

Whose Job is it Anyway? The Church's Responsibility to Counsel and Care for One Another

Introduction

My Biography

- It is a privilege to be able to serve you this weekend, and I hope to encourage you toward faithfulness to Christ and His people.
- I know that when I started vocational ministry about 20 years ago, that this was what I desired—I simply wanted to faithfully feed, and care for, and shepherd the flock of God. I was committed to that, but I didn't really know what it meant or what it would entail.
- I was not raised in the church, so I did not even have the experiences of watching other pastors growing up. I was saved at 20, and finished seminary at 30, and took my first pastorate at the age of 32 – in an effort to be like Jesus, I was just aiming for that “about 30” mark.
- In August 2000 we moved to Vermont/New Hampshire as a teaching pastor in a rural area of New England, where I served for 14 years.
- It was there, near the end of my first year of ministry, that I met “Jill.” This young mother of four, with a terrible history and all the troubles that they produced, became the impetus for me to begin a journey of being equipped to shepherd God's people thoroughly and effectively.
- More about her later ... I have a few questions ...

Who Are We Talking to Today?

- How many of you would say that, in one way or another, you have heard or been told, “Leave counseling for the hard cases to the EXPERTS!”
- How many of you have some degree of fear and legitimate concern, that if your local church worked long-term with people who have diagnoses or who are on medications, that you are inviting a degree of **legal liability** for your church?
- How many of you, as just lay people in the church, would feel unequipped and unable to help people in your church family with a psychological diagnosis?
- How many people have had experiences where people you know have gotten counsel from agencies outside the church, and they got unbiblical advice or counsel that complicated their problems, or at best just not been helpful?

My simple goal today:

My aim is to convince you that the work of spiritually caring for one another [counseling] is really just the work of discipling others in the faith. Caring spiritually is building others up, it is the call to shepherd the flock, to disciple God's people ...

... in other words, my aim is to answer, "Whose Job is it Anyway!?"

To aid in that, I want to tell you a little story about my first counseling case (the first case beyond "suggestions for marriage" or "parenting tips" or "conflict with family").

The Story of "Jill"

- Jill was the only child of a wealthy Boston banking executive, raised as a sheltered Catholic in all-girls private schools, whose innocence resulted in her being ***raped*** during her first year in college.
- To avoid that vulnerability, she soon got involved with a violent, abusive, drug-dealer—she thought she was safer with him, but she was not.
- He was not only physically abusive, he forced her to have at least two ***abortions*** (not an easy thing to endure for someone with a Catholic conscience).
- One evening he got angry, beat her until she was unconscious, and left her for dead on a sidewalk somewhere, where a knight in shining armor found her, scooped her up, took her to the hospital, and stayed there with her for the next 24 hours until she woke up.
- After literally threatening to kill the drug dealer if he ever came near her again, he courted and married Jill. It was dream come true for Jill—rescued, loved, protected, and cared for.
- After six months of marriage he was diagnosed with brain cancer, and six months after that he was gone—all of him except the 12 vials of sperm they froze so that she could bear his children if he died.
- Not wanting the potential children to be fatherless, she convinced her husband's best friend (a kind-hearted, Catholic, New England carpenter) to marry her—a marriage of convenience not of love, and her wealthy parents provided the funding to begin what in the end resulted in a dozen invitro fertilizations, some of which failed entirely, most of which resulted in miscarriages, and finally four children through three successful pregnancies.
- The grief of losing her husband, and the guilt of aborting her children, were driving her obsession to have as many of his children as she could.
- When she started coming to our church, she was ***suicidal*** (two attempts), suffered from panic attacks, experienced debilitating depression, and was reporting hallucinations, and the belief that her husband was plotting to kill her.
- ***I'm one year out of seminary, and other than "marriage tips" and "parenting questions," had not done any counseling of an ongoing nature.***

