HCSB** For if the eagerness is there, it is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. (13) It is not that there may be relief for others and hardship for you, but it is a question of equality-- (14) at the present time your surplus is *available* for their need, so that their abundance may also become *available* for your need, that there may be equality.

What are the responsibilities of the counselor?

1. You must live in total dependence upon God and His Messiah. (John 15:5; Philippians 4:13)

² Matthew 12:34

³ Proverbs 16:23

- John 15:5 HCSB "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me.
- Philippians 4:13 HCSB I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.

2. Rely on the counsel, direction, and advice of the Holy Spirit. (John 16:13)

- John 16:13 HCSB When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come.

3. Allow the Scriptures to enlighten not only the counselee's but your own mind. (Psalm 119:105-106)

- Psalms 119:105-106 HCSB Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path. (106) I have solemnly sworn to keep Your righteous judgments.

4. You must be ready to replace your solutions with His. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

- Proverbs 3:5-7 HCSB Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; (6) think about Him in all your ways, and He will guide you on the right paths. (7) Don't consider yourself to be wise; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.

You must understand that the success of your counseling ministry is NOT dependent upon you knowing all the answers. Once you start thinking that, you are on your way to big trouble.

5. Be able to treat the sinner as gently, respectfully, and honestly as possibly. (2 Timothy 2:14-16; 1 Peter 3:15-16)

- 2 Timothy 2:14-16 HCSB Remind them of these things, charging them before God not to fight about words; this is in no way profitable and leads to the ruin of the hearers. (15) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth. (16) But avoid irreverent, empty speech, for this will produce an even greater measure of godlessness.
- 1 Peter 3:15-16 HCSB but set apart the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. (16) However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian life will be put to shame.

6. Speak the unadulterated truth without favoritism. (Leviticus 19:17; Proverbs 27:5-6; Ephesians 4:25; 1 Timothy 5:21)

- Leviticus 19:17 HCSB "You must not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him.
- Proverbs 27:5-6 HCSB Better an open reprimand than concealed love. (6) The wounds of a friend are trustworthy, but the kisses of an enemy are excessive.
- Ephesians 4:25 HCSB Since you put away lying, **Speak the truth, each one to his neighbor**, because we are members of one another.
- 1 Timothy 5:21 HCSB I solemnly charge you, before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism.

PART TWO

What are the goals of the session?

Determine and respond to the need.

1. If unsaved, lead them to the feet of the Master. (John 10:9; 1:45-49)
 - **John 10:9 HCSB** I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.
 - **John 1:45-49 HCSB** Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the One Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth!" (46) "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked him. "Come and see," Philip answered. (47) Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said about him, "Here is a true Israelite; no deceit is in him." (48) "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you," Jesus answered. (49) "Rabbi," Nathanael replied, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"
2. If saved but wandering, give a course correction. (James 5:19-20)
 - **James 5:19-20 HCSB** My brothers, if any among you strays from the truth, and someone turns him back, (20) he should know that whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his life from death and cover a multitude of sins.
3. If saved but struggling, help them find their way to victorious living. (Philippians 4:13)
 - **Philippians 4:13 HCSB** I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me.
4. If confused and needing advice in life issues, help them find it in the Scriptures. (Isaiah 8:19-20)
 - **Isaiah 8:19-20 HCSB** When they say to you, "Consult the spirits of the dead and the spiritists who chirp and mutter," shouldn't a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? (20) To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, there will be no dawn for them.

What should you do?

1. Make the most of every opportunity, whether it be long-term counseling or merely a brief word. (Colossians 4:5-6; Matthew 12:36-37)
 - **Colossians 4:5-6 HCSB** Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the time. (6) Your speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.
 - **Matthew 12:36-37 HCSB** I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. (37) For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."
2. Prepare your physical environment. (Proverbs 14:8)
 - **Proverbs 14:8 HCSB** The sensible man's wisdom is to consider his way, but the stupidity of fools deceives *them*.

Make it private, as relaxing as possible and safe for all persons involved.
Make sure that if they break down they won't have to be unduly embarrassed.
Ensure that lighting is comfortable.
Before the session make sure that Kleenex and a garbage can are within reach.
If possible, make water available too.

Make it interruption free. Hold phone calls, let it go to the answering machine, hang a “do not disturb” sign.

Be conscious of the proper use of barriers (desks, height, light etc). Eliminate them for the nervous. Use them for the belligerent and/or abusive.

3. **Be able to help quickly and accurately.** (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Peter 3:15; Exodus 18:14-18)

- **2 Timothy 2:15 HCSB** Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.
- **1 Peter 3:15 HCSB** ...always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Have study helps, handy lists, your Bible (with its nifty concordance), the Quick Reference I made for all of you, paper, pencils handy. Take some time to have the names and numbers of better qualified people to refer them to on hand so that there is no more delay in them getting help than is necessary. Our mandate is not only to get them help but to get it to them as quickly and efficiently as possible.

- **Exodus 18:14-18 HCSB** When Moses' father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, "What is this thing you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" (15) Moses replied to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. (16) Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach *them* God's statutes and laws." (17) "What you're doing is not good," Moses' father-in-law said to him. (18) "You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can't do it alone.

4. **Use positive body language to promote communication.** (Proverbs 15:30)

• **Proverbs 15:30 HCSB** Bright eyes cheer the heart; good news strengthens the bones. The HCSB translators rendered *ma'owr ayin samach'* (literally the light of the eyes) as “bright eyes”. The LXX renders “bright eyes” as “the eye that sees beautiful things”. The NIV puts it “A cheerful look brings joy to the heart and good news gives health to the bones.”

