

## **Foundations and Fundamentals of Counseling, II**

I want to finish up a few things, talking about foundations and fundamentals. We have talked about this already. Be aware of yourself. Pay attention to what is stirring inside you. Name what is stirring. Consider how and why being with this other person stirs you like it does. What context will you have to create to foster, self-awareness? Will it be solitude? Will you need to talk with a trusted team member? Will you journal, or will it be something else? Do you know that it is a good thing to be in a relationship with you? If relationship is the vehicle of change, you have to trust that it is actually a good thing to be in a relationship with you. That can be fairly hard for us. There are lots of messages that we get as we grow and develop and move into professional life that are just the opposite of that. We do not get a lot of messages that say, "It is good to be in a relationship with you." For those who are in ministry, consider how many people have come to you and said, "It is good doing this with you." It does not happen very often. I know a student who is going to counseling at the moment, and as he was leaving the other day he stuck his head back in the office and said to the counselor, "You are really good at this." I thought, "Wow. Not very many people do that." This is not an issue of pride. It is about recognizing that God has made you as a human person who has relational abilities. That is part of being an image-bearer. He has gifted you in such a way that you can do relationship in a way that is good. If that is hard for you to believe, you might ask yourself why that is. Ask yourself when it is easier to believe and when is it harder.

The key fundamental that I have mentioned is listening, listening, listening. I suppose I waxed a little contrary when I said it is a problem if you think you are a good listener. Most of us are not. It takes a lot of focus. If you think you are a good listener, you probably stopped focusing. And if you stop focusing, you are not going to be a good listener. Listening well in the current moment is hard work. It takes a lot of energy and focus. If you think you are a good listener, you may lean too much on your good skills and not do the work to focus on understanding. As a result you may hear words but not the meaning for this person in this moment. You might be with your neighbor but not see your neighbor, because you are depending on your skills too much. So I am encouraging you to look and listen to things deeper than words. Listen with your ears but also with your eyes, feelings, heart, and soul. Listen deeply. Listen with your imagination. Imagination is needed to truly empathize. You need to be able to imagine yourself in the other's position to empathize, because they are a different person in a different situation. That is one key. Listen.

The next key is to move slowly. Almost all of us will move too quickly in our counseling. One of my heroes, Abraham Lincoln, said, "Make haste, slowly." That is a great statement. He had all kinds of problems getting his generals to move. So he said to one of them, "It is time to make haste, slowly." He wanted to move, but he also wanted to be careful. One of the best ways to improve your counseling is to slow down. That is true for the beginner and for the most experienced helper.

Another key is to move forward by asking questions. We have talked about that already. Also, anticipate fear and self-protection. Recognize that people are afraid and that they will cover and protect. They will stay blind to things. They will numb themselves. They will do all kinds of things to self-protect. So a good goal for us is connection. Build connection with people and develop understanding rather than trying to answer questions and fix people. Also, you need to take care of yourself. Work to be clear on who is responsible for change.

What is the difference between fixing and coaching? We talked in an earlier lesson about coaching. I do not know if you have ever been involved in athletics. Some of us had coaches who operated as "fixers." But I would say that they were not being good coaches. I am thinking of a basketball coach whom I had

in high school. Prior to his basketball coaching days he was known as one of the best football coaches in the state of Massachusetts. You might think that in Massachusetts that would not be hard, but it is still something. For some extra money he coached the ninth grade, which back then was junior high school. Then he moved up to the junior varsity job. Then he became the head coach, which is what he was when I came along. He was a very good coach in many ways, though I did not realize it at the time. Let me give an example. There were times when we would be playing a game where we were ahead by two points and there was a minute and a half left in the game. The other team just made a foul shot to bring it down to a two-point lead, and so we had the ball underneath the basket. They threw a full-court zone press at us, but we were not afraid. We recognized what was happening. We all went to our spots and knew what we were going to do, because we had a good coach. We had gone through that before on multiple occasions in practice. Coach would run similar situations like that in practice. We were prepared for it because he was a good coach.

