

Foundations and Fundamentals of Counseling

I want to spend the next little while thinking about counseling and people. If you have taken Introduction to Counseling at Covenant Seminary, this will not really be a review of that course, but rather a statement of “Here is what I would have wished you to take away from that course.” Maybe you did and maybe you did not, but let us make sure you get it now.

My main objective is to help you have an opportunity to understand how I think so you can understand why I am saying what I am saying and so you can figure out if that is how you want to think. That is ultimately the choice that you may need to make. I am not interested in creating people to think just like me. I happen to think that I think in unusual ways. I just do. Often I do not understand it myself. It just happens that way. Thoughts come out, and I cannot always explain it. Sometimes I embarrass my wife, but that is just the way it is. So I am going to try to give you some concept and some awareness, through talking about counseling in general, as we think about this. Afterward, I hope that you will have a few key questions to think about. These will be some things to look for and recognize, “I need to make some decisions about that. I need to think about that. That will shape my counseling. That will shape how I try to help people. That will make a difference in what I think I am trying to accomplish.” I think that is pretty important, or I actually would not do it here in this course on marriage and family counseling. This is not specifically on the subject of marriage and family, but I think it is important.

I am going to start with just a couple of thoughts that have crystallized for me in the last day or two. Biblical and Christian counseling is not defined by how well you use Bible verses or how many Bible verses you use in your counseling. Learning biblical or Christian counseling should not be about learning which verses apply to which problems of life. That is one way of thinking that is sometimes suggested, but I want to suggest a different way of thinking about Christian counseling. A fairly common way of thinking is, “Tell me the biblical content that I need to know when someone comes in and they have had an affair. Tell me the biblical content to make sure people know in premarital counseling.” Now obviously, there is biblical content that is important and that applies and that we need to know. I am suggesting here that often we think, “Our counseling is biblical or Christian when that is what we deliver.” I disagree and think we need to talk about that. So to understand the way of thinking that I am proposing, we need to understand the nature and purpose of the Bible.

The Bible is the story of redemption. From beginning to end, there is a central message that we call the message of the Gospel. Here at Covenant Seminary, we see that Scripture is organized around God’s covenant-making activity and that the resulting covenants between God and His people are a core part of the central message of Scripture and the Gospel of redemption. Actually, while the Bible was written by many human authors, because God inspired the human authors, it is a single book, primarily about one thing: redemption. Because this is the case, it could be said that while the details of Scripture are important, these details must be understood as part of a bigger picture. They really can only be best understood when seen in the context of the bigger picture. The Bible is a “big-picture” book. I do not mean that it has pictures in it. It is a book that presents itself in a “big-picture” way. The way the Bible shapes our view of the world and life is what will determine if our counseling is Christian and biblical. Accuracy in application of a biblical worldview should be our goal as helpers.

So here at Covenant Seminary, if you come to do a counseling degree, you will take theology courses, and you will take biblical studies courses, New Testament and Old Testament courses, and you will take counseling courses. Our objective is to strengthen and expand and deepen your worldview—what the Bible communicates in terms of how we should see the world and life and how it works and does not work and what God is up to. You need to understand that worldview. In a very real sense, our objective

is to shape your thinking about these things. We believe that in doing that, then, you will be prepared and equipped and given a grid through which to look at all kinds of things. You will be able to think about whether something is consistent with truth and useful and helpful. So our students take our Theories and Techniques course while they are in the process of an internship, counseling people 5 to 8 hours a week. During that time they are going to class and being exposed to 11 or 12 different major theories in counseling psychology. They are learning who are the founding mothers and fathers and what the main ideas of these theories in counseling are. Every time we critique these theories—understand them negatively and positively—from a Christian viewpoint. We try to think, “From this Christian worldview, how should we think about behaviorism? What here is true or consistent with truth? What here is helpful? How do we think about psychodynamic theory? How do we think about family systems theory? How do we wrestle with these things?” There is an assumption behind that, if you are thinking in that way about the more specific content. The assumption behind that is that truth is communicated by God through special revelation but also through general revelation. In His creation, what He is up to and what He has done is that all people have the capacity to look at and observe and see things that are true. The scientist can discover things that are true and accurate. Of course, we know, because Scripture tells us, that people cannot understand the need for salvation or the plan of salvation just through that general revelation. They are powerless to do that, but they can learn things that are true.

