The Psychology of Counseling

Professional Techniques for Pastors, Teachers, Youth Leaders, and All Who Are Engaged in the Incomparable Art of Counseling

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Contents of this PDF File

Chapter 23 - EXTENDING YOUR COUNSELING MINISTRY

Chapter 24 - THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

Chapter 25 - SUCCESS IN COUNSELING

Chapter 26 - GROWING PROFESSIONALLY
Chapter 23 - EXTENDING YOUR COUNSELING MINISTRY

Every conscientious Christian leader is faced with the dilemma of “too much to do and too little time in which to do it.” Pressed with over crowded schedules, he sometimes wishes he could be in several places at once. As he sees the many needs about him, he may almost resent his human limitations. How he wishes he could somehow serve in several capacities at the same time. This search for time is especially critical in counseling. The Christian counselor realizes that for every one he sees, there are many others who also need help.

But many Christian leaders are learning that they can extend their counseling ministry beyond themselves. This extension is usually made possible in the following ways:

By training leaders in the church to assume responsibility for specific types of counseling.

By conducting discussion and study groups, thereby helping many people at the same time.

**Counseling Is Extended Through Christian Leaders**

Through assistants, associates and other Christian workers, a pastor or another leader may reach out to more people and provide them with much needed counsel. Most Christian workers who have counseling ability are only too happy to assist the pastor in such a responsible service. Offered this challenge, they eagerly take the required training and conscientiously apply it in their work.

**Reaching Children**

Many children have problems — some of greater and some of lesser severity.* Often these boys and girls can be helped by an understanding Sunday school teacher, the leader of a boys’ brigade, or a children’s choir director. Many children are being helped every year by dedicated teachers and children’s workers. Interestingly enough, the vast majority of these people have never opened a book on counseling. Consider how much their effectiveness would increase if they were given the opportunity to attend seminars in the basic techniques of counseling and the handling of common problems. Throughout the year a pastor, Christian education director or Sunday school superintendent should arrange meetings or “sharing sessions” for small groups of children’s workers.

The following are a few suggested topics for discussion in such seminars for churches, Christian day schools, camps, and other organizations.

- Children who are emotionally disturbed.
- Common problems at various age levels.
- Problems of the slow learners.
- Meeting the needs of the gifted child.
- Delinquency: Its early signs and solutions.
- How to lead a child to Christ.

Such a seminar was helpful to Mrs. Wilson, a Sunday school teacher, in understanding Karen, one of the children in her junior class.

Karen had always been an alert girl. Whenever the teacher asked a question, Karen was there with the answers, and invariably she had the right ones. But something happened. Karen began to
come to Sunday school unprepared. While the teacher talked, Karen appeared to drift off into a world of her own. The activities in the class no longer held her attention.

Mrs. Wilson had recently attended a study series for Sunday school teachers. At one of the sessions, the discussion centered around, “The Child Who Is Emotionally Disturbed.” From what she had learned, Mrs. Wilson realized that she should visit Karen's home.

What she saw there helped to explain the girl’s behavior. For ten years Karen had been an only child. Then, a few weeks before the teacher’s visit, a baby brother was born. The parents, especially the father, had long wanted a boy. During the ten years since Karen’s birth, they had almost given up hope of having another child. But now he was there, the long, awaited son, and

Karen was out in the cold. To some children this would not have been serious. But to Karen it was. She had not been told much about the arrival of the “new intruder,” and she was uncertain as to how a baby was born. In addition, Karen was left with some acquaintances of the family for two weeks while her mother remained several extra days in the hospital. This, combined with the fact that the parents were now spending all their time with the new baby, caused Karen to resent her little brother as well as her parents. At first she struck out with angry words. Strong discipline only served to aggravate the situation. Now she entered a little world of resentful silence.

Mrs. Wilson decided to ask Karen to meet her at the church two afternoons that week to help prepare for a class party. As the two worked together cutting out paper decorations, the teacher skillfully encouraged Karen to talk and tell how she felt about her baby brother. The second day, after Karen had freely expressed her hostility, she seemed to be relieved. As the weeks passed, her teacher went out of her way to help the child. Now that Mrs. Wilson understood Karen’s situation, she could give her the attention and counsel she so badly needed.

**Reaching Youth**

Adolescence is universally recognized as a period of turmoil. During this period a young person may become vulnerable to emotional and mental illness. Many teen-agers could be spared unnecessary emotional conflict, educational failure, moral tragedies and sometimes even suicide, if adequate counsel were available.