I think that is something of what people who are coaching toward change do. We help people anticipate situations. Sometimes we even practice or talk through what situations would look like. What is the best way to respond? What might it look like? I end up doing a fair amount of coaching in the month of November here at the seminary because people are anticipating going home for Thanksgiving. People want to know what they can do when they go home to make things go in a better direction. So we will talk through that. Part of what we do is try to discover what is stirring inside of them that leads them to act in the same old way, to take on the role of a child even though they are 25. I ask them what might be going on inside their parents that they have not thought about. They have been thinking about what is driving them but not what is driving the people on the other side. And then I actually coach through that. Sometimes we even role play.

I can remember a situation in my own life that is relevant to this. At one point in my mother's life, she moved back to Minnesota to care for her mother, my grandmother, in the last decade of my grandmother's life. So we visited my mom in Minnesota. I can picture driving up the cement driveway, which was next to the right side of my grandmother's house in Winona, Minnesota. The back door was almost always open. It was hardly ever locked, though at night my mother would usually lock it. I would walk in and my mother would be there, probably working in the kitchen, because that is what she would do. After some initial greetings, on almost every visit her next question to me would be, "Do you want to get a hair cut while you are here?" Now, I was a father with two kids at this point. I was in my 30s. Part of her reason for asking could have been that I was a seminary student, but it is the same old thing. She just wanted to be helpful. She might have been right. Maybe I did want a hair cut but did not get one yet. Generally, however, it did not matter. None of that thinking was going on. I just reacted to that. "Mom is being too mother-like," I thought.

The tendency for me was to react against that. It did not take a lot of thinking to figure out what was going on in mom. Here was her son whom she did not get to see very often. We did not talk all that much on the phone, but when we did it was a whole different kind of thing. She does not have very many ways to express care. She grew up in a family where there were not many ways at all. So she does not have many ways to think about that. As a result, when she notices my hair is a little longer, she wants to help with that. Well, dealing better with this situation took a little bit of work on my part. In this case I think I had to self-coach. I would think about how to anticipate the situation. What would it look like? How could I respond differently? And it changed the whole nature of it just to be able to say, "Yes, I do need a haircut. I could not get it done earlier, and you know what my hair is like." She used to cut it. I tell this story as an example of thinking through, anticipating, and planning different kinds of responses, which can all be a part of coaching.

Notice that this is much different than saying to a client, "Here is what you need to do. When you go..." and then plan it out for the person. Usually when we directly tell them what to do, they do not embrace it as their own. Consequently, they will not do it. Even if they do, it will be a half-hearted attempt, because they have not really owned it as their own. So they might try it, but only half-heartedly. They expect that it will probably not work, which it usually, then, does not.

I am advocating leading people rather than telling them what to do. Is there anyone who likes to be told what to do? The truth is that most of us resist that. That is part of what is built into us. We resist that. Part of understanding people is recognizing what they are like and seeing that we have to work around that. So ask questions, lead, coach, and try to come alongside as opposed to over. Those are images or metaphors for trying to work collaboratively with people.

There are times to say things to people that sound like, "If I were in your shoes, I would do this." I believe those times are when you are trying to help someone get a hold of what is stirring emotionally at a deeper level, but they are having a hard time doing that. You might have some guesses. I think you should keep them as guesses or multiple choice questions or something like that. That is important. But you might have to be more direct with them. It could be really helpful to say to someone, "If I were in your shoes, I would be angry. I would hurt about that." It gives them permission to feel those things. Often people do not feel like they have permission to feel things, especially things like anger. We recognize that we are supposed to be forgiving, and so we move to forgiveness before we have even recognized how upset we were about something. As a result, we end up being dishonest in our forgiving. We need to be honest enough that we can grieve that which was lost so that we can forgive.

Let me take up a question. Can what I am advocating be applied to relationships that are not counseling relationships? Could this be applied to coworker relationships, for instance? It seems to me that you can apply it. But it is important to recognize that counseling relationships are unique. They are different from other relationships. Part of the difference is those two tracks of care and expectation for change. If you are in a role as helper or counselor, however you define that, you have power. You have more power than you do in a friendship or coworker relationship. Part of the way that power plays out is in the expectation that you have, as a counselor, for change. You have the ability to look the person in the eye and say, "Wait a minute. You need to look at this. I think you are running away from this. You are trying to escape this. You need to look at this because it is taking you down. You could get in trouble for this." Friends can do something like that, but they do not have the same power. A friend can ignore you a lot easier than a counselee can. So you always have to be thinking about what the nature of the relationship is and how that affects the boundaries that are present. There are always limits to what can happen in a relationship. There are more limits in a friendship in terms of how deep we go and how far we go and how much power we try to exert.

