

PASTORAL COUNSELING

INTRODUCTION

How do people handle their personal problems? Many people do nothing except to hope that the situation will eventually take care of itself, others pray, and a sizable number turn to family and friends for counsel. When people decide to seek professional help, many go to a clergyman.

Thus, regardless of his training or desires, the church leader, and especially the pastor, does not enjoy the privilege of electing whether or not he will counsel with people. They inevitably bring their problems to him for his best guidance and wisest care. He cannot avoid this. His choice is not between counseling and not counseling, but between counseling in a disciplined and skilled way and counseling in an undisciplined and unskilled way.

Skilled counseling is a complex activity. It depends first of all on a basic understanding of human behavior. It also involves knowledge of counseling techniques. The purpose of this course is to give some basic guidance and knowledge in the procedures for effective counseling.

I. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS IN COUNSELING

A. **Counseling Defined:** A relationship between two or more persons in which one person (the counselor) seeks to advise, encourage and/or assist another person or persons (the counselee) to deal more effectively with the problems of life.

B. **Some Goals in Counseling:**

1. A changing of the counselee's behavior, attitudes or values
2. Preventing more serious problems from developing
3. Teaching social skills
4. Encouraging expression of emotions
5. Giving support in times of need
6. Instilling insight
7. Guiding as a decision is made
8. Teaching responsibility
9. Stimulating spiritual growth
10. Helping the counselee to mobilize his inner resources in times of crisis.

C. **The Setting for Counseling**

1. Can be done almost anywhere...in a home, pastor's office, back of an empty room, in a hospital room etc.
2. Privacy important
3. Choose a quiet location, free from interruptions, if possible.
4. Behavior of the counselor matters: don't leaf through papers, doodle, slouch in the chair, look bored etc. Expression of the face, tone of voice, posture and gestures all convey our real feelings.

D. **Personal Characteristics of the Counselor**

1. Self understanding
 - a. A counselor who has not face up to the problems of his own life and his reactions to them will not be effective with others.
 - b. Needs self-knowledge...awareness of his own beliefs and values.
 - c. Knowing yourself better involves:
 - 1) Reflecting on our own characteristics, strengths and weaknesses
 - 2) Discussing the results of these reflections with a respected friend or experienced counselor.
 - 3) Asking the Holy Spirit to guide us in our self evaluation
2. Psychological Characteristics needed to be effective in counseling:
 - a. Understanding of others
 - b. Acceptance: genuine respect and interest in the counselee as a person, whether naturally "likable" or not.
 - c. Social distance: be enough detached from the counselee to be objective, but enough involved to "feel" with him.
 - d. Ability to get along with people.
 - e. Experience
3. Spiritual Characteristics
 - a. Born again Christian
 - b. Capable...God-fearing, honest, readily available, willing to help
 - c. Familiar with the Word of God

E. **Characteristics of the Counselee**

1. Must be cooperative
2. Must be interested in changing his behavior
3. Must have a favorable opinion of the counselor
4. Must have an expectation that things will get better
5. Must be willing to face himself.

F. **Counseling Skills and Techniques**

1. Before the interview:
 - a. Appear ready and unhurried
 - b. Arrange to keep the counseling period free from interruptions
 - c. Review the counselee's case history. Be sure you do not confuse him, or facts about him, with another.
 - d. Pray
 - e. Be ready on time
2. During the interview:
 - a. Start by working on the relationship

- 1) At the beginning, support the counselee. Make him feel relaxed, unthreatened.
 - 2) Stimulate him to talk. Make stimulating remarks if it is hard for him to begin, such as: "What would you like to talk about today?" "Begin where it seems easiest" etc.
- b. Listen attentively
- 1) Give alert concentration and undivided attention to what he says
 - 2) Don't let your mind wander
 - 3) Try not to show shock or disapproval
 - 4) Attempt to understand things from his point of view.
 - 5) Encourage by nodding the head, smiling, asking a question such as "What then?" "Anything else" etc.
- c. Watch carefully
- 1) Speech and actions can give clues as to the problem.
 - 2) Repeated reference to a topic may tell what is uppermost in his mind.
 - 3) Often the counselee will not reveal, or does not realize, the real problem, which makes this initial study of his words and responses necessary.
- d. Don't be afraid of silence
- e. Question wisely. Don't ask too many questions at once. Think before you ask. Use the following guidelines:
- 1) Ask open-ended questions: One that calls for more response, not a simple "yes" or "no" answer.
 - 2) Avoid "either-or" questions. (Example: "Do you want to get married or stay single?") This causes him to give a response, then stop.
 - 3) Try to use indirect questions. In this manner you inquire without seeming to. (Example: "How does it feel to have your marriage breaking up?" is direct. "I wonder how it feels to have your marriage breaking up?" is indirect.)
 - 4) Avoid a series of questions. (All at once. He will not be able to choose what to answer.)
 - 5) Ask "Why?" sparingly. It may have a negative, rejecting connotation.
- f. Learn how to respond appropriately. This depends on the situation. Types of responses and examples:
- 1) Probing. Example: "Tell me more about this" "What then?" etc.
 - 2) Understanding. Example: "this must be very hard." "In other words, you feel..." etc.