Unfortunately, the pressures of a busy schedule often hinder a pastor from devoting the time required for adequate preventive counseling. He is too involved with the serious problems of adults. But often there are youth leaders who are available. These leaders have already gained the confidence of the young people and are doing considerable counseling. Unwilling to discuss problems with their parents, teen-agers often seek out a youth leader whom they respect and consider their friend. Such leaders can function much better when they are adequately trained.

Through books, recordings and discussion groups, they can gain much insight into counseling.

Those who work with young people not only need to know the techniques of counseling; they should also have a fund of knowledge at their command. The following topics are helpful in preparing youth leaders for the important role of youth counselor.

1. Understanding Young People
2. Improving Leadership Skills
3. The Kind of Parents and Teachers Young People Want
4. Helping Teen-agers to Become Mature
Jerry was a 15-year-old boy from a Christian family. As he stood before the juvenile judge, the records indicated that this was his first offense. He and two buddies had “borrowed” a car and had driven it around the block several times, each taking a turn. As they were parking the car where they had found it, the owner walked up. Then came a little skirmish with the law. The judge warned the boys severely. Jerry was frightened. He had not expected to get into so much trouble. He could not explain why he had done it. He wanted to talk about it. Yet his parents did nothing but blame and warn him, so he did not feel free to discuss the matter with them. He hesitated to go to his pastor.

Then Jerry thought about Mr. Johnson, the Youth Director. He would go to him. He “understood the guys.”

Mr. Johnson did help Jerry, and his effectiveness was due in part to the deeper understanding he had gained through the leadership workshops that had been held in the church. Now as he worked with Jerry, he was able to help the boy gain insights into his own problems.

A pastor can also extend his counseling ministry through establishing a simple plan of vocational guidance for the youth of his church. He can train his youth workers to keep a card file on every unmarried young person. Each card should contain such information as name, address, birth date, educational status and vocational plans. Most of the information can be filled out by the young person himself. Through individual and small group counseling sessions, the Sunday school teacher or youth leader maintains notes on each person concerning his educational progress and vocational plans. Periodic interviews of this kind are invaluable in offering vocational guidance which is so desperately needed among Christian youth. In addition it gives young people the opportunity to bring to light many personal problems that otherwise might remain concealed. This systematic plan extends the pastor’s counseling ministry to many who otherwise might never have the advantage of talking to him individually.

Reaching Adults

The ministry of counseling should also be extended throughout the adult Sunday school classes. Take the case of Jim and Pamela. They were a couple who had attended the young adult class for some time. Then, one Sunday Jim lingered after class for a moment to speak to the teacher, Mr. Stuart.

“Could Pam and I talk with you for a few minutes sometime soon?”

“Certainly,” the teacher replied, “how about Tuesday evening?”

“Fine, we’ll see you then.”

The evening arrived. As the couple explained their problem, it became evident that they were deadlocked over the discipline of their children.

Mr. Stuart listened sympathetically and drew from his experience and training. Although Mr. Stuart had never taken any formal college courses in counseling, he had a genuine interest in people and considerable natural skill in dealing with them. The pastor recognized Mr. Stuart’s
aptitude for counseling and had encouraged him to develop this ability by reading books, attending lectures and viewing films on the techniques of counseling. Now s Jim and Pam placed their problem before him, Mr. Stuart was better able to help them because he had acquired some training in counseling. Thus a trained adult Sunday school teacher was able to extend the counseling ministry of the church.

As pastors and Christian leaders use this method, they must select their personnel with care. The following are several factors that should be taken into consideration:

**First**, some people seem to have little or no aptitude for counseling. They may habitually, though unintentionally, rub people the wrong way. They mean well but are not sensitive to other people’s feelings. Although extensive training may help, such people rarely make good counselors.

**Second**, Christian leaders are not exempt from having problems of their own. Although they may have a desire to help others, their own problems can distort their understanding, causing actual harm. They need help themselves.

**Third**, some people tend to become too officious when delegated an important responsibility. They may think they are protecting the pastor when actually they are sidetracking people who should see him personally.

**Fourth**, the counseling assistants you choose must be scrupulous in keeping confidence. Every Christian leader knows that an unchecked tale bearer can almost ruin an organization. How much more dangerous such a person is when he has access to intimate personal information about other members! Of course, such people should not be church leaders. But a few edge in – so counselors should be carefully selected.