What I just said may sound contradictory to what I was saying earlier. I just said that you have power, and you need to exercise that power. But at the same time, you need to do that from a collaborative position. If you simply use your power in a direct way, it will not be very effective, because of the nature of people. People resist that. They do not hear that well. They will think, "You do not understand me. You are not listening to me." It is more effective to come alongside them in a collaborative way and help them know that you are listening well and that you do understand and care. Then you can present your ideas about what the way forward looks like, and you can hold them accountable. You have a lot more power and opportunity to hold people accountable in a counseling relationship than in other relationships. So I think you can use the principle, but in terms of how deep and far you go, there are going to be differences, given the difference in the relationship.

One of the principles I learned in social work is to start where the client is. I think there is a lot of wisdom in that. It requires you to do some of the things we have talked about—listen, pay attention, and connect with people. But recognize that wherever people are is where they are. If you want them to be in one place, you cannot start there and pull them. It is much better to start where they are and help them move.

Let us continue. Take care of yourself. Work to be clear on who is responsible for change. It is not your expertise that is needed but your presence and faithfulness. I may start to sound like I have said this over and over again. I guess it is because it is important to me. It is all right to not know what to say. It is all right to not know the answers or what to do. It is good to be honest about the moment. Saying something like, “Wow, this is hard,” might be the best response. It is just being truthful. You might say, “This is a sad situation. This is a tough thing.” Often, the counselee is trying not to think about it that way, and it is helpful for them to hear that.

As a summary, what I am thinking is this: Fear is your enemy; to keep thinking is your aid; God is with you; and feel free to give responsibility back to the ones who should hold it. In hard circumstances people will look to you as if you are supposed to be the answer rather than the one to join them and be with them and get down into the pit with them so that together you can work on it.

Let me give you an image that I sometimes say might be one of the better images of what counseling is like. Imagine that you are in a room that does not have any windows. If you shut off all the lights it would be very dark. Now imagine that you are standing with a couple of people in the middle of the room. You cannot see anything, and so you start wandering around together. Perhaps you are making suggestions, looking for a light switch so you can get some perspective, some ideas on where you are, what is going on, and what to do. Counseling is an awful lot like that. It is taking someone’s hand, going to the middle of a very dark room, and listening to them, joining them in the process of wandering around and trying to help them figure things out. You might hit a wall. What does that mean? Which way will you feel along the wall? Perhaps you will hit a switch and shed some light on the situation. It is not always quite that startling. Often it is slow and subtle. But almost all the time it feels like you are standing in the middle of a dark room, wandering around together. That relieves you of the pressure. It gives the responsibility back to the counselee to work on change.

By the way, it does not matter how good you are. You can be a great counselor, but if the counselee is not ready to work on change, it will not happen. It cannot happen if they are not going to work. On the other hand, you can be a very average counselor and if they are ready, it is going to happen. It is not as dependent on you. It is much more dependent on them. Sure, we work to understand and improve and get better. We try to expand our skills. But do not take the responsibility for change. That needs to stay with them.

I said we were going to do marriage and family stuff, and I am moving slower than I thought. Let me mention some resources. There is a book called *Satisfy Your Soul* by Bruce Demarest. This is a great book. It is a wonderful book on spiritual formation. Another book is called *Emotional Resilience* by a man named David Viscott. The first sentence in the introduction to that book is “If you lived honestly, your life would heal itself.” Viscott is a wise person. He is deceased, I believe. He was a wise person who did therapy for 25 or 30 years and paid attention. One of the things that he tried in his therapy was to record the session, and he gave his clients the tape. He told them to go home and listen to it so that they could review, retain, and work on things. He was surprised, however, by the fact that his clients did not like to listen to the tapes. The reason was that they were hearing themselves tell lies that they did not even realize. They did not realize how dishonest they were about their own issues. Well, in about 8 or 10

pages, Viscott basically gives you a nice, concise model of how to understand people, and he does it all in non-psychological language. He uses words that everyday people use.

