

SESSION 13: IMPORTANT LAST THINGS

COMMON ERRORS COUNSELORS MAKE

God created us for loving companionship with Him. He wants us to know Him, for it is in knowing Him that we are able to follow Him, to love Him, and to obey Him.

One of the most powerful statements God makes about us knowing Him is in Jeremiah 9:23-24:

“Wise people ought not boast that they are wise. Powerful people ought not boast that they are powerful. Rich people ought not boast that they are rich. If people want to boast, they should boast about this: They should boast that they understand and know me. They should boast that they know and understand that I, the Lord, act out of faithfulness, fairness, and justice in the earth and that I desire people to do these things,” says the Lord” (Emphasis added).

For those whom God calls to disciple others, it is absolutely necessary for us to grow in our knowledge and understanding of the God who created us in His image, in whose Son we have redemption and reconciliation to Him, and by whom whose Truth we have been entrusted to minister to others.

While there are many mistakes on the practical side of things that are easy for Biblical counselors and disciplers to make, the most debilitating ones are the ones made outside the counseling setting:

- Lack of Personal Prayer
- Lack of Personal Bible Study
- Lack of Personal Worship
- Lack of Community & Accountability
- Lack of Self-Care & After-Care

LACK OF PERSONAL PRAYER

There are some technical definitions of prayer that aren't really helpful to our discussion at this point. For our purposes here, we will use a couple of simple ideas to give us a working definition:

Prayer is expressing to God—earnestly and honestly—what is on our heart and in our mind (Philippians 4:6). It can be adoration, thanksgiving, confession, desperation, gratitude, or interceding for someone else.

The pattern for this is given to us by Jesus Himself in The Disciples' Prayer (Matthew 6:9-15), and demonstrated for us in its most dramatic expressions in The Lord's Prayer (John 17) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26/Mark 14/Luke 22).

The method is not of concern—the intent behind it is. It simply needs to be a grateful and authentic, true expression of what is on our hearts and minds along with a surrendering of those things to God (Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; James 5). The rest is mostly window dressing.

Prayer is an attitude of the heart and a surrendering of one's will to God's. It is in this approach to the throne of grace that we anchor and solidify our relationship with our Creator and Savior, and it is here that we properly prepare to minister His Word to those He brings.

LACK OF PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY

Our number-one tool is “properly interpreted Scripture, properly applied.” This being so, being in the Word and allowing it to instruct us, inform us, confront us, correct us, and transform us is just as critical for us in a counseling and discipling role as it is for those we are counseling and discipling.

It is *far* too easy for us—especially if we are knowledgeable and experienced—to “lean on our own understanding” and not remember that we are merely instruments in our Redeemer's hands, not the all-wise-and-insightful problem-solver.

Sitting under solid teaching of the Word of God where our assumptions and presumptions are challenged, and then “studying to see if these things are so,” is the responsibility of every believer. It is here that we are taught the nature and character of God, here that we are confronted by the transcendent truth rooted in God Himself, and here that we are instructed on how to live those truths out in every circumstance.

There is an admonition and a promise in Romans 12:2: “*And do not be conformed to this world, **but be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*”

Our part in this is the “renewing of your mind” part. We do this by discovering and saturating on the truth in God’s Word through our study of it.

God’s part in this enterprise is the “be transformed” part. You might find it interesting to know that the original language word for “transformed” is the same Greek word we get our word “metamorphosis” from—the process that takes a caterpillar and turns it into a butterfly. And it is a “passive present” verb, which means is it something someone else does to or for us.

It is in our study of and ruminating on God’s Word that we encounter the ever-refining work of the Holy Spirit as we learn to surrender more and more to the truth He helps us understand. In John 8, Jesus gives us two clear declarations about the importance to all believers about “abiding” [remain, continue, dwell] in His Word:

“If you continue [abide] in my Word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (31-32)

“So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (36)

For those involved in discipling and Biblical counseling, it is our mandate to be diligent in our study of God’s Word so that the work He has called us to will be both faithful and fruitful (2 Timothy 2:15). After all, as Paul so eloquently put it, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

LACK OF PERSONAL WORSHIP

Worship is showing honor, respect, and reverence for who God *is*. Praise—acknowledging what God has done—may be a component of worship, but worship itself is about God’s “God-ness” and His worthiness of being honored.

Often in modern Western Christianity, “praise & worship” equals “music and singing.” Interestingly enough, if you read through the Psalms where we find the largest collection of worship for God, while many of them were set to music, many of them were *not*. Worship is an attitude of the heart, not a performance of the body.

LACK OF PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND COMMUNITY

Here is where a great many mistakes in counseling practices can arise.

In Colossians 2:6-7, Paul reinforces what he has already stressed in verse Colossians 2:2: believers are dependent on one another for remaining solid in their faith in Christ, reinforcing and building their understanding of their identity in Christ, growing in their understanding of the nature and character of God, and being protected from the persuasive words of those ignorant of or disloyal to the faith.

For us as counselors and disciplers, this provides us with the kind of solid, godly one-anothering relationships that help us have the proper focus, proper agenda, proper decorum, proper motivation, proper wisdom, and proper surrender of the outcomes.

We have to keep in mind that we have the same propensity and inclination for evil as those we our counseling and discipling (Galatians 6:1). It is in safe, godly, and Biblically consistent one-anothering relationships that God provides the accountability and protections we need to safeguard us and those we counsel.

LACK OF PROPER SELF-CARE AND AFTER-CARE

Go, eat your food with joy, and drink your wine with a happy heart, because God has already approved your works. Let your clothes always be white, and do not spare precious ointment on your head. (Ecclesiastes 9:7-8)

We speak often of how we are “instruments in the Redeemer’s hands.” Interesting thing about an “instrument”: In order to be ready to use, it needs to be clean, free
How we answer these questions will be somewhat unique to each of us, yet there will be many similarities as well.