- 3) Supportive. "Many people feel this way." "Things will get better when..." etc.
 - 4) Interpretive. "What seems to be happening is..." "You seem to be saying that..." etc.
 - 5) Evaluative. "That was wise." "The Bible says that is sin." Etc.
 - 6) Action. "I would advise you to..." "Why don't you..." etc.
- g. Make use of spiritual resources.
- 1) Pray at the beginning and end of the interview. Use appropriate Scripture.
 - 2) Realize that in most cases actual counseling may still be necessary, as well as prayer.
- h. End positively.
- 1) May be helpful to summarize what has been said.
 - 2) May discuss what the counselee should do next.
 - 3) Give a word of encouragement, and prayer.
3. After the interview:
- a. Jot down a few notes immediately so as to remember details later.
 - b. Keep the interview confidential
4. Other consideration:
- a. Appointments
 - 1) Aside from emergencies, should be prearranged
 - 2) Thirty to sixty minutes is usually long enough for one interview
 - b. Keeping records
 - 1) Notes (very brief) may be taken during the interview as well as after. Too much concentration on writing may distract from actual listening. Do not put negative thoughts, which you would not want the counselee to see.
 - 2) Keep locked up. If this is not possible, don't take notes.

G. Counseling Ethics

1. Keep confidence. Never use information for sermon illustrations, even in a disguised manner.
2. Avoid physical contact. A handshake is sufficient.
3. Do not use counselees to satisfy your own desires and curiosity.
4. Do not try to hide your Christian values. Make your commitment known.
5. Do not force to pressure the counselee to continue counseling.
6. Recognize your limitations. Some people may need to be referred to a more experienced counselor, doctor, etc.

H. Dangers in Counseling

1. Over reliance on one-sided information
2. Jumping to premature conclusions
3. Over involvement
4. Close associations with the opposite sex
5. Information slips
6. Failure to refer to another with more experience, when necessary
7. Over - or under-emphasis on the spiritual
8. A lopsided ministry. Do not let counseling cause you to neglect other duties.

II. THE COURSE OF COUNSELING

A. A Warning: Even with a knowledge of counseling techniques, many pastoral counselors experience feelings of helplessness and uncertainty when called upon to help. The best way to build confidence seems to be simply time and experience.

B. Making Contact

1. Let people know you are available by:
 - a. Announcing willingness to counsel
 - b. Informally demonstrating concern

C. The Introductory Phase

1. Put the counselee at ease.
2. Establish rapport (a comfortable relationship of mutual confidence).
3. Encourage the counselee to describe some of his symptoms and tell why he has come for counseling.
4. The counselor will spend most of his time watching and listening.

D. Problem Delineation (Defining the problem)

1. Counselor, through wise questions, gets an appreciation for the problems of the counselee, and tries to see things from his point of view.
2. Counselor attempts to discover why the counselee has come for help.
3. Ascertain the counselee's spiritual background.
4. This may take several sessions, or only a few minutes.

E. Working Toward Solution

1. The counselee elaborates on his problem, and both the counselor and counselee try to work toward a solution.
2. As they gather insight into the situation, they might consider how the problem had been handled unsuccessfully in the past.
3. Then consider how it might be dealt with more effectively in the future.
4. Counselee may decide to make some practical change in his behavior.

5. Counselee may recognize he must learn to live with a situation that cannot be altered.
6. There must be a concern about the counselee's spiritual situation.
7. Solutions or suggestions may be acted upon and evaluated as to their effectiveness.