Viscott says a couple basic things. Imagine that you are in a relationship and someone says something that generates a feeling in you. It might be positive or it might be negative, but you do not say anything. Perhaps they hurt your feelings, but you treat it as though it were not a big deal. You think you will get over it. Or perhaps you are starting to like the other person a lot, but you are not sure if they like you, so you do not say anything. By not sharing it, Viscott says you now owe it to them. You are in emotional debt. The thing that happens with emotional debt is that the further you get away from the incident that generated that feeling, the less connected it is to the actual event and the more distorted it gets.

The problem is that we do a lot of these things. You cannot talk about everything. Viscott does not have any qualifiers in his writing. He does not qualify anything. You can add the qualifiers in. You cannot talk about everything. But the problem is that the debt gets stored up, and it builds on itself. It can get to the point where—and probably everyone has had this sort of thing happen to them; I know I have—something happens that hooks something inside you. You react to the thing that happened even though you know at the time, or a little bit later as you think about it, that your response was inappropriate for what happened. “What was that about,” you say. You gave a much stronger reaction than what was deserved. Well, Viscott says that is what happens when emotional debt is stored over time. It can turn into toxic nostalgia. Is that not a great term? I think he is right. Ultimately, he ends up saying that mature people are fairly good at telling others what they feel when they feel it. That is one of the simplest definitions of maturity I have ever heard. It is also really challenging.

This concept is supported in Scripture in Matthew 18. If you are at the altar and you have something against your brother or your brother has something against you, you go to him. That is more important than praying. That is more important than what you are doing in the temple. You go and talk to him. We usually think about this passage as a foundation for church discipline, and it is certainly that. But before it is that, it is about a relationship. When there is something going on between the two of you, then you go to that person. Now, if that does not work, you bring someone else because you want to resolve it. You are trying to restore the relationship. I think Viscott gets that.

You could also go to Galatians 6 where Paul tells us to bear grievances. There is a time to do that as well. I wonder if Viscott does not give us wisdom in helping to figure out when to do which. Is it something that you can truly move past and be all right with, or is it something that is going to turn into toxic nostalgia? Is this something that you are going to dwell on? Is this something that is going to hook you? Is this something that is going to come back later? If so, then Matthew 18 applies and not Galatians 6.

Another resource for you to look at is a book that was published two years ago by the faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary called *All For Jesus*. We wrote the book because we were celebrating the 50th anniversary of the seminary. We each did a chapter. The chapter I wrote is called “Grace-Shaped Counseling.” It gives you some of these same ideas in a little different approach.

Let me mention another thing. I want to talk about what a good marriage looks like. We have already said it. I am sure you have heard it. But I have not emphasized it enough perhaps, so I want to make sure I do that. I want us to think for a bit about the Bible’s concept of “heart.” Perhaps this is one of the more helpful elements in a biblical anthropology, to understand what the Bible means when it talks about the heart. It can shape our work in all kinds of ways. I want to look at three things.

The first is out of the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, edited by R. Laird Harris, who used to teach at Covenant Seminary and went on to be with the Lord just recently. I am going to read a few sentences out of the entry on “heart.” It also mentions “understanding” and “mind” as possibilities for the same word. In parenthesis it says that this word can be used in idioms such as “to set your heart upon,” meaning “to think about,” or “to want.” The Hebrew word is *labe*. “Concrete meanings of *labe* refer to the internal organ and the analogous physical locations. However, in its abstract meanings, heart became the richest biblical term for the totality of man’s inner and immaterial nature. In biblical literature it is the most frequently used term for man’s immaterial personality functions as well as the most inclusive term for them, since in the Bible virtually every immaterial function of man is attributed to the heart.”

