
Deacon/Elder Lecture Outlines

Lecture 21

Visiting and Spiritual Counseling

I. Introduction

A. Qualifications of a Good Pastor

"A good pastor must have:

The strength of an ox,
The tenacity of a bulldog,
The daring of a lion,
The wisdom of an owl,
The harmlessness of a dove,
The industry of a beaver,
The gentleness of a sheep,
The versatility of a chameleon,
The vision of an eagle,
The hide of a rhinoceros,
The perspective of a giraffe,
The disposition of an angel,
The endurance of a camel,
The bounce of a kangaroo,
The stomach of a horse,
The loyalty of an apostle,
The faithfulness of a prophet,
The tenderness of a shepherd,
The fervency of an evangelist,
The devotion of a mother,

And then, he wouldn't please everybody!" --
Parables, Etc., August 1989

- B. From the above quotation we can see that ministering to God's people is a multifaceted job. A minister must be competent in Bible knowledge. He must be apt to teach and preach (Titus 1:9, I Timothy 3:2, II Timothy 4:2). He must also be effective in counseling and visiting if he is going to care for God's flock properly (I Timothy 3:5).

II. SPS

This lecture gives important principles that will make your visiting and counseling more effective.

III. Why Visit the Brethren

A. To establish bonds.

Visiting and counseling with God's people are vehicles for trust and openness to be established. Visiting and counseling create an elder/deacon-member relationship that helps the brethren grow (II Corinthians 1:24).

At the same time, visiting and counseling build a respect for the minister. Not all elders and ministers are excellent speakers. However, when the brethren feel a love and respect that comes through personal interaction on visits and in counseling, the minister's overall image is greatly enhanced.

Visiting the brethren is important in forming healthy bonds with them. Sharing an hour or so with a member brings about a closeness that will allow the member to feel free to discuss matters of importance with you in the future.

B. To see how they are doing.

Paul and Barnabas visited the brethren for this purpose (Acts 15:36).

C. To build rapport.

Brethren will not generally bring problems or questions to the minister unless they feel comfortable with him.

D. Preventive maintenance.

Visiting is like maintenance work on an automobile. One doesn't wait until the engine sounds terrible before having the oil changed or the car lubricated. Visiting serves the purpose of helping the person run his life smoothly.

E. To provide leadership.

Leading the member to see a point is far better than driving or coercing him.

IV. Why Improve Counseling Skills

A. Most of the minister's time is usually spent in visiting and counseling.

A major part of a minister's role is in visiting and counseling. Bible studies and Sabbath sermonettes and

sermons require preparation and time, but visiting and counseling requires even more effort.

B. Having the authority and having the ability are two different matters.

A minister is given the privilege, in counseling and visiting, to address almost any issue. A wise minister will learn what his limitations are and study to improve himself or he will refer the lay person to someone who is more qualified.

C. Counseling and visiting are ongoing processes and take time to be successful.

Many of the brethren's issues will require numerous regularly-scheduled counseling sessions. Watch the "quick fix" approach (II Corinthians 11:28-29).

V. Types of Visiting

A. The Elderly

Elderly people especially appreciate being looked after more regularly. Be aware of their needs -- to have a leaky faucet fixed, or to have the lawn maintained or any other needs that might be presented.

Elderly people need to be made to feel that they are important to the Church (James 1:27). Remember to treat them with respect (I Timothy 5:1). Help the elderly see they are a valuable resource to the Church by pointing out their wisdom, experience and stability.

B. The Sick

The infirm are in need of more regular visits. We must be sure to support and encourage and not condemn. Place responsibility for their actions upon their shoulders. Be careful not to use "Here's what I'd do if I were you" statements. A flower, reading material or candy brought along do wonders to let a sick person know you care.

In the event of a person who is terminally ill, we want to make every effort to regularly visit and encourage him. According to Kubler-Ross in On Death and Dying, five typical stages include: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

Be sure to make follow-up visits to the family as they grieve for a long period of time after the funeral. Remember to attend to the surviving members needs.

C. New People

After initially warming up with general conversation, it is important to relate to new people through our common interest, the Work. The key is to get them talking by inquiring about their experience coming into the truth. Ask them about their background in religion and what level of commitment they had in their previous beliefs. Don't try to cover too much ground on the initial visit.