**Counseling Is Extended Through Discussion and Study Groups.**

Another effective means of extending one’s counseling ministry is through discussion and study groups with the adults and young people themselves. In these sessions (meeting perhaps two to four times) the principal aim is therapeutic or instructive in nature. Such groups might be geared to parents, teen-agers, Sunday school teachers, or other classifications. Many people in need of help would never seek individual counsel but they would attend group meetings. The following suggestions may be helpful in planning these study groups:

(1) Listen to recordings on counseling and other psychological subjects.
(2) Review books on counseling.
(3) View and discuss appropriate training films.
(4) Discuss pamphlets and other printed literature.
(5) Listen to lectures by specialists such as physicians, psychologists, psychiatrists and other Christian leaders.

Group counseling requires free discussion among the participants. The counselor acts as a moderator, encouraging discussion and interpreting significant interaction between members. In many larger churches, adults may fit into such study groups as:

- Young married couples
- Parents of pre-school children
- Parents of primary age children
• Parents of pre-adolescents
• Parents of teen-agers
• Unmarried adults
• Senior citizens

Discussions could center around such topics as:

• What makes a strong Christian home?
• Children in the Christian home
• Meeting the needs of teen-agers
• After you have said, “I Do”
• Discipline in the Christian home
• Sex education in the Christian home
• Children with emotional and behavior problems

Let us not forget that even Moses, great man of God that he was, needed assistance in leading his people. In Exodus 17:11-13 we read, “Then, while Moses held his hand raised, Israel gained the upper hand, but when he lowered his hand, Amalek won. But Moses’ hands grew weary, so they took a stone and placed it under him. He sat on it and Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on each side, so that his hands kept steady until sunset. Thus Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sharpness of the sword.”

Indeed, pastors and Christian leaders have physical limitations. And their hands grow weary. But by means of training other leaders, and through discussion groups, they can extend their ministries effectively.
Chapter 24 - THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

The wise counselor never overestimates his counselee’s spirituality. We can never take for
granted that people are where they should be spiritually. The basic solution to many difficulties is
a closer walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although people may have organic and emotional problems which must be dealt with by medical
doctors and other specialists, the great majority of their problems stem from the fact that they are
not letting Christ control their thoughts and actions. *No one fully realizes what Christ is able to
do for him.* There are unlimited resources available for a person who truly seeks God.
Undoubtedly the greatest mistake made by counselors is that they fail to utilize spiritual forces.

This is an insidious trick of Satan. Too often things of God are discounted or completely left out.

The result? We tend to work on a human level rather than on a spiritual level.

A pastor once confided in a retired missionary about a church official who was having a serious
problem.

“I need your advice,” said the pastor. “Frankly, I don’t know what to do. Have you
any suggestions?”

‘Well,” replied the missionary, “as you describe it I’m prone to think that it is a case of a believer
who is far from the Lord. Perhaps you have been working around the problem. I am wondering if
you have called sin by its real name. Have you actually dealt with him concerning his relationship
to the Lord Jesus Christ?”

After talking confidentially for a while, the minister admitted that in all possibility this man’s
difficulty was a case of old-fashioned sin. So he counseled with the man again, pointing out his
backslidden condition, then helping him surrender to Christ. In a short time the man’s problem
was solved.

Such cases are common. A Christian worker counseled with a woman who was seriously
disturbed – on the verge of taking her life. Day after day she grieved over an only son who had
died just a few months before. Her entire life had been wrapped up in her boy –and now that he
was gone, she felt life was not worth living. As the Christian worker talked with her, she clearly
saw that her life was centered in the boy rather than in *Christ.* This was misplaced affection. If
she had been living close to the Lord, honoring and serving Him, the loss of her son would not
have caused her such undue confusion.

However, she was now in a serious condition, unable to sleep or eat, losing weight and entering
into serious stages of mental illness. Medication was needed to induce sleep. The counselor spent
most of his time helping her spiritually. Within a short time, she rededicated her life completely
to Christ. This marked a turning point in her mental and emotional well-being. From then on she
started to recover. As she began to read the Word, to study, to witness and to pray, her affections
soon turned to the Lord and she developed a completely new outlook on life. Indeed, her problem
was a spiritual one. What she needed was spiritual help. Yet, if she had fallen into the hands of an
unbelieving psychologist or psychiatrist she might have continued for years without getting the
assistance she needed so desperately.
Roy, a man in his thirties, was having serious employment problems. In his youth his heart had been set on becoming a medical doctor. After college he took one year of medical school. Then because of finances, he had to drop out. Several years passed and now his present work in a printing shop was intolerably dull. It affected his relationship with his employer and his associates. It also affected his attitude at home. He developed serious headaches. But after a series of counseling sessions with his pastor he began to gain insight into his own problem.