My Training and Commitments to Shepherding

- My seminary training had not discussed most of those issues in any detail at all.
- I had only taken the obligatory pastoral counseling course, but I was thoroughly convinced shepherding and counseling was the responsibility and role of those called to feed, shepherd, and care for the flock.
- But this ... I could not have foreseen my first counseling case would involve ...
- ... complex issues—rape, post-abortion, domestic violence, drug culture experiences, cancer, death of a spouse, multiple miscarriages, anxiety, panic attacks, depression, PTSD, hallucinations, suicide attempts, paranoia, and a desire to divorce her second husband.
- “Let’s start with the hallucinations! That sounds interesting!”
- I was not really prepared, and yet I knew ... I KNEW ... what she needed more than anything was the gospel of God’s eternal and infinite grace. She needed the real and personal manifestation of God’s sovereign goodness, an abiding relationship with the Living God, and confidence that He has promised to SAVE people from sin and its consequences.
- Do you believe that? Do you REALLY believe that? I think you do! And yet ...
- ... we also hear in our ears, this great swell of belief, a cultural tidal wave of opinion that says, “You CANNOT help her; and you SHOULD not try!”
- The social consciousness of 21st century culture says it is NOT your job, or you’re not equipped, and frankly, we look at it and think, “I don’t have time for this!”
- I suggest that her questions and problems have better answers than, “Here’s a referral!”
- These doubts that the church can’t help people like her are “speculations, and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God [and the power of the gospel],” and that we need to “take these thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ,” and figure out how to provide for the care of souls—fellow members of the Body of Christ. We must shepherd the flock of God, and bind up the wounds of hurting sheep.
- We need to be convinced that we are part of a body with mutual responsibilities to one another, to EVERY one another, ...
- ... or else the church will become known as a shallow place where you may get helpful tips for living in your relatively comfortable suburban life, but where the really deep wounds and pain of living in a sin-cursed world cannot be healed or spoken to with any clarity.

- The church must NOT become an impotent and shallow gathering of comfortable, middle-class, religious socialites.
- That work of providing soul care, and speaking truth into the deepest wounds of the human heart, ... that work belongs in the church!
- Why don't we think that anymore? Why have drifted from those moorings?

A History of Counseling's Demise in the Church

Before I begin explaining WHY the ministry of TRANSFORMATION belongs in the local church, I want to share just enough history that we understand this to be a modern question.

Historically, counseling always WAS a ministry of the church. The Reformers and Puritans were well-known for their soul care, and it is really only a matter that has grown into an issue beginning around the turn of the 20th century—the early 1900s.

Most of us love to think of ourselves as the progeny of the Reformers and Puritans, the spiritual offspring of the fathers of the Reformation. But in this regard, we have fallen far short of their example and theological commitments.

Are We Really Following in the Footsteps of the Reformers and Puritans?

Historically, soul care, shepherding, spiritual counsel—these were matters that were handled in the church. The Puritans were noted for providing careful soul care, and many of the Puritan paperbacks are actually very useful tools for counseling to this day.

Doctors didn't help! Many of you also know that historically, from the Renaissance period right through the Victorian age and beyond (in some ways into the 20th century), that many in the medical profession did not look upon kindly or respond compassionately to those who were manifesting symptoms of what we call psychosis, schizophrenia, and sometimes even severe depression (which they called melancholy).

These people rarely received compassionate care or sympathy. Instead most were institutionalized, and the vast majority were ostracized or treated in cruel and often inhumane ways.

Before the days of “no animals were harmed in the making of this product,” many people *were* harmed in the testing of the theories of so-called medical science (bloodletting, medically induced seizures, later shock therapy in 1800s, etc.).

While that was going on, many of the Reformers and Puritans remained committed to soul care for even the most marginalized of society.

Bob Kellemen in his book, *Counseling Under the Cross: How Martin Luther Applied the Gospel to Daily Life*, outlines some interesting cases in chapter 7. There he tells accounts of how Martin Luther befriended and counseled three difficult men.

- A man who was melancholic and psychotic, who believing himself to be dead, hid in a cellar to rot and refused to eat and drink.
- An individual who thought he was a rooster “with a red comb on his head, a long beak, and crowing voice.”
- Another man who was a “voluntary retentive”—someone who refused to urinate. He was able to trace his fear to a sermon the person had heard about the works righteousness of controlling your body, and he believed if he could perfectly control his body that he would be accepted by God.

Luther cared for these men, befriended them, integrated them into the relational life of the church, and brought the gospel to bear on the questions and pressures of their life and soul. Kellemen quotes a renaissance historian who says about Luther:

Luther shows none of the dehumanizing amusement that often animates even learned physicians when they report certain kinds of cases. The “cure” is brought about not by trickery but by friendly persuasion, by appeal to common humanity, by company. The entire story is informed by a strong sense of sympathy for a patient who becomes stigmatized by society.

I suggest that Luther, and later the Puritans, are the forefathers of the modern biblical counseling movement. But why is there NOW a biblical counseling movement in the first place? *Why has there just not been a continual thread of soul care in the church.*

What happened to “snip the thread” of thought that “soul care belongs in the church?”