A diagnostic tool to help us see if we are working from the Bible’s worldview, this big picture, is to examine our thinking about the common statement that the Bible is sufficient for life but not exhaustive in what it addresses. This is said commonly, although maybe not commonly in your circles. I live in a very strange world compared with most of you, since I spend most of the hours in my day at a theological seminary. People talk about the Bible as true about everything that it addresses, but it does not address everything. For example, people have sometimes asked where Adam and Eve’s sons got their wives. The answer is that we do not know. We do not know because God did not tell us. He just did not tell us. It really was not in the purpose of Scripture. What did I say? The Bible is about a story of redemption. We do not really need to know where Adam and Eve’s sons’ wives came from. Maybe you have never even thought about it. I have thought about it once or twice, but I have never really dwelled on it too much. It is not that important in very many ways. I remember, not too many years ago, going to another professor as I was dealing with some students who were really wanting that other approach. They really wanted me to tell them the Bible content for specific situations. They thought that was what they needed to know. This professor gave the example of how it is not the pattern of Scripture. He asked the question, “What does the Bible tell us about sex?” Once you get past, “created male and female,” the answer is “not a whole lot.” The main message after that is that sex is supposed to be with the right person at the right time in the right context. Is the Bible a manual for sex? No. God just really did not care about writing a sex manual in Scripture. Why am I saying this? It seems obvious, right? That is a good example of the fact that Scripture is not exhaustive. God never intended to address everything. He was not writing a manual for life for us. But that does not make Scripture less effective or less true or less important. It is just that God was doing what He intended to do, and it is important that we go to the Bible and take it the way He intended it, even if we sometimes wish that He had done something else or something different. I know I can sometimes wish that God had told us a little more specifically about something.

So the Bible is not exhaustive in what it teaches. The sufficiency of Scripture flows from the worldview it teaches us. Now I made that statement up. I have read some books on worldview, so maybe I did not make it up on my own. Maybe I do not remember where somebody else might have said that. I am not saying that I am proud of the fact that I made that up. I am saying that you need to question that. I composed that sentence late last night or possibly early this morning, and you need to think about whether that is really true. The Bible teaches us a worldview that informs our thinking about everything,

although often not directly guiding us in our choice-making. If we are becoming too detail-dependent, we will slide into practice that appears to assume that Scripture actually is exhaustive—that it has something to say directly about any and every aspect of life. In doing so, we may be using ample Bible verses in our work, but sadly, we might actually be less biblical and Christian in our helping. If we are too detail-dependent, we will pay less attention to all of the aspects of the heart of the one with whom we are working, and we will over-focus on merely the person's knowledge and thinking. This is not the way of the Bible and should not be the way of the Christian counselor.

So what was I saying? We are going to talk about “heart” in a minute. “Heart,” as the Bible talks about it, includes thinking. When we say “heart,” we tend to mean “emotions.” We mean only the feeling part of ourselves. That is not what the Bible means by “heart.” The Bible talks about “heart” meaning thinking, feeling, decision-making (our wills) and, according to Jesus, even the words that flow out of our mouths. In other words, the heart is the seat of personality. It is the self. It is the soul. It is a whole person. It is the whole thing. What I am saying is that if we get too focused on content and on details, what tends to happen, as I watch counselors and watch myself when I do it as well, is that the counselor is really only thinking, “There is something here that the person does not know. If they would know this, then they will be helped.” The tricky part is that sometimes that is true. Sometimes a cognitive-behavioral approach is really the approach to take, but it is crucial that we understand that that cognitive-behavioral approach is not a direct parallel to sanctification, to the way God works as He grows us. God's sanctification is a much fuller-hearted process where He takes into account not only what we think and what we know but also what we feel. He takes our whole heart into account—so what we know, what we think, what we feel, what we decide, the choices we make, the words we speak—are all taken into account in a truly biblical perspective. The beginning place is always an understanding of the human person. I will say that again in a minute, but it is in light of “What does the Bible say? What is our Christian worldview? What is our biblical worldview of people and God and what He is up to and what change looks like and all those things?” It needs to be more than biblical content. It includes biblical content, but it needs to be more than that. This by necessity makes it more mysterious and sometimes less clear-cut. There is a much greater need for wisdom.

So I would encourage you, at whatever level of helping that you are doing, to start now to pray regularly for wisdom, if you have not already. Pray for wisdom in the midst of your counseling. Train yourself, discipline yourself, do whatever you have to do for yourself. Put signs on your bulletin board. Put a note where you can see it and other people cannot. Do whatever it takes to be dependent on God for the wisdom that you are going to need, because there will be many situations that are not clear and that the Bible does not necessarily address directly. The Bible does address those situations indirectly, but there can be choices in which one way or the other can both look okay. These may not necessarily be moral questions, but questions of what is best and what will be most growth-producing. It just takes great wisdom, so be praying for that.