Do they have any questions about our beliefs in comparison to what they have believed previously? Don't feel you have to correct every fault that becomes apparent. Recommending basic literature from headquarters points them to headquarters and gives them a chance to digest the material at their own rate.

Definitely plan a follow-up by suggesting a possible meeting to discuss more of their questions next time. This little prod will help them realize you are interested in them.

D. Problem Visiting

Addressing problems is a delicate matter. The best approach is that of Proverbs 15:1 ("A soft answer turns away wrath") and Galatians 6:1 ("Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness").

The idea is to try to cure the person -- not to "get him" (I Corinthians 9). Firmness may be required, but don't lose your cool. When we get (angry), the other person hears our anger, not our words (Jude 22-23, James 5:20).

VI. General Principles of Counseling

A. Counseling differs from visiting

Counseling deals with more specific issues. Visiting is more general to see how the brethren are doing (Acts 15:36). Counseling may involve instruction and dialogue on issues or problems which need follow-up sessions.

B. General principles of counseling

Empathy is being with the person as he is at that time. If you like people, they will feel it. Genuineness is being aware of your feelings and thoughts at the time. Positive regard involves a

respect for the person as he is. A counselor must never do anything to hurt those being counseled.

W Undivided attention is rare, so give as much as possible. Listen to the person without making judgments. Sense and observe the situation and circumstances, but don't pre-judge. A good trait is to stay one step behind the person. Follow his thoughts rather than trying to think ahead of him.

Having the proper place to meet is appropriate. It needs to be private and safe for the person. It may be essential to have an assistant or your wife with you in some circumstances.

Usually counseling only goes for one hour. Do not try to accomplish too much in one counseling. It may be overwhelming. You may wish to make notes on the counseling if it needs to be ongoing. This will refresh your mind when the person returns and will help you chart your progress.

Remember: We are not the "answer man." We can say "I don't know" and try to find the answer for next time. Suggest options and get the counselee to state what he or she wants to achieve through the counseling.

C. Listening to others is not merely hearing

Listening involves blocking out other thoughts and distractions and giving undivided attention. It is work, because you hear and mentally process words quicker than one speaks, so there is "spare" time. Avoid thinking of your comeback while the person is talking, and follow along.

Sense what they are feeling. What did they mean by those words? Clarify if necessary by asking, "Is this what you meant by that?" Note what is not said when the counselee is speaking of others. Who is not included? Listening takes work, but is rewarding to the counselor and counselee (James 1:19).

VII. Types of Counseling

A. Baptism Counseling

1. Counseling for baptism will tend to be more instructional, though you will want feedback from the baptismal candidate.
2. Ask questions about why the person wishes to be baptized. What does baptism mean to him? What does he expect from baptism?

3. Explain about the need to believe in God, in Christ and His sacrifice, in the Bible and in the Church (Mark 16:15-16, Acts 8:16). Ask if there is any teaching that he does not believe or does resist.
4. What does repentance mean? The person needs to repent of both the sins and of being the sinner he sees he is. Psalm 32:5 and Isaiah 55:7-8 talk of confession to God and forsaking sin as essentials of repentance. Seeing God in the process results in godly repentance (Romans 2:4, II Corinthians 7:8-10). Psalm 51 is excellent to read.
5. Counting the cost and commitment are expounded in Luke 14:25-33 and Romans 6:1-13.
6. These counselings take place over a period of several weeks (usually one aspect per week). It is then up to the person to contact you and state he is ready.
7. A good suggestion at the outset of the baptism counseling is to have the candidate take notes of the sessions. Also, he should note feelings regarding faith, repentance and counting the cost in his notebook. If he files this away after baptism (with the date baptized) he will have a complete file to review each Passover. Having the baptism notes will be a great help to recapture the process he went through if he ever doubts his conversion.

B. Pre-marriage Counseling

Counseling a couple for marriage will normally take several sessions. In this type of counseling, there would be more interaction, though instruction plays an important part. A typical format might include:

1. Get acquainted and establish your counseling plan.
2. The biblical basis for marriage.
3. Does each prospective mate know him/herself?
4. What are the ideals and expectations of each of the parties?
5. Personal statements of commitment to each other.
6. Finance and budgeting.
7. Helping the couple know how to deal with problems when they come up.