A Little Evangelical History

Around the turn of the 20th century a couple of things happened that created a perfect firestorm for undermining the church’s role and authority to provide soul care for the God’s people.

First, beginning early in the 20th century there was ***a shift in the way the church began to think about pastoral duties and the nature of the church.***

The church began to increasingly function more like an organization, more like a business, we had the rise of Sunday school’s and program-oriented ministry models.

Pastoral duties began to be restructured so that the church would be led by someone who could manage the organization. It wasn’t a total redefinition, but certainly a shift in emphasis that continues to this day.

The days of being devoted to the Word of God and prayer are largely gone, and you’re all involved enough in ministry to know that you spend far more time in meetings than you do on your knees praying with your fellow pastors and elders.

This shift in emphasis began to be reflected in theological education as well.

At the very same time, another thing was happening.

Second, ***the rise of secular social science and psychotherapeutic methods of counseling*** created a cultural shift.

Freud, Jung, Adler, Skinner, Rogers and a host of others in the field of psychology began to redefine the nature of man and his problems.

Both western culture and evangelical culture, began to see counseling as the specific role of the trained psychotherapist or psychologist, rather than as the duty of the pastor.

The problems of people were now being defined as psychological problems, and not spiritual problems. And so, the place to go for help was not the spiritual guide or pastor, but the psychologist or psychotherapist. They were the professionals. Pastors were untrained and unskilled in such matters.

This shift was also reflected through changes in traditional theological education and pastoral training—pastors were simply *NOT* being trained in soul care/counseling.

By the middle of the last century, ***this was the predominant mindset and message*** in the evangelical church.

When Jay Adams took his first pastorate in the early 1950s, he was a product of these shifts in philosophy and training. He was confronted, just like I was in a different way, that he was not really equipped and prepared to help people with serious problems.

And when he sought training, it was either psychological hogwash built on bogus anthropology, or he too was being given the line, “leave it to the professionals.”

In his search for truth, Adams encountered the work of a secular research psychologist named Hobart Mowrer, a former president of The American Psychological Association, who was also seeing the bankruptcy of SECULAR psychological methodologies.

Mowrer was concluding that many of men’s problems really were driven by moral issues, and not medical or mental illnesses, and he asked this question, “Has Evangelical religion sold its birthright for a mess of psychological pottage?”

In other words, like Esau had the church relinquished her privilege and birthright of helping people with their problems, and sold it to our lying little brother, the psychological profession named Jacob, for a bowl of lentil stew.

So that is how the thread of counseling continuity was snipped. That is largely why we have not seen a continual cord of soul care from the Puritans to our day.

It was these shifts that fueled and motivated Jay Adams to pour over the Scriptures to see and learn everything he could regarding what God’s word said about the nature of man, of man’s problems, and how to help them.

He began to untie the knots created by psychological confusion, and restore the thread of soul care that had been snipped so that it again was tied directly to our generation. And the fruit of that was his first book (1970), *Competent to Counsel*, which launched the modern biblical counseling movement.

Why the Ministry of Transformation Belongs in the Church

So that is a little history, which paints a picture of how we got here and why this is even an issue. Now, we are back to the original question of “Why Counseling Belongs in the Church.” I’ve spent more time on that history than I would have wished to.

But here’s why I did it!

We are only having this conversation because the theology of modern liberalism, and the psychology of secular humanism, has severed the cord of counseling from its proper role in the church.

I am going to assume for a minute that I do not have to unpack or prove to you what biblical counseling is—though I realize that there is not a small amount of debate about that issue. I am talking about believing and practicing, purely and truly, that ...

What is biblical counseling? *God’s Word provides both the content and the methods for people to lovingly have biblically saturated conversations to help people with questions, problems, and trouble to find answers, solutions, and help (Heath Lambert, p. 13).*

This definition eliminates the NEED for understanding and integrating the theories and methodologies of secular counseling philosophy and practice. I am NOT saying that there aren’t observations and principles that CAN BE HELPFUL. I am simply saying that they are not necessary.

It is undoubtedly true that that vast majority of Christians who practice counseling vocationally, do so with some degree of training and integration of secular theory and practice. I don’t have the time to fully discuss the biblical reasons why this is unnecessary at best, and dangerous at worst—though I’ll touch on it some.

Today, my goal is to unpack:

FOUR REASONS why *Counseling Belongs in the Church!*

- The Great Commission
- The Sufficiency of Scripture
- The Role of a Pastor
- The Design of the Church

FOUR REASONS why *Counseling Belongs in the Church!*

1. The Great Commission Mandates Counseling Belongs in the Church

I'm convinced that COUNSELING is simply the ministry of Discipleship, which (we all know) is the mission of the church.