That is a different way of thinking than most of us are used to when we use the word heart. It seems to me that this helps us in thinking about counseling. We are really saying something by saying that we want to address people’s hearts. This definition fills in what that means. We are going to help people try to pay attention to their whole heart, their whole immaterial being—to use their language—their whole soul, who they are, the whole thing. Our methods should try to pay attention to the whole thing as much as possible. Let me continue. “Very few usages of *labe* refer to concrete, physical meanings. [...] By far, the majority of the usages of *labe* refer either to the inner or immaterial nature in general, or to one of the three traditional personality functions of man: emotion, thought, or will.” From the discussion so far of this biblical term, it seems to me that our counseling theory, our thinking about people and understanding them, needs to account for all three of those things: emotions, thoughts, and will. We need to account for all three. “The whole spectrum of emotion is attributed to the heart.” By the whole spectrum he means positive and negative emotions. “Thought functions may be attributed to the heart. Wisdom and understanding are seated in the heart. The heart is the seat of the will. So personality dispositions may be considered as more or less permanent personality patterns. Some typical dispositions located in the heart are generosity (for example, Exodus 35:5), pride (for example, ‘his heart became high,’ 2 Chronicles 26:16), and faith (for example, ‘the heart made firm,’ Psalm 78:8).”

I am not going to spend a lot of time doing this, but I have a couple of pages out of the small concordance in the back of my old NIV study Bible. If you look at a concordance like that and just look at the phrases, you will see what was just said. The heart gets attributed to it all kinds of things—emotions, thought, will, words, and all kinds of other things. So we read, “do not hate your brother in your heart”; “love the Lord your God with all your heart”; “obey Him with your heart”; “serve the Lord with all your heart.” Let me move on to the New Testament. Matthew says, “Blessed are the pure in heart”; “adultery with her in his heart”; “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”; “from out of the heart the mouth speaks. For out of the heart come evil thoughts.” Jesus talks about someone speaking or serving “out of the good stored up in his heart.” Paul prays that “the eyes of your heart may be enlightened.” So understanding is rooted in the heart. We can be encouraged in the heart. Hebrews 4 talks about “the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” You get the picture. All kinds of aspects of the human person are attributed to the heart. In Scripture, as the R. Laird Harris piece says, heart is consistently a big term and is representative of the entire human person.

Let me read one more thing. This is from a book called *Humanity and Sin: the Creation, Fall, and Redemption of Humanity* by Robert A. Pyne. A student sent this to me a long time ago. Pyne says, “If you had some difficulty understanding the Hebrew idea of breath [discussed earlier in the book], it may revive your spirit to know that the concept of ‘heart’ is much easier to grasp. From country songs to love letters and Valentine’s, we speak of the heart in almost exactly the same way as did the biblical writers. We describe others as good-hearted, cold-hearted, soft-hearted, hard-hearted, or broken-hearted. We give our hearts to others in love, and our hearts ache when love is lost. We set our hearts on things we

want, guard them against things we want to avoid, and turn them away from things we no longer desire. In our hearts we feel emotions, ponder questions, remember events, and make plans. Our hearts may not be as pure as those of the biblical writers, but at least we have the same vocabulary.” I get his point, but sometimes we do not, because sometimes we have reduced it down to just the emotional side.

Pyne continues, “It is surprising that traditional models of human nature commonly employ the terms ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ but leave out the heart, which the Bible mentions more frequently. I have no idea why that is, but it is interesting. As the physical organ hidden deep within the chest, the heart is that part of the person that is both central and unreachable.” At this point there is a quote by Bruce Waltke where he talks about the hidden and inaccessible nature of the heart.

“The physical heart gives rise to its figurative sense for anything that is remote and inaccessible. Because it is so inaccessible, the contents of the heart cannot be seen by other persons. We describe some people as especially transparent, meaning they are very open about their thoughts and feelings. Both expressions imply unhindered access to the heart. As the seat of emotion and understanding, will and conscience, the heart is the center of one’s being, the source of all thoughts and behaviors. The heart can produce belief or rebellion, integrity or corruption, obedience or obstinance. It can be enlightened or blinded, arrogant or humble. It can be fearful, astonished, gladdened, or joyful. [These are all Scriptural examples. I am not reading the references.] It can be inclined toward evil or good, demonstrating pride or humility. Many of these things can be observed by others in behavior more accurately than profession reveals the inclination of one’s heart. Still we all try to look better than we know our hearts to be, and those who do not know us well might believe the façade. God is never deceived by false virtue or impressed by physical appearances, for He looks at the heart. Jesus said, “you are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God.” Even when people continue to praise Him, He knows when their hearts have turned away, and that makes His judgment truly fair. Depending on what is in our hearts, God’s knowledge of their contents can be threatening or encouraging. When falsely accused by others it is very reassuring to know God knows our hearts. Paul took comfort in His judgment of such instances, writing, “As we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the Gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God who examines our hearts.” The psalmist also invited His inspection, saying, “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Psalm 139:23). But at times we might not want our hearts on display. Denying both His understanding and our own sinfulness, we often try to conceal our iniquity, making ourselves appear righteous when in our hearts we know better.