8. Discussing wedding, ceremony, honeymoon, etc.

C. Marriage-problem Counseling

1. Counseling a couple will consist of fact finding from both sides.
2. Next will be the need to remind both of their roles scripturally (Ephesians 5, I Peter 3).
3. It is important that both be in the give mode and look for ways to compromise on issues not involving God's law.
4. If God is revered in the marriage, there is a much greater chance for success.
5. When one partner comes alone to see you, using an empty chair to symbolize the absent partner is a good technique to bring the absent partner into the discussion.
6. It will take time to discover the whole problem and time to work it through.
7. Don't be in a hurry to patch up the difficulty, or you may miss the real issues.

D. Antagonistic Mates

1. Hostile mates pose other problems.
2. Encourage the converted mate not to neglect the antagonistic husband or wife. Converted mates should be sure to spend enough time with their nonmember mates.
3. Help the converted mate to invest his or her energies in trying to make the marriage work, so as to defuse the hostile feelings of the other.
4. If the antagonistic mate wants to see you, take another man with you and perhaps meet in a public place so as to minimize any chance of violence.
5. I Peter 3 talks about the winning of such by the righteous conduct of the converted mate.

D. Teenagers

1. Working with teenagers can be rewarding or frustrating.
2. Seeing their potential and future value to the

Church and society will give you, the counselor, encouragement in working with them.

3. Teenagers are going through tremendous changes in body and mind and are subject to mood swings. They are growing into adulthood from adolescence.
4. They are no longer likely to respond happily to power tactics. Teens are looking for self-identity, trying to find themselves.
5. Peers are very important to them at this stage of their lives. Having a social identity is important.
6. Don't make the mistake of expecting them to react as converted Christians when they are not yet baptized. They may do things we adults consider "abnormal" but the teens are just growing through a very difficult period in life. Sometimes we expect more of teens than of converted brethren.
7. They have a keen sense of fairness and like to have everything explained.
8. Boys are typically trying to build their bodies, and girls want to be thought of as beautiful.
9. Again, their sense of fairness and discernment will tell them whether you really like them or not.
10. Get them talking about their problems, listen to them and hear them out. Then you'll have a better idea of how to approach the problem.
11. Be firm but fair, and they will appreciate your guidance.

E. Single Parents

Single parenting is not an easy task. However, it is not impossible. The parent must assume the duties of both parents while realizing he or she cannot be both a dad and a mom. Yet, firm boundaries and family rules must be maintained for the sake of order and well-being. The minister must be careful not to "do it for the person," but rather, help the single parent feel the sense of power and responsibility he or she has in dealing with children.

VIII. Confrontations

Confrontations are inevitable, but how an elder or deacon reacts to them is under his control. We should not

be looking for a fight. In fact, when tempers flair and anger rules, we do not hear the words or reasons. The anger overpowers reason, and anger is what is heard.

Remain calm in the face of confrontation. Look for ways to relate to and understand the troubled individual. Compromise (not with God's law, but situationally) can help defuse the situation. If the emotions are being exhibited too keenly, you may suggest a cooling off period. Say, for example, "Let's calm down and think this over and meet in two days."

When the minister elects to confront another person, it should be by pointing out discrepancies while keeping emotional control (Galatians 6:1). If we find ourselves yelling at or browbeating an individual, how much does God's Spirit have to do with it? If the person is converted, then God's Spirit will bring him the knowledge by making him sensitive to the discrepancies you are discussing (I John 16:7-10, 13).

Those who oppose the truth doctrinally will have to be rebuked and convicted by you to preserve the flock (Titus 1:11-13). Note: This is not the normal approach in dealing with faithful, converted brethren, though. Argumentative members pose other problems:

- A. First, don't assume a person who has a question is argumentative. Questions help clarify understanding.
- B. Take time to give clear answers, but you may have to elect not to answer those who are argumentative (Proverbs 26:4, II Timothy 2:16, 23).
- C. We ought to warn the members that they are not approaching life in a normal way by being argumentative. James 3:17-18 talks of the wisdom from above being "easy to be entreated."
- D. Find out what is causing the argumentative mood and then help the person deal with it.

Suspensions and disfellowshipping are to be done by the pastor or the associate pastor.