F. Termination

1. Must come a time of mutual decision to end the counseling relationship.
2. Prepare the counselee for this with such remarks as "I think we've almost reached the stage where you can work more on these problems by yourself."
3. The real goal of the whole counseling relationship is to assist the counselee to deal more effectively on his own with problems of life.
4. Remember that the counselor is not solely responsible for solving the problem but that counseling is a relationship in which at least two people are working together on an issue.
5. Recognize that all problems are not handled in the same way.

G. Types of Counseling

1. Supportive

a. Goals

- 1) To undergird, hold up, and stabilize troubled people
- 2) To help the person gain strength and stability so he can cope with his problems.

b. Sample Problems

- 1) Serious illness in the counselee or his family
- 2) Death of a loved one
- 3) Breakup of a marriage
- 4) Failure of any kind

c. Possible Dangers

- 1) Over dependency by the counselee
- 2) Encouraging the counselee to "wallow" in his problems

2. Confrontational

a. Goals

- 1) Forcing the person to face and deal with some sin or difficult situation.
- 2) Helping him to develop the moral strength to avoid similar problems in the future.

b. Sample Problems

- 1) Any illegal or immoral action...illegal drug use, alcoholism, illegitimate pregnancy.
- 2) An action which the individual, society, or scripture considers to be wrong.
- 3) Any action which causes guilt feelings
- 4) Dissenting factions in the church.

- c. Possible Dangers
 - 1) Pride in the counselor
 - 2) Rejection of the counselee because of his actions
 - 3) Moralizing (lecturing but not helping)
 - 4) Not helping the counselee to change his behavior and to strengthen his controls.

3. Educative

a. Goals

- 1) Discovering, with the counselee, what information is needed
- 2) Providing information or helping the counselee to find information
- 3) Showing him how to find information on his own in the future

b. Sample Problems

- 1) Vocational counseling
- 2) Premarital guidance
- 3) Marriage and family counseling
- 4) Questions about theology or the Bible

c. Possible Dangers

- 1) Counselee becoming over dependent on the counselor as a teacher
- 2) Counselor belief that passing out information will always bring genuine learning or behavior change
- 3) Counselor manipulation of the counselee (pressuring him to accept your ideas)
- 4) Domination of the counselee
- 5) Counselor thinking that he is an "expert" in some area, just because people ask for his advice.

4. Preventive

a. Goals

- 1) To anticipate problems before they arise
- 2) To prevent worsening of existing problems

b. Sample Problems

- 1) Youth with increasing sex drives
- 2) Young people facing marriage, the military etc.
- 3) People who are preparing to retire
- 4) People facing surgery, serious illness, other crises, etc.

c. Possible Dangers

- 1) Ignoring the potential problem until it becomes serious
- 2) Over dramatizing potential problems making them sound worse than they really are

5. Spiritual

a. Goals

- 1) To clarify the issues and find solutions to theological problems
 - 2) To help the counselee to find meaning and purpose to life
 - 3) To teach people how to grow spiritually
 - b. Sample Problems
 - 1) Problems of doubt, unbelief and confusion
 - 2) Problems of emptiness, meaninglessness, or lack of purpose in life
 - 3) A desire to know God
 - 4) Confusion over the meaning of life crises
 - 5) Confusion and disagreement in the church over doctrinal issues
 - c. Possible Dangers
 - 1) Failure to recognize that theological questions may hide deeper problems
 - 2) Squelching him with a comment like "Trust in the Lord and your problems will all disappear"
 - 3) Tendency to read a few Bible verses and not deal with the real concerns of the counselee
 - 4) Assumption that spiritual problems are all the result of sin. A desire to learn spiritual truths is not the result of sin (Acts 17:11)
6. Referral
- a. Goals
 - 1) To provide short-term support or other temporary help
 - 2) To refer the counselee to another counselor
 - b. Sample Problems
 - 1) The seriously disturbed
 - 2) The severely depressed or suicidal
 - 3) Those whom you aren't helping
 - 4) People who need medical care
 - c. Possible Dangers
 - 1) Counselee who thinks referral is really rejection
 - 2) Referring too quickly. Often the pastoral counselor can be of more help than he realizes
 - 3) Not referring when you have neither the competence, training nor time to handle the problem

7. Depth

- a. This type of counseling is for highly trained persons only

H. Information Counseling: The most common, and often sufficient. Nine suggestions for informational counseling:

1. Listen intensively
2. Use questions carefully to focus on conflict areas rapidly

3. Help the person review the total problem. This tends to produce a clearer perspective and prepare the person to make an enlightened decision. It also helps him to mobilize his inner resources.
4. Provide useful information.
5. Focus on the major conflict, problem or area of decision with the aim of clarifying workable alternatives.
6. Help the person decide on the "next step" and then take it.
7. Provide guidance when it seems useful.
8. Give the person emotional support and inspiration.
9. Move into longer-term counseling if brief counseling does not prove adequate.