Perhaps that is enough to emphasize the importance of this concept and how much it should be a piece of our conceptual framework and our understanding of who human people are and what they are like.

Let me take up a question. How do we know when to share? Can we not share too much? Are there boundaries? The nature of the relationship has something to do with what level of openness is to be expected. When people say too much on a first date, for instance, that is not good. That seems to happen a lot. I, at least, get lots of questions about that. On a second date a certain person felt that to be responsible they had to share all their sexual history. Well, there is not enough relationship there to support that level of openness and vulnerability. In the Phillips and Phillips book, it talks about the growing of commitment and the growing of intimacy. Those are related to each other. There is a growth in the progression forward. So the nature of the relationship has something to do with that, it seems to me.

I am coming to believe that in reference to people relating to each other, particularly in marriage and family situations, the most important verse in the Bible is Genesis 2:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” There we have God recognizing that we need each other. It was important enough to God that He made that statement in Genesis 2:18. Rather than going immediately to the solution, we have this action inserted where God said to Adam, “Here come the animals. You name them.” It seems to me, and others have observed this as well, that God was giving Adam an object lesson that he could not miss. Adam was supposed to learn what God already knew—namely that it is not good for man to be alone. We get from Adam this response later, “Wow.” You do not see that in the text, but it is really there. “This is bone of my bone,” he says. “This is one like me,” he is saying. Remember that he has just seen male and female squirrels come together. For every animal in creation there was male and female, but there was not for Adam. So he discovers that something is not good. Think for a moment. It is a safe assumption that Adam walked with God in the garden in the evening even before Eve was created. He had all of creation, and he had the animals, and there was some relationship taking place there. It was not that he was completely alone. But God said he was alone, because he did not have one like him, even though he had God. Is that not something? Even though he had that relationship with God and they walked together in that pre-Fall kind of communion that they had, it still was not good.

I think that one of the most important things that happened in the Fall was that alienation entered into relationships. That has three aspects to it. It is obvious that there is a breakdown in the relationship between Adam and God. There is also a breakdown in the relationship between Adam and Eve, which is why Adam responds to God by saying, “This woman you gave me.” He is shifting the blame to both of them. The point is not so much the blame-shifting but the breakdown in the relationship that would allow him to do that so easily, apparently not caring about the impact it has on them. He is really just trying to save his own skin. That was more important to him. But there is a third alienation as well, and that is the alienation of Adam with his own heart. He cannot be honest about what is going on there. I wonder what would have happened if, when God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat the fruit of the tree?” if Adam had said, “I did. I looked at it. Eve was there talking with the serpent. I was standing there, and I did not have the courage to step in and say, ‘Hey! Do not do this.’ I listened to what he said. I thought it was a good deal. I doubted whether You really had my best interest in mind. I thought I could do a better job of it, and I messed up.” I wonder what would have happened. I know it is a hypothetical question, because it could not have happened. My point is that there is alienation in the relationship with himself as well as with Eve and with God. It is a product of sin, which we are all still living with. So we become people who are escape artists. We try to escape things. We try to shift the blame to someone else as much as we can.