Someone might ask for further clarification about the relationship between the cognitive and the emotional aspects of change. I am not trying to throw out the cognitive element. I am not trying to say, as some counselors would say, “Oh, just look at the feelings. That is all that counts.” I am not saying that. I am trying to say, “Let us truly be Christian; let us truly be biblical in our approach,” and that is not as simple as we sometimes assume, nor is it as simple as some people who teach or who have written books or whatever sometimes assume, in my opinion. That, in other words, cannot be measured by the amount of biblical content. So you might watch a session of mine, and you might ask, “Where was the Scripture?” and I would be thinking, “You did not see it? It was there the whole time.” I would say that because it is sort of the whole context, the whole view of the world, the view of what they are saying, the whole thing. We need to understand that for that person to change, to grow, to meet the

challenges before him or her, or whatever it is that brings that person here, it is going to take more than just more information or additional information or clarification of information for that person to actually change. Usually it is going to include changes in thinking, knowledge and thinking, and also changes in what the person is doing with the emotional stuff and therefore making different choices.

Part of what makes that hard is standard operating procedure for people—Christians and non-Christians alike—is not to pay attention to things that make us afraid or ashamed or hurt. We ignore all that feeling stuff. So there is a reason why those three principles that dysfunctional families tend to have end up with “Do not feel.” There is a reason that families operate in such a way that they can avoid thinking about feeling or talking about feeling or even paying attention to it to such an extent that some individuals can come out of those families, and they do not even know what they are feeling. It is common for me, in working with couples, to ask a person, usually the husband, “So what are you feeling about what she just said?” And after a good, really hard effort to try to figure it out, he says, “I do not know.” It is an honest answer. I have seen women say terrible things, awful things about their husbands, and when I have asked the husband, “How does that impact you?” he will say, “I do not know.” And they do not know. They really do not know. It is amazing, but it is a very powerful thing that our tendency is to put those things somehow behind us or away so that we do not have to deal with them. We get really, really good at that.

So I think that much of this course will be an effort for us to think about how to get better at that and how to help others get better at that. In a very real sense, this is “How do we help people do spiritual formation better?” It is that combination of emotional maturity and spiritual maturity that comes together right there. When Jeremiah tells us, “The heart is deceptive; who can understand it?” he is not saying, “Do not try.” I think we take it that way, often, or at least that is the way we live it out. I do not think he is saying that at all. We have stories in Scripture where what happens is that the prophet comes to David and tells him a story. Why? To expose David’s heart to himself so that he can see what is going on and what is driving him so that he can hear, “You are the man!” But there is an emotional thing going on. There is more than just the cognitive. It is told in story to get around the defenses or whatever you want to call them that people put into place to try to avoid feeling those things.

A great question to ask at this point is, “What does this have to say about the emotional readiness for the counselor?” I probably have two ways to address that. First, that emotional process is more about process than about content. I would not want you to hear me as if I am saying, “You have to work through stuff and be healed and be done with it before you can ever help others.” I do not believe that. Do you need to be pretty good in your own ability to pay attention to your own heart and your own stuff in order to help? Yes. If you cannot do that, will it mean that it is impossible for you to help others? No, I cannot say that. But I think it is a big hindrance. I cannot say it is impossible, because God just uses people. This sounds funny, actually, and I will probably say it again during this course, because I think it is important to know and just trust. I am fully aware that some of the best moments in terms of impact in my counseling were not intentional on my part. I was not at my best. Some of my favorites are when people come in and say, “You said something last week, and I thought about it all week, and it has been so helpful.” I will say, “Oh, really? We talked about a lot of things. What was it?” They will say something, and I will sit there and think, “I do not remember saying that.” Then I will think, “Oh, I remember those words, but I meant something different.” But I do not clarify, because it worked. That person heard something that I did not even mean, and it was helpful for him or her. That just strengthens my theology of God’s providence. He works and He operates and He does good things with people.

I remember my best counseling experience ever. It was the best for all kinds of reasons. One was that these people were just really, really prepared. There was a day where I actually looked them both in the

eyes and said, “You know, I am really aware that if I just went over in a corner right now and stood on my head, you would come back next week and tell me how helpful it was, because that is what is going on. It almost does not matter what I do.” And there is a truth in that. A lot of it has to do with the readiness of the person coming in. A lot of it has to do with what God is doing. For that reason, we do not have to be all fixed and all healed and all healthy, but we do have to be pretty good at paying attention. That is really the bottom line. We have to pay attention to ourselves, and you have to be able to pay good attention to yourself to be able to pay good attention to someone else. If you cannot pay pretty good attention to yourself, it is really hard to pay attention to someone else. Probably one of the few factors that distinguish the great counselors from the good counselors is that the great counselors can really pay attention to themselves. They use that to figure out what is going on with the other person. They understand that in a relationship, the things that you are feeling are partly because this person is impacting you in such a way that they are most comfortable when you are feeling those kinds of things. So if I were in a counseling relationship with someone and I felt like she was holding me off, then I would need to be able to get an understanding of that. I would need to be able to identify, “I am feeling like I cannot get through this wall”— to start thinking about why it is helpful for her to hold me off. Then I start to understand her better, and I have a chance at being a better helper to her, because I have a little bit of an ability to pay attention to what I am feeling. So my first thought is that you have to be able to do that process. My second thought is that it is not about being healed or being done, the content of it, as much as it is about the skill and the ability to be aware.