While in college, God had challenged him to enter full time a Christian service. But Roy had his own profession in mind and so he closed his ears to the call of God. This stemmed from selfish desire and pride. Now, for years he had been out of God’s will. As he talked these things over with his pastor he saw the root his difficulty. He surrendered his life completely to God and soon he began to achieve a much better adjustment at home, at the shop and in every area of life. Shortly afterward he began to take Bible training. Later he went to the foreign field as a printer.

Needless to say, Roy became very happy -- in the center of God’s will.

Another case was that of a Christian man who had push himself physically beyond the danger point. He had an insatiable desire for wealth. A Christian? Yes, but not a consecrated one Satan had tempted him to “kill himself” making money. As man of unusual ability, he was constantly increasing his bank account. However, he was destroying himself, as he grew wealthy. In this respect he was a poor man and to be pitied. After counseling sessions he began to realize that although he was a Christian, Satan was causing him to misplace values in life. Realizing this, the man sought God’s forgiveness and surrendered completely to Him. When he did, he was released from the obsessive compulsion to work day and night in order to make more money. As time went on he developed into a well-balanced man God. He learned the true meaning of stewardship in time, talent and money.

And so the list continues, people needing spiritual help. A counselor cannot assume that a counselee is where he should be spiritually. Even though he may be an official in the church, he may not be walking on consecrated spiritual ground. Christian counselors also find that some counselees have never experienced a personal relationship with God. They may or not be attending church, but they have not been born again Doubtless, the counseling privilege that dwarfs all others is that soul winning.* God’s Word tells us, “He that winneth souls wise” (Proverbs 11:30). This still holds true.

Many of the most successful soul winners down through the years have used several simple Bible references. For example: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans3:23); and “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). When personal guilt is admitted, the next step is made plain. “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Soul winning is and should be uncomplicated. The infinite wonder of its composition does not make life hard to transmit. In this respect eternal life is like other marvelous forms of life. While bearing the inestimable value of the Creator-Redeemer, it is transmitted according to fixed laws.

The phase of counseling which deals with soul winning should never confuse birth with growth. Our birth in Christ is the real point of our beginning in eternity. We can take no particle of credit for it. At the same time, we may marvel at the “pre-natal” powers and influences that were disposed in favor of the one who accepts Christ.
Growth is another thing. It appears to have no ending. But growth cannot occur until first there is life. The Christian believer is a new species. God can afford to enhance this investment forever.

“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18).

The motive for soul winning is infinitely greater than many Christian counselors realize. The heroic Moravian missionaries sensed the heart of it. They bore banners of a Lamb on which was written: “To win for the Lamb that was slain the reward of His sufferings.” They laid hold of God’s viewpoint. He, for the joy (of obtaining the prize) that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising and ignoring the shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2 ANT).

Suddenly the soul-winning counselor sees his privilege in a new climate. He has a positive role far more fervent than the counterfeit reform of the dedicated communist. He is at once the beneficiary and messenger of God’s eternal gift. He cannot languish at this task like a clock-watching junior clerk. He cannot regard his work in the cold, antiseptic manner of a laboratory technician.

Through a lifetime, at any price, against all odds, and under the smile of heaven, he must strive to set forth the glorious claims of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every task he will ever attempt, every word he will seek to speak, every joy he will contemplate, will be subordinated to God’s great plan of redemption. The soul winner knows that this truth is utterly hidden from an unregenerate world. Hidden, alas, from most of Christendom, for is not the latter as a pretty, pouting bride, preening over her proud person and glamorous garments instead of rejoicing in her Glorious Bridegroom?

The Lord Jesus Christ is the center and circumference of our purpose. Strange to our redeemed hearts that Christ should have to make a beachhead landing on this microcosmic part of His creation in order to rescue us. Strange too, that many do not want to be rescued. Strange that out of this tiny planet He should His eternal Bride to reign with Him forever. Strange and wonderful that earth should be the crossroads of space and eternity.

After a man has trusted in Christ he needs more than the counselor’s good wishes. He needs to develop a strong program spiritual growth. This carefully considered plan, blessed of will bring spiritual results just as a carefully planted field -- adequate rainfall will yield an abundant harvest. Probably nothing a counselor can do, except to lead a person

Christ, is as important as helping the counselee establish a regular program of spiritual development. The keys to this program are clearly outlined in God’s Word. They are generally known to Christians, yet they are often overlooked:

**A daily plan of communication with God.** This time alone with God in prayer should probably be established both in the morning and in the evening. It is a time of thankfulness an– petition. It is the hour of communion and fellowship with God. As we wait on Him He speaks to us and shows us what is best.