If you are ever going to counsel couples, know that when they come in to see you they are assuming that they would have a great marriage if the other one would just change. It is Adam and Eve. I mentioned a book earlier called *Hold Me Tight*, by Sue Johnson—I do not know if Sue Johnson is a believer or not. I do not think so. She does not say. Occasionally she quotes Scripture, but I do not know what that means—She has been watching couples, and she agrees. That is what people do. It is the main problem. She calls that “demon dialogues.” People get in these dialogues, and though there is more to it than this, the foundation is, “I am trying to save my own skin. I am trying to put the blame on you.” Johnson has an exercise where she asks people to think about a situation. She asks them to imagine they are at a party. The hostess asks them to carry a tray into the living room, and they drop it. How do you respond? She asks you to write four ways that you might blame someone else. She knows people can come up with them. She suggests one, like the hostess should have told me it was heavy. We do that, do we not? Is it not a rare person who, when they are caught, says, “Yes, I am caught. I dropped it. Sorry.” That refers back to that alienation from ourselves that makes it very tough for us. Owning it is part of what maturity looks like.



Let me take up a question. If we look at defining the heart as emotions, thought, and will, how does that practically work itself out in counseling? Once in a while I recognize that in my teaching I am trying to be corrective. I have to be careful sometimes not to overemphasize things, which I can do. The corrective is this: Because we are escape artists and the escape is mostly about emotions, I am trying to pull the emotional into the realm of counseling. The implication of that is that we pay attention to thoughts, emotions, and choices. Pay attention to the whole person. At times it may sound like I am only saying pay attention to the feelings. I do not mean that. I mean pay attention to the whole person.

I am going to ask you to make some guesses here. What is the result of God saying, “Do not eat the fruit of that tree?” Was He trying to be contrary? Was He trying to set up something that would be really hard? Did He want Adam to have to look at something that would be good and not enjoy it? Is God like a stingy, old grandfather? Is that what He was doing? Another way to ask the question is to ask, what is the function of God’s law? Is it in setting up rights and wrongs? Is God trying to be stingy with us, as though all the ungodly people have all the fun? We know that is not true. But I wonder if deep inside we still think like that. My guess is that by telling us not to eat the fruit of that tree, God was creating an opportunity for Adam to be faithful. Adam and Eve could walk by that tree and say, “God said not to eat of it, and we will not.” In doing that they were faithful in their relationship with God. “God said it, and I will do it. I will obey.” Part of how I get to that guess is by thinking about the second Adam, Christ. A distinguishing factor between the second Adam and the first is that the second Adam is faithful. He had a mission, something to accomplish, and He did it faithfully. He was faithful to what God asked Him to do. In the process, as He died in our place—substitutionary atonement—He redeemed us. And among all the possibilities that it created for us—think of justification, for instance, both legally and all kinds of other ways—it also creates the possibility for us of restoring faithfulness. We can begin again to live a life that is faithful. You can be faithful without being perfect. It is not based on works. The creation of the opportunity is by God’s grace. And the help we receive in the moments we need help is God’s grace. But so much of it is about being faithful. As Christian brothers and sisters, children of God, we have the opportunity to be faithful to God because we believe. I think that is at the heart of the Gospel. I think that is a very important piece.

Let me take up another question. Where do I see discipleship in relation to counseling? The question is about how spiritual shepherding can happen in counseling. Spiritual shepherding can and should happen in counseling, especially with believers, obviously. Because counseling can be about helping people, wrestle with what faithfulness looks like now. What does it look like in this context? In this challenging situation, what does faithfulness to God look like? Often in counseling situations, part of what people are wrestling with is the question of whether God is really good. Or, they know that He is good but they are not sure if He will be good to them. They do not know if He cares about them. Well, that involves spiritual shepherding. So I would say there is an overlap between counseling and discipleship. They are not completely the same, but there is overlap. There are times when it is clear. In the case of a manic depressive person, for instance, where you have a mental health type of issue and where someone is dysfunctional and has lost touch with reality, there is obviously a spiritual element involved. But there is not going to be as much overlap in that situation. In other situations there might be a lot of overlap. It depends.

Let me mention a word about counseling non-Christians. I work with everyone from the same truth perspective. I try to stick with vocabulary that they understand. I still come from the same worldview. The other point to remember is that a person’s profession defines where they are at that point in time. What I am doing may be pre-evangelism, which is great. It may not look a lot like spiritual care, but

when you step back and look at it there are an awful lot of the same elements. The language might be a little different, but the truth is still the same, and the worldview is the same.