It makes me think of Ken Gire’s *Windows of the Soul*. He quotes Frederick Buechner. This is on page 31 of *Windows of the Soul*. Buechner says, “If we are to love our neighbors, before doing anything else, we must see our neighbors with our imagination as well as with our eyes. That is to say, like artists, we must not just see their faces, but the life behind and within their faces.” If you want to work at becoming a really good counselor, work at that. Work at seeing people. That is a piece that we could never figure out how to help you do that during this course. We can only get you started, but it takes paying attention. A book like *Windows of the Soul*, which is written about something else, helps a lot, because he is so concerned about helping us pay attention. If we cannot see our neighbors, we cannot help others. It really does start with understanding people, understanding what the Bible tells us about people in general and even more specifically, but we have to understand the individuals as well. We only get that by listening well and seeing them and getting it. In having the imagination, as Buechner talks about, to be able to get into, “What would it be like to be in their shoes? What would it be like to be in their seat?” That takes imagination. We can grow that imagination, but it takes time, and it takes some effort and some practice.

There is an interaction between observing growth and development and actually doing that process of seeing our own life, understanding ourselves and seeing that grow. There is a connection between that and seeing someone else. It also works the other way. One of the great things about working with people is that you grow in the process. If we go back to the emotional process question, it is not impossible—it happens more than I like—to be sitting with a couple and they will be talking about some issue or struggle or whatever that they have, and I will be thinking, “This marriage is better than mine.” Now we have a good marriage, but everyone struggles at some level. If you do not think that you struggle, then you are in trouble. That is a real problem. But why do I say that? The positive, peaceful functioning of my marriage, or our marriages as helpers, is not the measure of whether or not we help others. And sometimes as counselees are sharing, I am starting to see things that help encourage me to grow up. I think, “You know what? If he would just grow up a little bit, this would be different. Oops. That just got turned on me.” So the process can certainly go both ways.

We will talk about one other topic: foundations and fundamentals of counseling. First, here is a quote from Ed Teyber in *Interpersonal Process in Psychotherapy*: “Although personal experience, common sense, and intuition are useful, they alone do not prepare one to negotiate affect-laden therapeutic relationships. In order for a therapist to be effective with a wide range of people and problems, these valuable human qualities must be wed to a conceptual framework. The therapist must understand very specifically what they are trying to do in therapy—where they are going and why—in order to be consistently helpful to clients. Every therapist needs a conceptual framework as a guide, and this is especially true for the beginning therapist. Without this framework, decisions about intervention strategies and case management are too arbitrary to be trustworthy, and the therapist’s confidence in the therapeutic enterprise lessens as a result.” Now obviously Ed Teyber is writing for therapists, but we can take out the word “therapist” and put in your name or your role or whatever you would like, and it is still true.

One of the wonderful things about counseling in general is one of the easiest things is to see the possible things you can talk about and work on. There are so many, and they are often pretty obvious to the person who is not in the situation. This is especially true when working with couples. Many people may have had experience sitting down with an individual and having that conversation, but the thought of sitting down with a couple scares them a great deal. I say regularly—and I know most people do not believe me, but it really is true—that in many ways, counseling is easier with couples, because they cannot help but live their relationship right there in front of you. And you see it. You see the problems. Now I am a visual learner, and maybe I am too tied into that, but it is right there, and it helps me. When I have an individual in front of me, I am confused a lot more. Confusion is not bad, but I am just confused a lot more. I get uncomfortable with how often I can be confused with an individual, because I do not understand the story. I do not see the relationship, and there is a distance that I struggle with and wrestle with. But what happens is it does not take very long (usually one session is enough) that you are seeing all kinds of things with couples. All kinds of things are going by, and you are having to make choices of what you are going to address, what you are going to leave for later, and what you may never get back to. You have to decide what would be the best way into this. So it is that conceptual framework—that theory of who people are and how marriages work and how change happens and what that looks like—that is going to guide those decisions that we make as we work with people. So I think Teyber is correct on that.