III. PREMARITAL COUNSELING

A. Goals of Premarital Counseling

1. To help individuals, couples, and groups of couples to prepare for and build successful marriages.
2. To anticipate difficulties in marriage and family living and help people build healthy, satisfying marriage relationships.
3. Goals of special importance:
 - a. Assessing readiness for marriage:
 - 1) The reasons for marriage...wise or unwise...realistic
 - 2) The degree of background similarity
 - 3) Age. Very young marriages are often less successful.
 - 4) Age differences. Beyond 10 years is usually too much for a good adjustment.
 - 5) Courtship. Should be of sufficient time to get well acquainted.
 - 6) Attitudes toward marriage.
 - 7) External circumstances, which might cause strain (further schooling, debts, limited finances, parental opposition etc.)
 - 8) Spiritual maturity. Are both saved?
4. Anticipated potential stress. Advise on areas of difficulty such as:
 - a. Sexual adjustment
 - b. Handling of finances
 - c. Choice of activities
 - d. In-law relationships
 - e. Differences in religious values or beliefs
 - f. Conflicts over choice of friends
5. Guiding self evaluation...recognize one's strong and weak characteristics

6. Considering Biblical views of marriage (Ephesians 5:21-6:4; Colossians 3:16-21; I Corinthians 7; I Peter 3:1-7)
 7. Planning the wedding.
- B. Techniques of Premarital Counseling
1. Take opportunities to speak to youth groups about Christian marriage.
 2. Establish discussion groups or classes for engage couples.
 3. Individual meetings...with the couple, and each singly
 - a. Session for rapport building and discussion of the Biblical view of marriage.
 - b. Session on roles, responsibilities, personality differences, and potential problems in marriage.
 - c. Session discussing details of the ceremony.
- C. Special Problems in Premarital Counseling
1. Parental disapproval of the marriage
 2. Premarital pregnancy
 3. Mixed marriages. Race, religion, socioeconomic, educational, age
 4. Mental illness
 5. Severe doubts
 6. Physical disability

IV. **MARITAL COUNSELING:**

- A. Common Causes of Marital Disharmony
1. Lack of communication. Inability to honestly share feelings and ideas about significant issues.
 2. Immaturity. Unrealistically high expectations.
 3. Failure to take marriage seriously.
 4. Unhealthy need fulfillment. Needs not being met, or even neurotic needs, in which case long-term counseling would be needed.
- B. The Goals of Marriage Counseling
1. To guide in the building and improving of a marriage.
 2. To counsel with those who are having marital conflicts.
- C. Counseling the Newly Married
1. Has value even though there was premarital counseling.
 2. Can be done successfully in Sunday school or evening discussion groups.
 3. Aim is to help young couples understand themselves and their spouses better.

D. Joint and Individual Interviews

1. Value can be found both in joint and individual interviews.
2. Usually best to use a combination of both.
3. The counselor must show concern, understanding, impartiality and a willingness to listen.

E. Special Areas of Marital Stress

1. Role conflicts. Disharmony over the responsibilities of each.
2. Money...this is often regarded as the area of greatest disagreement.
3. In-laws.
4. Sex relations.
5. Pregnancy and childbirth.
6. Spiritual conflicts.

F. The Problem of Divorce

1. The counselor's obligation is to do everything in his power to heal broken marriages; yet realizing that at times separation or divorce is unavoidable. Read Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18.
2. Recognize that even when sin is clearly involved in the divorce, God forgives, and the follower of Christ must do likewise.

V. **FAMILY COUNSELING**: There will at times be occasion to counsel an entire family as a group. This may involve a simple form of counseling when he makes a call at the home, or more formal counseling at the church.