Counseling, properly understood for the life of the Christian, is simply helping people know, and **worship**, and **follow** Christ more faithfully.

There are a few words that are legitimately translated counseling in the Bible—the two most common and familiar are:

- **Parakaleo** – comfort, encourage, exhort (and I would say come alongside implies a kind of care and counsel).
- **Noutheteo** – instruct, admonish, warn, counsel (counsel was Adams' favorite rendering of the word; Romans 15:14 – able to instruct, competent to counsel).
 - ... full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to instruct ...
- To those I think you can add **teaching, shepherding, discipling**.

I say all that to expose how the English word "COUNSEL" has modern baggage [tied to THERAPY], but the activity itself is something we do all the time in the church.

But here is what is key regarding the Great Commission. When Jesus commissions His disciples to follow through on preaching the kingdom of God, He does so with this specific requirement.

His people are not just to be **informed** about the body of doctrine around which that kingdom will be built, but that they also be instructed concerning the necessary **lifestyle** of those who would be part of that kingdom.

Matthew 28:18–20 — **18** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The **commandments** we are to observe (or keep, or guard), summed up in the Law as "love God, and love your neighbor," **have more to do with how we live in relation to God and neighbor than just some body of knowledge or doctrine**.

As the Pharisees have proven for all eternity, knowing doctrine is not the goal. Living doctrine is the goal. Faith without works is dead.

The Scriptures are full of commandments of Christ that we are to embrace, and obey, and train others to know, guard, keep, and observe. We could start with the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. **Or keep reading into chapter 6, ...**

Jesus taught us ...

Matthew 6:25–34 — **25** "Therefore I tell you, **do not be anxious** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of

the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** Therefore **do not be anxious**, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. **34** **“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow**, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

We cannot be seriously teaching Christ’s followers to observe all that he commanded, because “all authority on heaven and earth” is His, and believe that those who experience fear, worry, anxiety, and even panic attacks are beyond our expertise.

The *great commission demands* that those called to disciple others know how to teach others to observe Christ’s command to “not be anxious.”

Now, I don’t have time to teach you and equip you for how to do that today, and that is not what they asked me to do. I was asked to explain why it is that “Counseling Belongs in the Church.” [*Shameless plug for “Intro” class in Feb/Mar/Apr*]

One of the reasons counseling belongs in the church is because the nature and fact of the Great Commission itself Mandates it to be so.

FOUR REASONS why *Counseling Belongs in the Church!*

2. The Sufficiency of Scripture Mandates that Counseling Belongs in the Church

Listen to the words of Peter:

2 Peter 1:3–4 — 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, **4** by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Do we REALLY believe that we have been given “ALL THINGS” that pertain to life and godliness? If you don’t, then you must. This is the word of the Lord.

This power for life and godliness comes through “the knowledge of him,” correct?

And, we are convinced that knowledge of Him who is the living Word, who is the way the TRUTH and the life, can only be ours through the Word of God—the revelation of Himself, who is the Word become flesh.

He calls us by his own glory and excellence, Peter says, by which also He has granted to us his precious and very great promises—where are those contained?

... in the written Word of God ...

And, by that written word containing His precious and very great promises, we can become partakers of the divine nature—we can live in a way that escapes the corruption of this world.

What amazing promises.

Christians do not escape the corruption of this world, and partake of the divine nature, by the promises, power, and philosophies of secular therapy!

These are simply the traditions of men at best, and often just vain imaginations and empty philosophy.

There may be no clearer expression of this truth of Scripture's sufficiency than the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) – The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Again, the best that can be said of secular theory and practice, is that it is the “traditions of men.” We want to be the offspring of the Reformers, but we have come in this regard to be rejectors of their standards.

Another passage:

2 Timothy 3:16–17 — **16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Properly used, the God-breathed Scripture not only instructs, it convicts, corrects, and trains us in righteousness.

And it does so in such a way that we are **COMPLETE** (adequate to meet every required task) and **EQUIPPED** (thoroughly outfitted to handle every possible contingency).

Anything and everything the Lord requires, Christians can be adequately prepared and thoroughly outfitted to be and to do. The Word of God will leave the believer lacking for nothing, if we know and embrace it fully.

Psalm 19:7–8 — **7** The law of the Lord is perfect, **reviving the soul**; the testimony of the Lord is sure, **making wise the simple**; **8** the precepts of the Lord are right, **rejoicing the heart**; the commandment of the Lord is pure, **enlightening the eyes**;

Can we see the sufficiency and power of God's world to help us?