So as we think about that conceptual framework, some of these foundations are the essential elements. Our conceptual framework, our practice, and any change that comes through our help all begin with our understanding of people and life. We must continue to learn about the nature of people and life to be best prepared to help people. Our understanding must address people in general, people more specifically—in other words, culturally—as well as the specific individual. Our conceptual framework, our practice, and the change that comes through our help begin with our understanding of people and life.

I started my training for my first role in this helping profession as a social worker back in around 1973. I did not know that then. I went to graduate school in 1975 after graduating from college, and I did not know that after I finished in 1977. Then I worked as a social worker for about eight years, and then I came to Covenant Seminary and did a Master of Divinity, and then I went off and was an assistant pastor. Then I came back, and I had done some counseling and some other things, and I gradually learned this, but I could not have said those words. I could not name it until some time in the last few years. What I am seeing is, what I stumbled into is, many of my activities that I have sort of fallen into have been about trying to figure out the nature of life and people and God’s interaction with that and our interaction with Him. What I read and the music I listen to and the people I talk to and the conversations

we have had and all of that, so much of it is about that. I was doing it without realizing it, because it is necessary.

An essential beginning point for being a helper, for being a counselor, is having a pretty good understanding of life and people. You need a good understanding of how people are wired and what they are up to and what happens with them, and how suffering fits into life, and how a good God is still good even though He decides to allow suffering to happen. You just need to wrestle with that and have a peace about that and an understanding of that that makes sense and that fits across cultures and that fits with specific individuals. That is a big task. That is a lifelong task, and I do not think you ever complete it. But you have to do more than just take one or two courses on counseling. I am not necessarily saying to get a degree. If you get a degree, you realize that you have to do more than that. You have to be a lifelong learner. You have to be somebody who just decides that you are going to pursue an understanding of people and who they are and life and what it is about. And it might even make you unusual. It might make you different from other people, but if you are really going to be helpful, I think that is what you need to do. So I think that means that you read things that maybe other Christians do not think you should read. You read things that are not Christian things. My current opinion is that the expressive artists—the musicians and the poets and the visual artists—have the best take on life of anyone out there. A lot of those folks, who have a really good understanding of life and people, are not believers. I am somewhat ashamed of us as Christians that we are not doing better in terms of getting a grip on the nature of life and its struggles and the nature of people and our struggles and what that looks like. Certainly there are people who are writing good things, but we need to do more than that. We need to read from some different perspectives, so I want to challenge you to do that.

Another foundational aspect is a biblical anthropology. This is the understanding that that we are created in the image of God, but we are marred by the Fall. We are what Schaeffer called “glorious ruins.” We are created for relationship. God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” We need to understand man in that context and in that perspective, that there is an “already and not yet” aspect to human existence, even for believers. When we talk about differentiation, we are going to talk about a couple of different ways just as examples of thinking about maturity. One of the things that mature people do is that they can tolerate, and even embrace, ambiguity. It takes a level of maturity to be able to say, “Hmmm, these things look opposite, but they belong together. I am going to hang on to both of them.” That is a challenging thing. An example of that would be the complementary truths that we are created in the image of God and that we are also fallen. Sometimes we kind of think that we are fallen in the past and present but redeemed in the future, as if redemption were a movement from one epoch to another epoch or one factor in us to another factor, but that really misses the ambiguity that is present in the human person. Human beings are image-bearers, and there is great dignity in the human person. At the same time, even for believers, there is great brokenness, expressed as depravity and sinfulness. It may not even be obvious, overt sinful behavior as much as still a bent toward self-centeredness. It may be expressed as still a bent toward being blind to the truth of what is going on in our own hearts. It may be expressed as being bent toward being like Adam in the garden after the Fall and blaming someone else—“The woman you gave me...”—as if that somehow absolved Adam of responsibility. We are still bent that way, as redeemed people. Now, is God working in us to transform us? Yes. Is that going to be accomplished completely in this life, if Christ does not return? No. It is a process that we are in. It is more important that we are moving forward in the process than where we are in whatever measurement continuum you want to put up there. The fact is that they are happening at the same time. That is a crucial understanding. That is a biblical anthropology that is really fairly unique.

Humanistic psychology does not use the idea of being created in God’s image. They are not connecting to the Creation, but they are exclusively positive about the human person. They basically assume that in

the right environment, given the opportunity, the human person will grow. That idea is opposed to behaviorism, which is at the other end. Behaviorism is basically and ultimately a dehumanizing of people, philosophically speaking. It is the idea that we are just conditioned animals. This philosophy states that we are different from other animals, but not really that much. It is a degrading of the human person. All of psychology tends to go one way or the other. It is really a pretty unique situation that our description of our view of what mankind is like is that there is a mix. So a biblical anthropology gives us an important starting point that is unique and accurate. We will talk more about the other piece, that we are created for relationship. I do not think we emphasize that enough. I think we do not emphasize how much we need relationship. We do not realize, if we look at the list of sins in the New Testament, how many of those are in a relational context. Relationship is much more at the core of life than we tend to think.