- Where do you find solace?
- What brings you comfort?
- What brings relief of tension and stress?
- Where do you go that allows you to rest fully?
- What activities replenish you mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically?

- Who do you have in your life that you can be starkly authentic with who will keep you accountable and will lovingly guide you back to the right path if you start to wander off it?
- Who can and will pray with and for you when you need to be ministered to the way you minister to others?

We have days that are good, days that are not-so-good, counseling sessions that energize, and counseling sessions that drain. But if the not-so-good and the draining become more and more prominent, it is time for a “checkup” and a focus on more purposed self-care.

How Self-Care and After-Care Differ

Self-care is the ongoing daily attention we pay to our own basic needs for survival, wellbeing, and general health and stability.

After-care addresses the purposed, intentional care we take of ourselves following a difficult counseling session — or series of sessions — that has taxed us in ways that leave us depleted, edgy, anxious, or any of the other signs that we have “absorbed” the toxicity of what has been shared with us.

Tired or Weary?

When we pour out, we need to be poured in to. The difference between being tired and being weary is rooted in where we have been drawing our strength as we engage in counseling. When we draw on our own strength, when we take on the responsibility for others’ outcomes, when we accept responsibility for whether or not our counselees succeed in experiencing the transformation they came to us to help them find, when we do not proactively invest in self-care and after-care, these are prime examples of drawing on and leaning on our own strength. The result is weariness.

Tired, on the other hand, is the natural result of investing emotional energy in the lives of the broken and wounded. It takes an emotional toll on us to listen to others’ stories of the sins they have committed and the evils they have suffered.

Basics and Balance

Balance between work and play, giving and receiving, accomplishing tasks and doing nothing are essential to effective self-care/after-care. Learn simple

strategies to nurture yourself throughout the day, including basics such as enough water, good nutrition, and movement and exercise.

Our spiritual health is key to all of the other areas of health and wellness that impact our daily lives, especially when function in the role of Biblical counselor.

Personal worship, prayer, Bible study, corporate worship, being in fellowship with other believers—these are essential to our basic and ongoing spiritual health. Without these spiritual essentials, emotional and physical wellbeing are compromised.

Secondary/Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue

Another important aspect of self-care and after-care is to be knowledgeable about secondary trauma and compassion fatigue. As soul-care providers, we listen to counselee' stories of depression, anger, fear, pain, trauma, or other issues daily. It is easy for us to absorb some of the emotional residue that attaches to their lives and stories. If we do not have avenues to purge all the toxic elements absorbed, we may develop secondary trauma or compassion fatigue.

Secondary trauma and compassion fatigue are not burn-out. Burn-out is more related to the day-to-day stressors of the ministry of counseling, whereas secondary trauma and compassion fatigue are directly related to what we absorb from our counselees' renderings.

- Secondary trauma may occur when issues counselees bring to us are similar to issues we may have encountered in our own lives.
- Vicarious trauma may occur when we hear stories from a counselee that impact us on a deep and personal level as if we actually experienced their experience along with them.
- Compassion fatigue may occur when issues counselees bring to us begin to exhaust our ability to work effectively.

Having an Action Plan

Look back at the personal inventory at the beginning of this section. Put a plan in place to engage in those specific things, and have them scheduled on a regular basis. You know as a counselor that if things are not planned for and scheduled, they are very likely not going to happen.

This is where intentionality comes in. There are several examples in Scripture where those who had put their hand to doing the work God had called them to who purposefully invested in self-care — both beforehand and afterwards.

When we examine the story of Nehemiah, we see that he took a mini-retreat before he engaged in the work of directing the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:11-12).

God Summons Us to Rest

God intends for us to work diligently, to rest, and to enjoy the work of our hands (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-10; 34:21; Ecclesiastes, 5:19).

God promises to give peace and rest from anxiety – an important promise for those engaged in Biblical counseling and pastoral ministry (Philippians 4:6-7; Hebrews 4:9-11).

Even Jesus understood and followed this principle and taught it to His disciples. One such example is in Mark 6:30-45. There is a great deal here, but let's look at the beginning of this section of the text and see what example Jesus left for us:

Then the apostles gathered around Jesus and told him everything they had done and taught. He said to them, "Come with me privately to an isolated place and rest a while" (for many were coming and going, and there was no time to eat). So they went away by themselves in a boat to some remote place. (30-32)

HOW WOULD YOU COUNSEL THIS...?

"I am so depressed all the time. I just can't seem to snap out of it."

Your Solution

What Scriptures Support Your Solution?

“I found out that that my son is smoking marijuana and drinking at parties. He claims to be a Christian. How can I get him to realize the seriousness of his actions?”

Your Solution

What Scriptures Support Your Solution?

“My husband has developed a friendship with a woman at work. He says that nothing is happening and that they are just friends. This makes me feel so insecure and unattractive. Am I wrong to be suspicious?”

Your Solution

What Scriptures Support Your Solution?

“My son, age 34, still lives at home and can't seem to hold down a job. Whenever I confront him, he becomes angry, defensive, and depressed. How can I get him to take responsibility for his life?”

Your Solution

What Scriptures Support Your Solution?

“My husband isn’t a believer and he said I can’t give money to the church, but I believe I should tithe on my own income.”

Your Solution

What Scriptures Support Your Solution?

“I’ve been diagnosed with advanced cancer. My doctor says it is treatable, but that he can’t guarantee the outcome. My friend tells me that God has promised to heal all disease if we just have enough faith and if I’m not healed it is because of sin in my life or because I or someone close to me does not believe.”

Your Solution

What Scriptures Support Your Solution?