VI. **VOCATIONAL COUNSELING**: The selection of an occupation has added importance for the Christian. When we acknowledge that Christ is Lord, we must turn over our whole lives ... including our working lives...to His control. It becomes critical that our choice of an occupation be in accordance with divine will and that our daily work be done diligently "as unto Christ" (Ephesians 6:5-6). Thus a vocation should be made with great care and deliberation.

A. Vocational Counseling Techniques

1. Knowing the world of work. The counselor should be familiar with types of work, sources of information concerning selection, where to refer the counselee etc.
2. Knowing the counselee. Help the counselee get a realistic appraisal of himself. Help him to evaluate himself in the following areas:
 - a. General ability...set his aspirations in accordance with his ability.
 - b. Specific abilities.

- c. Personality traits. Is he shy or outgoing, likes change or routine, is cheerful, more serious, active or critical, etc.
 - d. Interests...may be helpful in making a choice.
 - e. Spiritual state.
 - f. Other factors...sex, age, physique, health, training or lack of training, etc.
3. Guiding in the decision process. The work of the counselor is to help the counselee acquire the needed information and to guide as he uses this to make his vocational decision.

B. Special Issues in Vocational Counseling

- 1. The unemployed. Offer sympathy but also practical advice as to finding job.
- 2. The dissatisfied. Some suggestions to offer and consider:
 - a. Start a new occupation.
 - b. Change employers.
 - c. Change jobs within the same company.
 - d. Stay in the present job.
 - e. Change oneself. The problem may be the worker, not the work.
 - f. Change one's attitude toward his work.

C. The Senior Citizen: Through individual counseling and discussions with others who are retired or approaching retirement, the older person can be helped to a smoother transition out of the labor force. He may also be helped in:

- 1. Finding new work
- 2. Finding substitute activities...volunteer work, etc.

D. The Married Woman: In spite of the joys of being a homemaker, a woman's work is difficult and frequently unappreciated. The woman must be helped to realize that she has the important task of molding young lives and maintaining a stable home.

E. The Handicapped:

F. The Church Leader's Role

- 1. Spiritual Guidance. Help the counselee to discover:
 - a. If he is making the best use of his divinely given gifts
 - b. If he really wants God's will
 - c. To discover God's will in his choice of a vocation
- 2. Counsel concerning church vocations

- a. Help the counselee decide if he is called into full time Christian service. Realize that in the final analysis, the counselee, with God, must make the final decisions.
3. Writing letters of recommendation

VII. SPECIAL COUNSELING SITUATIONS

A. Counseling the Mentally Ill: Often people who are mentally ill don't differ much from the rest of us except for the fact that the problems of life have become so overwhelming that it is difficult for them to behave or think efficiently.

1. The Disturbed individual
 - a. The signs of emotional turmoil must be recognized by the counselor or pastor. But beware not to find a "psychotic in every pew."
 - b. The counselor can help the disturbed person get competent treatment
 - 1) If he feels inadequate to help, he should encourage referral to a professional person.
 - c. The counselor should be a source of support and comfort to both the patient and his family.
 - d. The pastor-counselor should minister to the hospitalized.
 - e. He should help the patient during the time of rehabilitation.
 - 1) The former patient should be welcomed back, encouraged, and treated as any other person who has been hospitalized.
2. The family of the disturbed individual
 - a. Help the family recognize and accept the fact that the person is emotionally disturbed.
 - b. Help the family and the patients get competent treatment.
 - c. Keep in contact with the whole family, including the patient.
 - d. At times, help may be needed in the form of food, financial aid, etc. (James 2:14-16)

B. Counseling the Physically Ill

1. Recognize that sickness of a physical nature may also bring reactions such as anxiety, frustration and uncertainty.
2. Recognize the characteristic periods in an illness:
 - a. Transition...may be sudden or gradual, depending on the illness. The time during which the person must realize he is no longer healthy but sick.
 - b. Treatment period...the time during which the person faces his symptoms and gives himself over to medical treatment.
 - 1) May suffer from fears of the "unknown"
 - 2) May be hospitalized

- c. Convalescence period...the period of transition from sickness back to health. New family habits may have been established, which can cause conflicts.
3. Counseling the patient and the family
 - a. Jesus spent a great deal of time ministering to the sick. His followers should be grateful for the privilege of doing likewise.
 - b. The pastor can be an encouragement to both the patient and his family.
 - c. Pray for and with the people involved.
 - d. Guide their thinking about why God permitted this situation to arise, using relevant Scripture.
 - e. Help in making practical decisions...how to handle the extra financial burden, how to rearrange family routines, etc.
 4. Counseling when a child is sick
 - a. Hospitalization for a child may have strong psychological reactions:
 - 1) May interpret this as parental rejection or even punishment for past behavior.
 - b. Children should always be reassured and not deceived.
 - c. One's attitude and bearing can help to create in the child a feeling of trust and confidence.
 - d. Supportive counseling with the parents helps the child indirectly, because he feels greater assurance when he senses his parents are calm.