We need to think about a basic pattern of change. Here I am borrowing from Dan Allender's *The Wounded Heart*. He has three chapters that are, I think, a model of change for him: honesty, repentance, and what he calls "bold love." I am going to call that "reworking relationships." So the very beginning of change is to help people wrestle with being honest, to start seeing things more honestly and clearly. Repentance means repentance not just from sinful behaviors, in terms of outward or overt behavior, but also from the self-protection that we put into place that keeps us from looking at things. That kind of repentance allows us to move into relationships in new ways. Another person called this process "expose" (kind of like honesty), "explore" what the possibilities are, and then "enticing toward change." The "enticing toward change," I think, appreciates the amount of defensiveness and the amount of resistance that people typically put up, whether they want to or not. Then we need to recognize that by nature, people are, first of all, escape artists. I am borrowing that language from Frederick Buechner, actually. People are, first of all, escape artists. Every approach to people in terms of psychology or counseling and even other approaches has some description of this. Freud talks about "defense mechanisms." Psychodynamic people, who include object relations people, still talk about "defense mechanisms." Dan Allender, a Christian writer, talks about "self-protective behaviors." It is really the same process or ideas related to it. Whoever it might be, people eventually, if they have paid attention in working with people at all, recognize that people are dishonest with themselves about pain, disappointment, suffering, joy, fear, victories, and losses. We just are. People cope by hoping and pretending that the "it," whatever it is, in their lives, is not big, does not really matter, will go away, will not hurt much or for long, or something like that.

Therefore we have to lead with caring gentleness. We must create a safe place to have a chance of going around the walls of the defenses so that we can help them really stop coping the way that they have been coping, so that they can start to face some things honestly. Helping happens through special relationships. There are two elements to the relationship. Sometimes I actually say it this way: The relationship is the vehicle of change, and I envision that vehicle as being a train. The train rides on two tracks. One track is care, and the other is expectation for change or coaching toward change, sometimes confrontation. So there is this "care," the gentle, compassionate, listening side, but there is this other "thumb in your back" or "hand in your back," encouraging you toward change. "Yes, that is a sad story, but you really need to do something here." Part of what you need to do is to look at your own contribution to the problem.

By the way, the train image helps me. I do not know if you have ridden in trains very much. Where I grew up, we rode subways quite a bit. I do not remember this in the subway too much, but several years ago, at a church where we were, the church took a trip to an antique train. A bunch of us got into this antique train, and we rode this 1860s vintage train down several miles of track. Then we came back on the same track. One of the things that is very clear in riding in a train like that is that you know when

you turn corners, if there is any speed at all, because the weight shifts. It is much like that in a counseling relationship. You turn corners, and the weight shifts. Most of the time, typically, when you are first beginning with someone, the weight is on the care side. Sooner or later, however—and it is usually fairly soon—the weight is going to shift. You are going to turn corners. Now you do not ever lose contact with that one track, or you are in trouble. You keep caring, but also you have to throw some weight toward that expectation or coach toward change. There is something of a shifting back and forth.

That image actually helps me, because it fits so accurately the reality that happens when we work with people. When I have a sense that we are spinning our wheels, it is a good sign to me that I have been standing mostly on the care track and have not done enough with the coaching toward change. That is my personal tendency. I am not a very assertive person. I will wait for people. I am not very directive. This image helps me recognize that I have not been directive enough, I have not been putting in enough accountability, and I need to get going and get a little more active. It is important for me to recognize that.

Some of you are maybe more directive and more assertive. That may come more easily for you. That is the way it is. I do not know that it splits 50/50 in the population, but some people are, and some are not. I am not sure what it will be for you, but it may be that you will recognize that maybe the person whom you are counseling is not connecting enough with you. Then you may recognize that you have been riding the “expectation for change” track a little too much and you need to back off. You need to spend some time paying more attention so that person knows that you really do care. We need to recognize that we need to ride both tracks, but the weight and the emphasis shifts from time to time. I do not know how that illustration hits you. You may think that it is kind of silly, or you may think that it is interesting, but I probably draw from that directly every week. I probably draw from it with every client at some point, because I am pretty good at being myself consistently, which means that I am going to be pretty good at not doing that second track soon enough. Most clients, most couples, most situations, I can recognize that I have not been pushing this forward enough. So I will draw from that all the time. I think it can be one of those things that can help you in your counseling.