**A daily plan of reading God’s Word.** This is the way to know God’s will -- seeking His guidance through reading the Bible. This plan should include reading in both the Old and New Testaments. The reading should be orderly and meditative, always asking God to reveal what we need for that particular day. A system of marking special verses and of memorization is essential, too.
**A plan of regular church attendance.** In the fellowship of believers there is strength not known in any other way. Worshiping God, hearing His Word, giving testimonies, singing the great hymns and associating with others of like precious faith truly build up the man of God.

**A carefully considered plan of witnessing.** This is one of the greatest joys in the Christian life. As a believer begins to learn ways of telling others about Jesus, a new brilliance and luster adorns his daily walk. Through personal testimony, printed material and other means of witnessing, he develops into a mature Christian.

**A plan of reading Christian literature.** It has been wisely said that every consecrated believer should be in the process of reading a Christian book. Through Christ-centered books, magazines and Christian recordings, a believer brings the influence of godly men and women into his life.

They will challenge him to live above the world and to devote himself completely to God. These five procedures combine to make a strong program for spiritual development. But it is the counselor’s responsibility to help each counselee enter into such a program, then maintain it. A little time during each session should be devoted to considering each of these five points. If the counselee experiences difficulty in any area, the counselor can help him gain strength. In time the counselee will make great strides in his spiritual growth and he will overcome, as well as prevent, many serious problems in his life.

The Great Physician! Oh, how He longs to bring spiritual healing to the creatures whom He fashioned and whom He loves! What a privilege is ours, as Christian counselors, to become God’s very agents to nurture the souls of men!
Chapter 25- SUCCESS IN COUNSELING

A great man once said, “Constant success shows us but one side of the world.” This surely applies to counseling. If you have never failed in helping people, you have never done much counseling. But the fact that you fail need not make you a failure. Hubbard wrote, “A failure is a man who has blundered but is not able to cash in on the experience.” Often failure can teach us what success cannot.

The professional counselor must not be discouraged if a certain percentage of his cases seem to be failures. He knows that all people do not respond. However, inexperienced counselors often tend to blame themselves for this lack of response. That is why it is important to look at the reasons why a counselee may not respond to therapy. The following are some of the common causes for seeming failure:

Satan may interfere. God says, “Be well-balanced—temperate, sober minded; be vigilant and cautious at all times, for that enemy of yours, the devil, roams around like a lion roaring (in fierce hunger), seeking someone to seize upon and devour” (I Peter 5:8 ANT). In these days of “scientific enlightenment,” many have thrown overboard their belief in a personal devil. This, of course, is exactly what Satan wants. Enemy agents can best carry on their malicious work when the people of a nation are too naive to believe that they are there. And Satan is an enemy agent. He is the arch-saboteur of God’s plan of salvation.

God wants people to be born anew spiritually. He would have His creatures find the happiness He has planned for them. He wants them to become dynamically related to Him. From God radiates all goodness, beauty and truth. From Him flows the healing water that brings good mental and spiritual health.

Satan lies in wait to sabotage this therapeutic power, to pollute this beneficial stream. When your counselee begins to make progress, especially on the spiritual plane, Satan may try to interfere. Resist him with the weapons he most fears: the Word and prayer. Above all, do not try to fight him with merely intellectual weapons. That would be like trying to ward off an H-bomb attack with a bow and arrow.

God has given every person the right to choose between serving Him or Satan. In spite of your Christian love, fervent prayer and skillful use of the Word, a counselee may choose Satan’s way. Though, of course, you will be disappointed, you should not be discouraged.

A person may not want help. Another reason some people do not respond may come as a surprise for some inexperienced counselors. It is this: some people do not want to change. Changing is painful and as soon as they get a taste of the discomfort involved, they decide it is easier to continue with their problems. They are like some obese people who have been advised by their doctors to diet. They start out with good intentions. But after a few days (or hours) they are overwhelmed by hunger pangs. At first they snatch one illicit tidbit. Then another. At last they throw away the diet altogether and resign themselves to being overweight. Changing is painful. Some enjoy the advantages that accompany illness. They become accustomed to shifting responsibility in the direction of others. People take care of them, sympathize with them and make allowances for them. Being sick has its advantages. Sometimes the sick are actually frightened by the demands of good health.
A person who has a psychological problem may have the same reaction. When counting the cost, he may not really want to rid himself of his problem. Unless a counselee is convinced that doing so is worth the effort and the loss of the secondary advantages, a counselor will probably fail to help him.