Seeing it is kind of the easy part. BELIEVING it is fully and truly is more difficult.

This is a second, powerful reason, why counseling belongs in the local church.

The sufficiency of Scripture demands it. The truth of God’s Word, and the power of His promises, demand that we believe it, and learn it, and be equipped to minister the implications of it to others.

ANOTHER EXAMPLE: The Bible commands followers of Christ to “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

And, the Psalmist says that “the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart” (Psalm 19:8).

We CANNOT truly be believing the promises of God, and applying our belief in the sufficiency of Scripture, if we are also saying that helping people who are sorrowful, despairing, and depressed are beyond the reach, or outside the area of my expertise.

The Sufficiency of Scripture Mandates that Counseling belongs in the Church ...

... and, the Great Commission ...

FOUR REASONS why Counseling Belongs in the Church!

3. The Role of a Pastor/Shepherd Mandates Counseling Belongs in the Church

I have always thought it strange that the words for overseer and elder are used much more often in the New Testament, and yet our culture has adopted the title “Pastor” as the label most often used in evangelical churches.

We see the verb form of “shepherding” or “pastoring” – emphasizing the ROLE or ACTIVITY of church leaders – more than its use as a title (I think only in Ephesians 4?).

One place we see elders told to fulfill this role/activity in the church is in 1 Peter 5.

1 Peter 5:1–4 — 1 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: **2 shepherd the flock** of God that is among you, **exercising oversight**, ... **4** And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

I like rewards, though that shouldn’t be our primary motivation. And yet, there is certainly the obvious implication in that text that if we DON’T shepherd the flock, we will NOT receive the crown of glory.

Shepherding is the task of feeding, guarding, nurturing, protecting, leading, and guiding.

Those things cannot all be sufficiently done from a pulpit, or in larger meetings.

The Apostle Paul we find numerous times exercising both **personal and private ministry** of the word to those he served.

In Acts 20:20, he says he was declaring what was profitable, “teaching publicly and from house to house” —he believed in private ministry of the Word.

Later when he commends the Ephesian elders to the work of caring for the church, he says:

Acts 20:31–32 — 31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to **admonish EACH ONE with tears.** **32** And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up [EDIFIES] and to give you the inheritance [ENRICHES] among all those who are sanctified [SANCTIFIES].

He says it was instruction given to each one. It was personal. The kind of personal instruction and counsel and care that comes with tears is a very personal ministry—he’s NOT talking about his pulpit ministry here.

Nor here:

1 Thessalonians 2:7–12 — 7 But we were gentle among you, **like a nursing mother** taking care of her own children. **8** So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because **you had become very dear to us.** **9 ... 11** For you know how, **like a father** with his children, **12** we **exhorted each one of you** and **encouraged** you and **charged** you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

Verse 13 [in the NAS], ...

1 Thessalonians 2:13 — 13 For this reason we also constantly [**refer you to outside agencies for help with your spiritual problems** ...] ...~~thank God that~~ ...

Given Paul’s example of a shepherd’s heart, the common practice of many evangelical pastors actually should be unthinkable. It sounds utterly ridiculous to say it out loud.

I fear the two-headed monster of modern liberalism, and humanistic psychology has unwittingly caused many to repeat the errors of the shepherds of Israel, that we read about so graphically in Ezekiel 34.

Ezekiel 34:2–16 — 2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel ... ; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? **3** You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. **4** ***The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought,...*** **5** ***So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; ... with none to search or seek for them.*** **7 ... 11** “For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. **12** ... I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them ... **15** I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. **16** I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, ...

To care for the weak, hurting, wounded, straying, despondent – this is GODLY!

We need to be reminded, like Peter did, to “Tend my lambs, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep” (John 20:15-17).

As I’m calling on you to develop, and to personally own the burden and responsibility to care for the flock, I also need to say ...

... referring them out is not the kind of care they need.

When we refer them to counselors who practice secular counseling—or even to Christian counselors who integrate secular content and methods—those referrals can ***potentially undermine*** their (1) connection to the church, their (2) affection for the shepherd, and (3) their belief in the efficacy and power of the gospel.

Now, I think they are going to get biblical help if you refer them to our counseling center, and we do desire to serve our community, but we don’t have time.

We want to equip you, and equip your flock, to love and serve one another. We cannot actually shepherd and feed your flock for you, though we want to help.