I think we have talked about use of self, which is dependent on awareness of self, in general and in the moment. Connection is fostered by our own non-anxious presence. If you read that recommended book *The Leader's Journey*, it talks about that non-anxious presence. This is the concept that as helpers, when we go in the room, it is important that we are the least anxious person in the room. That is not that easy, actually, particularly when you go in, and you sit down. In some way you have been identified as the helper or the counselor. The other person does not say the words (not very often, anyway), but somehow the person communicates really quickly that he or she is expecting an answer from you that is going to fix this stuff, and he or she is expecting it pretty soon. Five minutes would be fine. That person is looking to you to be that answer person. If that does not make you anxious, something died in you or something, because it just does. It is a powerful force, and as near as I can come is that it is always there. I have been doing this for a while now, and I am pretty sure that every new client I have, I am thinking things like, “Why are they coming to see me? Can I help these people? I am scared.” I really am. I am anxious. I am afraid. Experience is not a remedy for that, although experience can be helpful. I do not think there is a remedy for that. It is a natural part of the process that you have to manage. You have to learn and get used to it and manage it. Some of that is whether you trust that God really will use your worst moments for good things. Do you trust that He will use your good moments? Do you trust that He will help you to have some good moments? You need to know that these people are in His hands. He wants to use you, and you want to be used and do the right and good things. You go for that, but if you put too much responsibility on yourself, you will not be able to manage that anxiety. You just will not be able to manage it. If you put too much responsibility on yourself, you will not last long in this helping

profession, however that is expressed in your life. I say this because you do not get enough feedback that you are actually being helpful. You do not get a lot of that. That is pretty rare, so you cannot be dependent on that. If you are really feeling responsible for the change, if you are looking for that feedback because you need it, then you are in trouble.

So the process is that we are trying to lead people to truth as opposed to telling them the truth. Another element is the use of story. I wish I were a better storyteller. Some of my reading these days is stories. Just recently I ordered some books because I thought they might help me with the use of story. Story can be so much more effective than some of the directive approaches we use like, "I have an answer for you." I have been teaching this for years, and I think I do a pretty good job of not telling people what to do and not giving answers and so forth, and then in June some of us went to Ethiopia. It was a group of mostly counseling students. I was one of the faculty members, and we went to help in an HIV/AIDS project in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. We spent about eight or nine days on the ground there, and we did counseling, among other things. Well, several things were exposed, and one of the things that was exposed to me (and probably to others) was that I was doing more telling than I realized. I was confronted with these situations like a 21-year-old mother with a 5-year-old child. The mother is HIV-positive. She is alone. Her husband has died from the disease. Her parents are dead, and she has no siblings. Probably the greatest concern for her is, "Will I live long enough to raise my child?" Truth-telling, or the approach of "let me give you something that leads you to an answer," is not really helpful in that situation. I was exposed more than I even realized. It became clear that a better approach would perhaps be the use of story, the use of questions to lead indirectly, to listen well and to really hear what is underneath the concern rather than pushing too quickly and saying, "Hey, you can do this to solve this." What is needed is really to be present. I had said to the students before we even went, "One of the most important things for us is going to be our presence." I then found that I was perhaps not believing that enough.

Someone might ask about a situation where a counselor tries to correct something in a person's life and, as a result, the person falls apart. That is a really hard one. One question is whether or not that is bad. My answer is that I am not sure. It is possible that that is a necessary process for that person to move forward. Sometimes progress starts backward. One man said it this way: "The way to God is down." Often that is true, so that can be a part of someone who really has not honestly looked at things, so in your confrontation, when you try to correct them—"Hey, let us look at this problem. Let us look at this behavior here"—that person may have felt exposed. But part of the possible goodness out of that situation is that in that they could look at it and say, "Oh, it is like I am looking in the mirror as these people talk with me, and I am seeing myself clearly."

Now, it feels badly when you have a conversation with someone and it overwhelms them. It feels badly, but having said all this, part of the truth really is that much of counseling is a great experiment. Let us relieve ourselves of the idea that if I go take this class and learn how to do this, then I will know what I am doing. It is much more important to know that you will not know what you are doing sometimes. That is not true all the time. We want that conceptual framework, because it is a guideline for us for how to get started and how to listen well and what to pay attention to. It is a guideline for us on how to make choices about what is most important to focus on and what is perhaps less important. It does that, but you will still have points where you do not know what to do. People are complex. They are unpredictable. It is mysterious, and we cannot take that piece of it away. The more we learn about life and the nature of it, the more mysterious it becomes, really. We do not get to where we have everything all figured out and we can explain it and it all fits together nicely. For me, part of the joy and part of the excitement of doing this kind of work is that you get the chance that a lot of people never get in their whole lives to really get to know something of what is going on with a person. You will not understand

it all completely, but often you will be able to offer some help and something they can take and wrestle with and think about. But you usually will not experience a situation like, "I know if I do this, then good things will happen." It does not usually work like that.