**Rehabilitation requires time.** Like any growth process, rehabilitation does not take place rapidly. One cannot imagine a farmer digging up seeds he had recently planted to see if they had sprouted yet. Or a surgeon reopening an incision several times a day to see if the internal healing was proceeding quickly enough. Yet some counselors are just as impatient about their counselee’s progress. If they do not see immediate improvement, they are ready to admit defeat. They are like people who are overweight -- they want to slim down fast. But they fail to take into consideration that the excess weight was accumulated over a period of time. It also takes time to lose it.

So the counselor is not to be discouraged if rehabilitation seems slow. Results are often concealed at first. Only those who are patient, harvest the good that they sow. As Longfellow advises,

“Learn to labor and to wait.”

**There may be personality conflicts.** At times a counselor cannot help his counselee simply because he is unable to establish proper rapport. For some reason, the counselor does not “click” with his client.

Accepting the fact that we have rough spots in our personality, we must not be discouraged if we occasionally encounter some friction with a counselee. When this occurs we can usually refer the counselee to another in whom we have confidence. If a personality conflict is causing the trouble, another counselor may get excellent results where we would have failed. And vice versa. Some people just rub each other the wrong way!

**It may be an incorrect diagnosis.** Another reason why a counselor may fail to help a person is that he has misjudged the case. Unfortunately, valuable time may be spent before a counselor reaches a thorough understanding of the causes, then changes his approach. Not infrequently he realizes his mistake only after he has lost the counselee.

A certain percentage of errors may be attributed to human fallibility. The physician faces a similar dilemma. But many mistakes can be prevented by avoiding haste. Do not settle prematurely on the causes of the counselee’s problem. Let him talk, then take your cues from him. In a sense, he knows what his problem is -- if not consciously, at least on an unconscious level. If you are patient and alert, in time he will reveal the problem to you. If you are able to help most of the people you counsel, you are a successful counselor. The secret of success in counseling is hard work, professional growth, and divine guidance. What a joy to do our very best, then depend upon God for His blessing!
Chapter 26 - GROWING PROFESSIONALLY

One mark of a professional person is the desire to improve his understanding and skill. This search for greater competence emanates from the fact that in his chosen field a man desires to do his best. He wants to make his greatest contribution, yet he realizes that no one can be fully prepared for his work by merely taking courses and serving internships. Even if this were possible, he would not continue to be prepared because new developments demand constant study and training. Like a soldier marching with an army, if he does not keep moving forward, he is left behind.

Few fields offer more challenge for professional growth than counseling. This is due, in part, to modern advance in human understanding. New insights continually unfold before us as we gain experience and as we keep pace with the findings of modern research. Also, as Christians, we grow professionally when we develop spiritually. As we gain more spiritual depth, we see life in a truer perspective. It is only as a person increases in godly wisdom that he can work at his maximum ability as a counselor. As he depends completely upon the Lord he gains new insights. But growing professionally is not an automatic process. It is carefully planned, then systematically carried out. The following are ways counselors are able to deepen their understandings and improve their skills:

**Taking courses**
Today many courses in professional subjects are available. Christian counselors are often within driving distance of a university, college, hospital or some institution that offers helpful courses evenings or on Saturdays. The intellectual stimulation provided by a good professional course is a strong factor in promoting growth.

Take the case of Mrs. Richards, a Sunday school teacher. The teen-age girls in her class had many problems. Because they liked her, they often brought their questions and difficulties to her. Feeling a need for training in the field of counseling, Mrs. Richards decided to take a course in this subject. There was no university or seminary within reasonable distance. But a hospital in the town offered a course in counseling designed for nurses. Mrs. Richards was permitted to attend.

Naturally she found that some aspects of the course did not apply in her situation; but many did. As the semester progressed she gained valuable insights which she applied in counseling. She had taken a first step toward professional growth.

**Attending meetings and lectures**
Pastor Brooks was not as fortunate as Mrs. Richards. No courses were available in the town where he ministered. Yet he felt his need for professional growth. Many of the townspeople brought problems to him that ordinarily should have been handled by a psychologist or psychiatrist, had there been one in that vicinity.