People need a shepherd, and a body of Christ, manifesting His care and love to grow and be built up as God has designed.

That brings me to the FOURTH reason ...

- ...Great Commission...
- ...Sufficiency of Scripture...
- ...Role of the Shepherd...

FOUR REASONS why *Counseling Belongs in the Church!*

4. God’s Design for the Church Mandates Counseling Belongs in the Church

The biblical counseling movement began when Jay Adams published “Competent to Counsel,” and I mentioned earlier that he borrowed that phrase from the words of ...

Romans 15:14 — 14 And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

He translated “Able to admonish” with “Competent to Counsel.”

But notice the bigger picture of Paul’s confidence in the members of the church in Rome (*he wasn’t writing just to leaders*). **The whole church**, having been filled with goodness and knowledge, **had the necessary prerequisites** to provide the loving care, instruction, and counsel that every member of their body needed to grow and thrive spiritually.

Counseling is a responsibility that the entire body of Christ—each local church—should understand and undertake together. The pastor (or pastor-teacher) has the responsibility to set the example, to take the lead, and to cultivate the equipping of the church for these mutual responsibilities.

This dynamic—of the body edifying, and the pastor equipping for the ministry—is exactly what is **described in Ephesians 4**.

Ephesians 4:11–16 — 11 ... [God gave gifts to the church] ... some as pastors and teachers, **12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ**; **13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. **14** As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; **15** but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, **16** from whom ***the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.***

If only our churches were lovingly, and effectively, fitting and holding everyone together because every part was doing its proper work!

They can!

If those called to shepherd and teach them are convinced it is the proper ministry and service of the church, and those shepherds get the training, and help members of the body get the training, that will equip them to do it.

Have I convinced you that ...

... *that COUNSELING (ministry of Life-Transformation) BELONGS IN THE CHURCH ... ??*

Conclusion

I want to encourage you today, not just convince and convict you.

... I'm certainly not intending to speak to you in a way that leaves you condescendingly feeling like you're a failure if you've thought referring to the so-called "professionals" is the only option. And I especially understand not feeling equipped well enough to counsel. That was my experience early in ministry too, and I had theological training.

Maybe you've never seen or been challenged to think any other way than, "hard counseling cases and people with diagnoses are best left to the 'experts.'"

Maybe you've never considered seriously if the Scriptures advocate (or command?) an approach different than this tsunami of worldly philosophy that has drowned the church

...

... or this pot of psychological pottage, that has choked the church ...

Like I said, I was not fully ready for the hard work of shepherding and caring for the church in 2001 when I met Jill.

I was in a position where I had to figure out how to help a young mother who had endured untold trauma, and emotional pain, and was often non-functional, and at other times delusional.

I knew that I had the gospel, and that the gospel was the power she needed.

I did not fully know and understand how the truths about God and the gospel applied to her complex situation.

So I studied ... sometimes 6-8 hours to prepare for 60-90 counseling session.

And I sought training from trusted resources in biblical counseling (ACBC, CCEF, and whatever books I could find on the topics).

I also knew that the long-term health of the church depended on there being more people to help shepherd, counsel, and disciple.

And so, I found a mature couple in our church that was respected, and to whom people were naturally inclined to go to for counsel, and we went together to get some training.

They were blown away to see and be convinced of the power of the gospel, of the sufficiency of God's Word to help people. They saw the weakness of some of their own counseling principles, methods and tools—learned from James Dobson, and Larry Crabb, and Dan Allender.

I continued to help "Jill" and over the course of the next 18 months she professed faith in Christ, she learned how to view her past in light of the sovereignty of God, and became a stable, functioning human being.

The following year we took a few more people to the counseling training, and our small team of servants with the convictions and tools to shepherd and counsel began to grow.

Within 5 years we had over 20 people attend a 30-hour counseling training seminar, and we had essentially created a culture of counseling in our church. They were not all gifted to counsel one-on-one, ...

... but almost everyone in our church had a vocabulary, and an approach to understanding and speaking about problems (anxiety, depression, etc.) that created a real culture of mutual soul care.

It wasn't always smooth. There were disagreements, and transitions for people (not leaving the church—no church split), and everyone was learning how to change their language and vocabulary without being judgmental.

It changed how people interacted in every small group, every Sunday school class, every conversation in the foyer, in the pews, and in the parking lot.

And I know the same can happen in your church.

We would love to help equip you, and to equip others in your church. You have information about our next Introduction to Biblical Counseling course next year.

It is hard work, but very rewarding work – and there is training available!