Let me tell you about the best counseling situation I have had, as far as what I experienced and from what I know of what the clients experienced. They have given me permission to talk about this, without using their names. I saw them as a couple, but it really was about the woman having been sexually abused by her father in her childhood. She did not remember the details of what he had done, and we spent the better part of a year or so together, pretty much weekly. Very early in that process I had asked her, as some homework, to make a list. I was borrowing a question that somebody calls "the miracle question." The question is, "If you went home tonight and a miracle happened and you woke up tomorrow and the problem was gone, how would you know?" The way I said it was, "So if we work together for a while and it goes well and things are resolved, like a miracle, how would you know? I do not mean just that you do not hurt anymore, but what would be present? What would we see?" She came back with a list of 10 or 12 things, and it was amazing, because in that year we dealt with them all. We did not do it methodically. Some of them just fell in place. She was the first client I had ever worked with around sexual abuse issues. I had three that school year, and all at the same time. God seems to do that. He brings them to you in bunches. In my mind I was thinking, "I have no idea what to do. I do not know where to go. I do not know how far to go. I do not know how far not to go. I just do not know." But by God's grace and often by experiment, even in the moment, it was a great time for all of us. It was a wonderful time.

After that experience, I said to my wife and to others, "I could retire now and be fine." Here was one situation where I know that it was good. It felt like that was what I was made for, and it was enough. It was so good. It felt like that afterward even though almost every week it was like, "Where do I go with this?" as this woman shared stuff that was so challenging. Where do you go with that? My point in saying this is do not think you are going to know. It is all right to have a sense of not being sure what to do, where to go, or what the next step is.

Let us talk about the use of questions. If you want to improve your counseling, some simple things to do are to work on awareness of yourself and others and to ask more questions. A third thing to add to that might be to put more pause in what you do. That fits with asking questions. If you are asking questions and they are answering like a metronome, that is a problem. It is actually better when you ask a question and they think and you wait patiently and then they answer. Then perhaps you have to think. Some of my best moments occur when I do not know what to say next. Then they add something because I did not fill the space too quickly, as I am prone to do. That is really important. They were not done. They just paused, and I did not pick it up. Thankfully, in those moments when I am not sure where to go, they keep going. So put more pause in what you do. Let me say it this way. Slow down. Use more questions and stay aware of yourself. Those are probably the best ways to improve your counseling.

We are going to talk about this more fully later but lead people indirectly. In other words, lead people indirectly through the use of questions as opposed to telling. Questions come in different types. There are questions that enlighten the other person, not the counselor. We all know about questions that are used to orient us. You might be asked these questions at the beginning of a class, for instance. These are questions like, what is your name, where are you from, or what is one thing you would like me to know about yourself. Those are questions to orient us, and a lot of our questions are like that. But as a counselor, those questions work for about a session-and-a-half at most. You need to get to some other kind of discussion. That is where you need to shift to questions that are more about getting them to think about themselves so that they will be enlightened about themselves. Ask questions to help them get

around the standard defenses and dishonesty with themselves that they tend to have operating. We will explore that more. I am just mentioning it here. These are questions that are meant to expose the truth to the person. They are questions that clarify for the person their hurt, pain, sorrow, fear, choices, risks, and needs. They are challenging and confrontational questions. Make sure to do this gently. One of the best ways to improve your listening is to ask questions. Slow down enough to ask questions about the answer that was just given as opposed to moving on to another question.

In the classroom sometimes, one person will make a comment and then someone else will respond by making a different comment about something that does not have anything to do with the first comment. A better process would be for the second person to respond to the first comment. That is a really good model for good counseling. They make a comment, and we respond to that rather than moving on to something else.

We are back to the idea that we need a conceptual framework to guide our decisions. A piece of our conceptual framework needs to be that we really need to pay attention. We really need to listen well. We need to move slowly enough to make sure we are getting as much as we possibly can. It is about what they are saying, not what I am doing. That is a big piece of our conceptual framework. I am not the expert. We are not the experts. We are people who come alongside rather than in front of or above, not to direct but to listen. Steer perhaps. Lead. Impact. It is certainly not just about care, that one track of the relationship. But do that from below or beside, rather than pushing in the way you want to go.