In this situation, Pastor Brooks did the best he could. From time to time special lectures and meetings were held at the county seat a few miles away. Whenever one of these gave promise of helping him in counseling, he attended. Over the years he amassed an abundant store of valuable information which was useful to him in his work. He also made the acquaintance of a number of stimulating professional people to whom he could occasionally refer cases. In these ways he increased his understanding and skill.
Reading in your field
There is one thing that anyone can do to stimulate growth, regardless of the opportunities available in the community. That is to read good books.

Bob and Frank were roommates in their last year of seminary.

After graduation, both became assistant pastors in large churches. This involved considerable work with young people. Both were called upon to do counseling. But here the similarity ended. Bob felt that the seminary course he had taken in pastoral counseling was all that he needed. He did little additional reading in the field. As the years went by, he assumed a pastorate of his own.

He gave most of his time to preaching and reading books on theology, but opportunities to reach people individually in their time of need were limited.

Frank, on the other hand, saw that a large portion of his ministry centered in personal counseling. He began to read books and articles in counseling and related topics. He subscribed to a professional journal and kept abreast of the latest developments in research and techniques. Although he had little opportunity to attend lectures or courses in the field, his conscientious reading and application stimulated his professional growth immensely. Over the years he became more and more in demand by those needing individual counseling. And as he helped people to solve their problems he pointed them to Jesus. Because his experiences in counseling enabled him to make his sermons more practical, his preaching also improved. Now he made his messages relevant to people’s needs.

Using recordings
Many professional men and women are recognizing the value of recordings. People are busy and time is often scarce. For many, records meet a need.

In some communities, medical doctors meet during the lunch hour and listen to professional recordings on medical science. Counselors and ministers can also find recordings helpful.

Recordings on psychological topics are available at some university libraries. A variety of recordings on counseling and Christian psychology can be obtained through the Audio Bible Society. These are appropriate both for leaders and laymen. They lend themselves to individual or group listening and discussion sessions.

Viewing films
Another means of growing professionally is through the media of films. Many excellent motion pictures are available through local libraries, schools, Bible institutes and universities. In most public school districts, the school psychologist or guidance director will gladly recommend psychological films that are available.

Local film agencies are also prepared to furnish titles and sources of effective films. Some motion pictures developed by such companies as McGraw-Hill are not religious in nature and they do not indicate the Christian aspects of counseling, yet they do present some vital information which is helpful to all Christian counselors.

After a pastor, for example, has seen a film which is helpful in counseling, he may wish to use it with other leaders in the church or community. When he follows the showing by a discussion, the pastor will gain much himself from the contributions of various group members.
Investing time and money in professional organizations

Those who are really interested in their profession are willing to expend effort, time and money to advance it. As they involve themselves in counseling as a profession, they grow in that direction. One of the ways to grow professionally is to join organizations that promote the art of counseling. Naturally, the ideal situation would be to join an evangelical Christian group. However, this is not always possible. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned from a secular organization. Since counseling is a science, surely we can gain from those who have made it their lifetime study. Through associating with other counselors we have the opportunity to profit from their experiences. A problem may be new to us. But someone else may have worked with many such cases. We can all benefit from the experience and findings of others.

Studying related professions

It is important to be acquainted with related professions. A general knowledge of health and hygiene, basic physiology and principles of neurology and endocrinology can be very helpful. This knowledge enables a counselor to know when a referral is necessary and which specialist would be most appropriate. In addition, understanding related fields sheds light on one’s own specialty.

Knowledge in these areas can be obtained by taking courses, reading, attending lectures and meetings or any of the other methods previously discussed.

Carrying an active research

A person does not need to wear a white coat or lock himself in a laboratory to qualify as a research scientist. Anyone who applies the scientific method in an effort to advance human knowledge can rightly be called a scientist.

So it is in the field of counseling. There is always need for grass roots research. And our findings are not only of benefit to others; we also experience valuable growth ourselves.

Some Christian leaders have seen the need for practical, active research and are doing something about it. One pastor decided to take a census of the kinds of problems experienced by the adolescents in his church. The results were rather surprising but indeed helpful in planning a youth program. In addition, the pastor presented his findings at a meeting of the evangelical ministerial association. A few weeks later another minister in the group presented a study of the most common problems in the Christian home. Everyone in the group benefited from these studies. But undoubtedly, the men who did the research gained the most. They compared their findings with the results of other studies. They sharpened their skills of research and did some independent thinking. And they grew professionally.

Writing articles

Many people have a desire to write, to see their ideas and experiences in printed form. Yet few ever manage to fulfill this urge. Perhaps time is a deterrent. But another is the disappointment they experience when they discover how clumsy their unpolished thoughts appear on paper.