C. Counseling the Dying

1. Understanding the dying: there are five stages that the average person goes through as he approaches death:
 - a. First stage: Denial and isolation. This is a type of defense used by most patients, especially at the beginning of their illness. During this period, the patient is getting used to the idea of death's approach.
 - b. Second stage: Anger. The patient's anger is irrational...but normal...lashing out in response to a frustrating situation. At this point he needs understanding from loved ones.
 - c. Third stage: Bargaining. Such petitions as "God, give me a little longer, and I'll serve You faithfully for the rest of my life.
 - d. Fourth stage: Depression. As the illness lingers on, discouragement sets in. the depression is a reaction against the illness and its effects. There may also be "preparatory depression," which is really

a form of grief as he anticipates the future. If he is a believer, his concern may be about the loved ones who will be left.

- e. Fifth stage: Acceptance. Most patients eventually reach a stage of acceptance. It is usually a time void of feelings. Such patients may not want to talk, but they are comforted by the presence of loved ones, knowing that they are not forgotten.
2. Counseling the patient:
- a. The realities of death must be faced, and scriptural teachings concerning it well understood.
 - b. The pastor must be available and show genuine concern.
 - c. The pastor may need to discuss fears and frustrations, give encouragement from the scriptures, or simply sit in silence.
3. Counseling the grieving:
- a. Grief over the loss of a loved one involves such emotions as: sorrow, anxiety, despair, guilt, loneliness, anger, confusion, futility, and an overbearing sense of loss.
 - b. A common pattern of grief:
 - 1) Shock: dazed disbelief, sometimes accompanied by physical symptoms such as nausea, faintness, stomach pains, headaches etc.
 - 2) Intense Grief: generally beginning before the funeral. There may be insomnia, irritability, outbursts of anger, even periods of silent despair and a general sense of futility.
 - 3) Period of adjustment: begins after a month or two. The person may return to normal activities, but the sadness still remains.
 - c. Needs of the grieving:
 - 1) Support from others
 - 2) The need to accept the reality of the loss
 - 3) The need to express sorrow...this takes two forms, talking and weeping.
 - 4) The need to verbalize hostility and guilt
 - 5) The need to establish new relationships
 - d. Unhealthy reactions to grief: excessive self-condemnation, stoic denial of grief, getting involved in a host of busy activities, taking on a number of physical symptoms, excessive drinking, antisocial behavior, suicide attempts, intense anger, complete withdrawal from social activities. (These are especially bad if present several months after the funeral).

- e. Counseling:
 - 1) Bring the comfort of the scriptures
 - 2) The funeral: an opportunity for friends to express concern and support for the bereaved. For Christians, it is also an opportunity to worship and give witness of the hope that is within.
 - 3) The pastor can help in the planning of a funeral
 - 4) The pastor can guide during the period of readjustment...he should be available to bring the comfort of friends and the scriptures, and to guide as the mourner works to make an adjustment.

- e. Death and the young child
 - 1) Studies have concluded that the death of a child is "the most distressing and long-lasting of all grieves..."
 - 2) Other children in the family may need much comforting, given a clearer understanding of death, and reassurance that they are loved and cared for.

D. Counseling the Physically Disabled

- 1. Jesus showed a deep concern for the physically disabled. Most Christians today ignore or make little effort to reach those who are handicapped because of physical disabilities.

- 2. In working with a handicapped person, it is important to remember that while there are things he cannot do, there are also things, which he can do.

- 3. Understanding the disabled:
 - a. People who are disabled from birth apparently adjust smoothly to their condition.
 - b. The situation is more difficult when a person is disabled later in life.
 - c. Stage of adjustment to a disability later in life:
 - 1) Shock
 - 2.) Retreat (behind a number of psychological defenses)
 - 3.) Acknowledgment
 - 4.) Adaptation
 - d. The physically disabled person must make a unique adjustment...he must adjust to being different.
 - e. Counseling: the disabled
 - 1) The counselor must convey acceptance
 - 2) Treat the counselee as a person of worth
 - 3) Seek to help the handicapped person accept himself and realistically evaluate his limitations, to overcome

obstacles when he can, and to function as efficiently as possible.