However, it's necessary to understand WHOSE heart is cheered? I believe that as the second half implies news given to someone else, so the first half should be understood. It is when we give a bright look, when we have a twinkle in our eye, when we look at someone else that is meant. When we give good news to someone it improves their condition of life. When we look upon someone as if they are pleasant to see it cheers their heart.

Therefore,

- a. Smile at them. Dispel their fears.
- b. Shake hands or hug them. It implies warmth and caring.
- c. Sit close and face them full on.
- d. Look them in the eyes. Maintain good eye contact. You need to watch their face anyway.
- e. Occasionally lean forward. It signals interest.
- f. If the conversation is getting tense, or you're touching on something painful, lean back and maybe put your arms behind your head. It signals relaxation. It is a non-threatening display.
- g. Occasionally nod or make a sound to indicate acceptance not rejection. However, be careful that you don't signal acceptance of something wicked they did or are doing!

h. Give a relaxed, approachable appearance. Don't sit with your arms folded too much. Don't allow your fists to clench. Don't react negatively when they tell you their mistakes. Don't sit with a desk between you unless with an aggressive person.

5. **Don't stay on the surface, look for underlying issues.** (Proverbs 20:5; Mark 10:17-22)

- **Proverbs 20:5 HCSB** Counsel in a man's heart is deep water; but a man of understanding draws it up.
- **Mark 10:17-22 HCSB** As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up, knelt down before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (18) "Why do you call Me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good but One--God. (19) You know the commandments: **Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; do not defraud; honor your father and mother.**" (20) He said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these from my youth." (21) Then, looking at him, Jesus loved him and said to him, "You lack one thing: Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." (22) But he was stunned at this demand, and he went away grieving, because he had many possessions.

The rich man said he wanted to inherit eternal life. Jesus basically responded with "get rid of your stuff." Can we buy our way into heaven? Can being poor save us? No! What Jesus was doing was dealing with the underlying issue. The man could not bring himself to be dependent. His trust was not yet put in God. He could not be saved as long as that was true.

Like the Master, we must look beyond what is presented and see what is the real problem. What the person assumes is the cause of the trouble is very often not the true root of the issue. We need to probe with pertinent questions until we find that root.

- a. **Call them by name.** It promotes intimacy.
- b. **Avoid small talk.** It delays getting to the point and it keeps them on the surface, away from the vulnerable places they are so ambivalent about exploring.
- c. **Ask direct questions.** Plainness and seriousness encourages them to practice the same.
- d. **Ask a lot of "why" questions.** People like to flood you with details, thinking that's communication, but it often clouds the issue. "Why" questions seek out the motivating heart issues – the source of most problems.
- e. **Ask background questions.** You're looking for patterns of behavior and old emotional triggers.
- f. **Pay attention to what they DON'T say.** Keep in mind how healthy people would react or process the issue and note the differences.
- g. **Ask about origins of habits.** Determining when something started and then poking around as to what was going on at the time is often helpful.
- h. **Ask open ended questions.** "What else can you remember?" "What more can you tell me?" "What are you remembering but not telling me?"
- i. **Ask questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no.** You're not a lawyer trying to trap them. You're trying to encourage them to talk.
- j. **Ask questions about significant relationships.** Mom, dad, siblings, extended family, children, spouses, lovers, etc.
- k. **Don't be afraid of silence.** Don't try to fill in the uncomfortable silences. Wait them out. Don't let them weasel their way out that easy.
- l. **Don't think it's just about them talking.** I don't believe in the therapeutic nature of talking for talking's sake. The Bible says,

- **Proverbs 10:19 HCSB** When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise.

At some point teaching has to take place. A good counselor “proclaims the message and persists in it whether it’s convenient or not; rebukes, corrects, and encourages with great patience and teaching.” (2 Timothy 4:2)

6. Determine why they do what they don’t want to. (Romans 7:18-19)

- **Romans 7:18-19 HCSB** For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it. (19) For I do not do the good that I want to do, but I practice the evil that I do not want to do.

Most people behave this way because they are trying to fulfill certain basic, primitive needs.

Physiological Needs – Examples are: Clothing/apparel, food/water, shelter/home, and biological needs such as defecation, urination, breathing, and so forth.

Safety and Security Needs – Examples such as: Free from occupation, free from the threat, free from pain, free from terror, and so forth.

Social Needs – Example is: have friends, have a family, needs the love of the opposite sex, and others.

Award Needs – Examples: praise, awards, decorations, gifts, and many others.

Self Actualization Needs – This is the need and desire to act as they pleased according to their talents and interests.

Often there are deep-seated emotional triggers that are related to one of these issues that cause the person to react in a knee-jerk fashion, often against all common sense. If you can determine the time the habit originated, and see which of these (or other) needs were being felt at the time, sometimes you can determine some causes and start dealing with the REAL problem.

7. Present them with Yahweh Yireh, God the ultimate Provider.

- **Daniel 2:26-28 HCSB** The king said in reply to Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, "Are you able to tell me the dream I had and its interpretation?" (27) Daniel answered the king: "No wise man, medium, diviner-priest, or astrologer is able to make known to the king the mystery he asked about. (28) But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has let King Nebuchadnezzar know what will happen in the last days. Your dream and the visions *that came into your mind as you lay in bed* were these:

Make sure that they understand that you are not their savior. You are not the answer to their problems. You are a fellow traveler, a fellow student of life. The good disciple takes others to the Master.