Writing an idea down is often the acid test of its soundness. Flaws in our thinking may not show up until they are down on paper. There they are brought into sharper focus. When we put an idea in writing, go over it several times, sharpen it up and then submit it to others for suggestions, it improves greatly. In the light of this close scrutiny, it is easy to see whether an idea is worth ending or whether it should be discarded.
Take the case of Art Williams. Although Art worked as a rug salesman, his real interest was his Sunday school class of young adults. His students had confidence in him and often came to him with their problems. Art had taken a few courses in psychology and he liked and understood people. He also knew his Bible and loved the Lord.

Frequently during the lesson, Art would discuss the significance of Christian living to good mental and emotional health. One day the pastor suggested that Art submit some of his ideas to a Christian magazine so that others might benefit from them. At first he was reluctant. He wondered if anyone would be interested in printing his thoughts. But on further persuasion he decided to try. He conscientiously wrote and rewrote a short article. At last he submitted it. It was rejected - but Art was no quitter. He rewrote it and submitted it again. After one or two more rejections, the article was accepted by a fine Christian magazine. Now that he had learned the desired style and had clarified his thinking, Art had little trouble getting other articles accepted. Did he grow professionally? Indeed he did. And his class also reaped the benefits of his growth.

**Teaching**

It is truly said that no one in a classroom learns as much as does the teacher. The teacher gives thought and planning to what he is to teach. He reads extensively, considering what others have to say on the subject. He refines and reshapes his own ideas. He examines other points of view. As students raise challenging questions, the teacher considers them carefully, often gaining new insights himself. Hence, teaching courses or conducting classes in counseling or related fields is one of the most effective means of growing professionally.

**Evaluating your work**

The time-worn advice of the ancient sage to “know thyself” is an appropriate motto for all counselors. This is because one of the best ways to improve one’s self is to examine his own work. A counselor can look back at his procedures and techniques with a view toward improving. Perhaps this is part of what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, “If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.”

Looking at our mistakes helps us to avoid repeating them. Owning up to our weaknesses allows us to find ways to overcome them. It is a wise counselor who recognizes his need for self-evaluation.

The following questions can serve as a basic guide to help you evaluate your counseling:

- Do you prepare for each counseling session by reviewing information about the case?
- Realizing that counseling is a process and not a lecture, do you arrange for a sufficient number of appointments with each counselee?
- Do you keep distractions at a minimum so the counselee can make full use of the time?
- Do you devote your complete attention to the counselee?
- Do you let the counselee establish his own pattern of divulging information?
- Do you exert leadership, yet maintain a flexible approach to each new development?
- Do you wait for the counselee’s “real” problem to emerge?
- Do you encourage the counselee to rid himself of tensions and fears?
- Do you explore the setting of a person’s problem?
- Do you accept the counselee as he is, even though his ideas differ from yours?
- Do you continue to focus on the counselee’s problem?
- Do you make an effort to help the counselee grow in self understanding?
- Do you help the counselee find the basic causes of his difficulty?
• Do you keep in mind the fact that many problems have physical causes?
• Do you welcome pauses in your counseling sessions?
• Do you endeavor to maintain an objective attitude toward the counselee and his problems?
• Do you keep in mind the fact that decisions must be emotionally as well as intellectually acceptable to the counselee?
• Do you approach problems as having several “sides”?
• Do you help the counselee to accept responsibility for his own problems and solutions?
• Do you make the counselee aware of his and your joint responsibilities in the counseling relationship?
• Do you handle direct questions discreetly?
• Do you recognize problems that are not within your competence or that can most appropriately be handled by others, then refer the counselee to an appropriate resource?
• Do you enlist the cooperation of community resources in assisting you with various types of problems?
• Do you keep a brief written summary of each session?
• Realizing— that no counselor is effective with every counselee, do you make allowance for seeming “failure”?
• Do you gain insight into the counselee’s spiritual condition?
• Do you use Scripture effectively with each counselee?
• Do you help the counselee to set up a definite program for spiritual development?
• Do you seek God’s guidance and wisdom in each counseling session?

“I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5)

As we evaluate our own work we find strengths to take advantage of, errors to correct, insights to develop, mistakes to avoid, skills to apply and weaknesses for which to be watchful. Then, with the help of God, we will grow professionally as well as personally and spiritually.

(Several questions in this section are based upon those in Clifford Erickson’s book, The Counseling Interview.)