4) Help him to find and follow God's will for his life.

E. Counseling the Disadvantaged: We cannot fulfill the Great Commission while ignoring the disadvantaged nearby. This is a "mission field" literally around the corner.

F. The Question of "Why?": The people whom a church leader counsels ask "Why?": frequently. Why do I have this problem? Why did God let this happen? Etc.

1. While we may not have the specific answers, we do know that when God permits or brings about some stressful situation, He does so for a good purpose (Romans 8:28). It may be to:
 - a. Promote patience (James 1:3)
 - b. Bring humility (II Corinthians 12: 7-10)
 - c. A deeper dependence on God (II Corinthians 1:8-9)
 - d. Show an expression of divine love for us. The Lord chastens those He loves (Psalm 94:12; Proverbs 3:11-12; Revelation 3:19)
2. Point the counselee to passages of scripture, which deal with suffering (especially I Peter and Job)
3. The example of Job: Job was never told why it all happened. God had a purpose (Job 1-2), but Job never knew what this was. In many cases the same is true today. We must realize that God in His wisdom may not answer but instead require us to suffer in ignorance of the reasons. God is sovereign and does not always share with finite minds the reasons for His infinitely wise decisions.

VIII. MENTAL HEALTH AND PREVENTION OF ABNORMALITY

A. Mental Health Defined: "The ability to function effectively and happily as a person in one's expected role in a group," or "A state of being in which the person finds a satisfactory measure of fulfillment."

1. Emotional Maturity
 - a. Having the ability to deal constructively with reality
 - b. Having the capacity to adapt to change
 - c. Having a relative freedom from symptoms that are produced by tensions and anxieties
 - d. Having the capacity to find more satisfaction in giving than receiving
 - e. Having the capacity to sublimate, to direct one's instinctive hostile energy into creative and constructive outlets

- f. Having the capacity to love
- 2. There is no sharp line between mental health and mental illness, between begin normal and abnormal. Most people are some place in between.

B. Some Characteristics of Good Mental Health

- 1. Social and emotional competence
- 2. Satisfying interpersonal relations. The normal person has both superficial social contacts and intimate, deeply involved relationship with one or a few confidants.
- 3. Self-examination and insight. "Know yourself."
- 4. Self-acceptance and self-confidence. Accepts himself for what he is, improves where he can, sets realistic aspirations, and works to build his self-confidence.
- 5. Realistic approach to problems. It is not healthy to evade problems, hide from them, or try to solve them through excessive worry, complaining, or procrastination.
- 6. Freedom from internal conflict, intense feelings of insecurity, and paralyzing anxiety.
- 7. Satisfying philosophy of life. Life must have meaning and purpose.

C. Prevention of Abnormal Behavior

- 1. Primary Prevention:
 - a. Reduce or eliminate early experiences that could be psychologically harmful.
 - b. Biological prevention...good physical health frequently is a factor in good mental health.
 - c. Psychological prevention...parents who live in harmony, a home with a minimum of tension, children taught discipline and responsibility.
 - d. Sociological prevention...government and community programs geared to eliminate some situations that breed behavior deviation.
 - e. Spiritual prevention...developing a clear-cut moral standard, finding an enduring faith, formulating a unifying philosophy of life.
- 2. Secondary prevention: Dealing with emotional disorder I the early stages.
 - a. Detect the developing problems.
 - b. Get the person to a place where he can be helped.
 - c. Getting the necessary help for stopping and hopefully eliminating the developing abnormality.

D. Mental Health and the Church

- 1. Introduce men to Jesus Christ.
- 2. Worship: An experience, which encourages good mental health.
- 3. Private devotions encouraged: to be still and get to know God.

4. Preaching...the sermon can be a great opportunity for stimulating mental health. Many Bible truths apply to men's needs and every day problems of living.
5. Teaching.
6. Stimulating healthy family life.
7. Group interaction...there is real spiritual growth when two or more people get together to pray, study, discuss and share their personal needs or concern.
8. Service to others fosters good mental health.
9. Support in crisis. People facing crises need the help of others.
10. Counseling.