The Pastor as Counselor
Basics 2016

Introduction:

David Powlison: Pastor, you are a counselor. Perhaps you don’t think of yourself that way. (And perhaps your people don’t think of you that way, either.) Perhaps you don’t want to be a counselor. But you are one.¹

Paul Tripp: We want ministry that doesn’t demand love that is, well, so demanding! We don’t want to serve others in a way that requires so much personal sacrifice. We would prefer to lob grenades of truth into people’s lives rather than lay down our lives for them. But this is exactly what Christ did for us. Can we expect to be called to do anything less?²

Mental Health Statistics

- NIMH: 25% of Americans suffer from a mental disorder (61.5 million people)
- 60% never receive treatment (2012)
- 30% of Americans suffer from some type of anxiety disorder
- we spend an estimated $467B to treat mental illness in the US
- $25 billion spent on medications

Steven Hyman, MD, Former Director of National Institute of Mental Health: We psychiatrists have been given an impossible task. Our medications are sometimes able to alleviate symptoms, though they often come with side effects. But we cannot give people what they really need. People need meaning and relationship.³

³ This is a summary of an interview with Steve E. Hyman which aired in the late 1990's on an NPR show entitled, “The State of Psychiatry Today.”
Body:

*Definition of counseling:*

- Taking the truths of God’s word, speaking them in love and in the context of a personal relationship with the goal of growth in godliness.

*5 Reasons Every Pastor Needs to Be Counseling*

1. Counseling is part of our calling as pastors

2. Counseling helps us take what we proclaim publicly and forces us to apply it personally.

   a. **Tim Ackley:** We [pastors] tend to be pretty good at speaking truth, but I have learned from experience that it is often hard for us. When people come in with their sins, struggles, and sufferings, we respond with “wise” answers. But it’s often a one-way process with very little give and take, where a relationship isn’t *that* necessary. But, truth and relationship *together* are the fundamental ingredients of biblical counseling that “lives.” Biblical counseling cannot be reduced to a few well-timed verses, a strategy for change, a prayer, and a handshake…Scripture is so much more robust and lively than that: it is God-breathed…as a pastor and counselor, I aim to be as personal as He is.⁴

3. Counseling enriches, expands and enhances our understanding of the people we minister to.

   a. Richard Baxter: It will furnish you with useful matter for your sermons, to talk an hour with an ignorant or obstinate sinner, as much as an hour’s study will do, for you will learn what you have need to insist on and what objections of theirs to repel.\(^5\)

4. Counseling pushes us out of self-dependence and towards Christ.

5. Counseling helps build Christ’s church and kingdom.

Practical Considerations:

(1) Talk about it publicly

David Powlison: In effect, [we] are counseling people to think that most of us don’t need the give and take of candid, constructive conversation. This absence of engagement, whether intentional or not, communicates that the care and cure of wayward, distractible, battered, immature souls—people like us—can be handled by public ministry and private devotion.⁶

(2) Consider your terminology

(3) Invest in getting your people trained

(4) Know when to refer

(5) Develop two-tiers of care and counseling

(6) Don’t reinvent the wheel

(7) Read things which orient you to counseling related issues

⁶ Powlison, 23.
(8) Develop relationships with nearby Christian counselors, therapists, counseling centers

(9) Start small and bring someone into your counseling sessions

(10) Don't lose heart

Conclusion:

Edward Donnelly: In attempting to stress the importance of preaching, it is possible to over-react by minimizing personal work. Personal counseling can be no substitute for the preached Word, but, as a means of enforcing and applying that Word to the individual conscience, it fulfills a unique function.

It is all too possible—and comfortable—to misuse the centrality of preaching as an excuse for pastoral cowardice or neglect. Does the fact of having preached publicly against our people’s sins absolve us from the responsibility of speaking to them in their homes about those same sins? We are called to be diligent students, to labour in the Word, to be much in the secret place. But the study may become a convenient refuge from reality and we may all too easily salve our consciences over an unpaid visit by reading yet another book. Many of us have discovered, to our shame, that the courage with which we have preached can evaporate during the walk to the door of the meeting-house.7

Romans 15:14: I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

7 Baxter, 17-18.
Biblical Counseling Coalition: [http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/](http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/)

Sign up to be a partner with the BCC: [http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/partner-with-us/](http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/partner-with-us/)

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CCEF (Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation: [www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org)

Free resource bundle: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/8azp6ahwevnjuh8/AACTrbOfNtWedBQudEbDsul6ma?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/8azp6ahwevnjuh8/AACTrbOfNtWedBQudEbDsul6ma?dl=0)

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