In the event an antagonistic mate or other person tries to perpetrate violence upon you, you have the right to restrain such a person. You do not have to just submit to being physically attacked.

IX. Legal Problems

- A. Don't give financial advice about someone's business. Let him find a financial consultant. Explain tithing. Let the consultant do the rest.

B. Don't give medical advice or "home remedies." The ministry are not doctors, so be careful not to advise on medical issues.

C. Suicide attempts are to be taken seriously. Therapists and neurologists can provide biological, physiological and psychiatric help while you provide the pastoral.

D. Abused children require special care. Advise the pastor of any verbal, physical, mental or sexual abuse. He will then report the matter to Church Administration and/or the Legal Department.

E. It is a good idea to establish contacts with reputable professionals (doctors, therapists and specialists) to whom you may make referrals when necessary. Their relationship with you as a professional will help them understand where the Church members are coming from and ease the way for treatment.

X. Communicating With Headquarters

Let your pastor know of any major difficulties so that he may inform headquarters about what is happening when problems arise. When you need help or perceive possible difficulties for the Church because of a problem, let headquarters know. Notifying Church Administration early can prevent adverse publicity and give you the needed help to work with the problem.

Matters such as divorce and remarriage, racial problems, child abuse, etc., should be brought to the pastor's attention. He then may write the information up for headquarters. Other matters the pastor may choose to discuss over the phone or, if possible, in person, in order to help you with the situation.

Headquarters personnel cannot help if they are not informed. So please remember to call if there is a need.

XI. Conclusion

Caring for God's people is a vital part of ministering and doing the Work. A minister has to care (I Timothy 3:5) and do it with proper feeling (I Thessalonians 2:7-8). Remember: The flock belongs to God. They need to be treated tenderly and lovingly. The pastors of ancient Israel were criticized for neglecting the flock and not visiting them (Jeremiah 23:2, Ezekiel 34:2-4).

Remember to be "up" for visiting. A minister's moods are infectious. Get rid of any wrong moods before visiting and be positive. The brethren will pick up our feelings,

negative or positive. The main approach is to, by all means, help and serve those we visit (I Corinthians 9:19).

Let's apply these principles of visiting and counseling so we may serve God's people effectively. One of God's names is Counselor (Isaiah 9:6). Let's learn to be as He is for the benefit of the Church of God.

Recommended Books on Counseling

There are many helpful books available to help improve our knowledge of people's problems to be able to help them. Books on alcoholism, suicide, children of alcoholics, pre-marriage and marriage counseling are available to name a few. Of course, we must learn to throw away the "chaff," but there is "wheat" available also.

Alcoholism

Co-alcoholic Para-alcoholic (Jael Greenleaf)
Conquering Drug Abuse (Worldwide Church of God)
The Responsibility Trap (Claudia Bepko and Jo Ann Kreston)
Under the Influence (James Robert Milan)
Conquering Alcohol Abuse (Worldwide Church of God)

Death

Death: The Final Stage of Growth (Kubler-Ross)
On Death and Dying (Kubler-Ross)

Depression

Counseling the Depressed (Archibald D. Hart, Ph.D.)
Volume 5 of *Resources for Christian Counseling*

Family

Bradshaw on the Family (John Bradshaw)
Counseling Families (George A. Rekers, Ph.D.)
Volume 14 of *Resources for Christian Counseling*
How to Really Love Your Child (Ross Campbell)
How to Really Love Your Teenager (Ross Campbell)
Promises to Peter (Charles Shedd)

General Counseling

Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Howard J. Clinebell Jr.)
How to Help People Change (Jay E. Adams)
The Art of Counseling (Rollo May)

Marriage/Premarriage

Before You Say I Do (Wes Roberts)

Letters to Karen (Charles Shedd)

Letters to Philip (Charles Shedd)

Love, Marriage and Sex (Worldwide Church of God)

Pre-marital Counselling (H. Norman Wright)

The Act of Marriage (Tim and Beverly LaHaye)

The Minister as Marriage Counselor (Charles William Stewart)

Sex

Incest/Therapy (Maltz/Halman)

New Sex Therapy (Helen S. Kaplan)

Sexually Transmissible Diseases (Worldwide Church of God)

Suicide

Suicide: Prevention, Intervention, Postvention (Earl A. Grollman)