PASTORAL COUNSELLING PRINCIPLES
AND CASES

Preface

Pastoral counselling is one of the most important tasks that the servants of God are called to engage in. It is at the same time both exacting and rewarding as we seek to apply the Word of God to those we are seeking to help. Our handbook is the Bible itself, and it contains a wealth of teaching that is both spiritual and practical at the same time, and which we can share with those needing counsel. Sometimes we will be asked for help by those facing various difficulties in their lives. There will be other times when we are not asked for help and where we will need to make the first move and open the discussion, so we will need much wisdom and grace from the Lord. It is also fair to say that no two cases are the same, even when dealing with the same issue, but the Bible contains principles that can be applied to every problem.

This book was produced to go with the talks on pastoral counselling in the Serving Today radio programme by Jim McClatchey. Jim has many years of experience as a pastor, and although he has retired he is still giving pastoral help to the Lord’s people. The contents of each chapter are based on the notes he prepared for this series, and I am indebted to him for his willingness to contribute this material. The first half of the book deals with the main principles of pastoral counselling that we find in Scripture. The second half is devoted to a number of the most common problems that people face today, and Jim’s guidance is very helpful indeed.

It is our prayer that our gracious God will use this booklet to help his servants as they seek to point men and women and young people to the solutions he has provided in the Bible, with the result that they will walk closer to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Derek French
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Introduction

The Lord has a great concern for his people. His so great salvation is concerned not just about eternity, but also about this life, here and now, as well. Because of this, he has given us his Word and in it the guidelines for a life, which will be for his glory and for our good. When we read and study that Word we are overwhelmed by the love of God on the one hand and the great wisdom of God on the other. This wisdom is often contrary, indeed generally contrary to the wisdom of the world.

There are two portions of Scripture, which always challenge me. The first is Psalm 1:1, ‘Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly.’ Then verse 2 says, ‘But his
delight is in the Law of the Lord.’ Here is our guidance for every situation and circumstance in life. The second is in 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. God tells us that the natural man does not receive the things of ‘the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him’. But the Christian is one who has received the Spirit of God and therefore we know the things of God.

The Lord’s people are often called to endure many of the problems faced by the men and women of the world. We know what grief is when a loved one dies. We know what suffering is where either we or a loved one has pain, sickness, a disease or an accident. We know what it is to have little of this world’s goods, perhaps some to lose everything, sometimes for the cause of Christ. However the difference between the Christian and the man or woman of the world is in our attitude to those trials and traumas of life. We do know that God is sovereign and in control. We do know that nothing happens without his knowledge and we know that in it, His grace is sufficient for us. We also know his help and strength as we bring each matter to him in prayer. And we know that whatever the trial, his love for us remains constant.

We as Pastors and church leaders will experience many of these same problems in this life ourselves, but we do know that because of our calling we have a responsibility to lead guide and care for those souls God has entrusted to our care. Part of that care is to counsel the people of God and help them from his precious Word. I trust that this little booklet will be a help in some small way.

Yours in his Service.
Jim McClatchey

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**Part 1: Principles**

**Chapter 1 The best text book**

Often when we hear of some tragedy, be it large or small, we hear that ‘counsellors’ have gone to help those who are bereaved or traumatised by the disaster. Counselling is big business in the natural world. But counselling is also a very natural and very essential part of the Christian Church and the Christian life. The responsibility for correct Christian counselling lies particularly with those who are Pastors and Elders. It is both our responsibility and privilege. Because of this the question arises, how can we prepare ourselves to give good counsel?

In every aspect of Christian work we start with the Bible, the Word of God. It is God’s directive to us as to his will and ways, and that gives us the base for all our work. In order that we might give God’s Word and wisdom to others, we need to know that Word ourselves. That means there must be a personal reading plan of the Bible. A very useful practice, in addition to our study of Scripture while preparing to preach and take Bible studies, is for us to read right through the Bible at least once a year. It means
reading two chapters of the Old Testament and one chapter of the New Testament each day. It is also useful to write down verses or passages in a notebook, which can be used for counselling in various circumstances. As you read the Bible day by day, you will discover and can underline in your Bible and note in your notebook that God has given us ‘Principles for Life’.

Consider these two examples:
Think of ‘The Principle for Marriage Relationships’. This is so important in every society. How do the Christian husband and the Christian wife live? A key passage is Ephesians 5:22-33. There is the breaking of the old union, with father and mother and the making of a new union, husband and wife. There is the responsibility of the wife and the responsibility of the husband. The example set before us is love of Christ for his Church. There are many other Bible passages that can be used such as 1 Peter 3:1-7.

Another important principle would be the structure and authority of the Church. Who do we find in the Church? In Philippians 1:1, Paul reminds us that there are Members (the saints), there are Bishops (that is Elders and Pastors) and there are Deacons. To discover the requirements for offices of Elder and Deacon we turn to 1 Timothy 3:1-13. Again for the various responsibilities of an Elder, look at Acts 20:17-28. The Elders are overseers and have to shepherd or pastor the flock. God has given these two offices for different reasons with different responsibilities. The members are to submit to the authority and Biblical teaching of the Elders (Hebrews 13:17). See also 1 Timothy 3:1-7 & 1 Peter 5:2-4.

Earnest prayer naturally follows having a good knowledge of the Bible. Before we can counsel anyone we need to seek the Lord for ourselves and for him or her. This is so important because we need to go with the Lord’s wisdom and help and presence. We need to be ready to follow the Holy Spirit’s leading and we need him to prepare the heart of the one being counselled.

Chapter 2 Counselling and our preaching ministries

Christian Counselling is the duty and responsibility of every Pastor and Church Elder, and this raises the question, ‘How are we to counsel?’

We often think of counselling on a one to one basis and that is important as we shall see in our next chapter, but it is also important to see that Christian counselling starts in the pulpit. The preacher has the responsibility to expound the Scriptures, but preaching does not end by explaining what the text says. Preaching and true exposition must include the application of the Scriptures. We must show how the Bible passage we are preaching from is to be worked out in the lives of our hearers as they face the problems and temptations of every day life. Look at 2
Timothy 3:16 & 17. The Scriptures are inspired by God and are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Over the years, I, like many others, have always had the practice of preaching through a book of the Bible at least at one service each week. And this has proved invaluable in counselling the people.

Let me give you an example with the book of Ephesians. There we will find great Christian truths and great personal application. In chapter one we have great teaching on the divine source and glory of our salvation. If this is expounded and applied it will teach how our salvation came to us and will demolish wrong views of salvation. It will also bring great assurance to those believers in our congregations who have doubts about salvation. We will see the place of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in Salvation and in the life of the Christian. In Chapter two we discover both the effect of sin and the glory of God’s grace and the great work of Christ, and what that means to us personally. Chapter three gives us teaching on service and prayer. Chapter four deals with unity and the place of every believer in the Church. Every believer has a part to play in the Church of Jesus Christ. Then we have the duties of the Christian to other Christians. Chapter five begins with the godliness of the Christian and the responsibility we have in this sinful age, and it concludes with the relationship between Christ and the Church and the husband to his wife and the wife to the husband. Chapter six is about children and parents, employers and employees and the Christian’s daily battle with the evil one. You will see that if this is expounded and applied many important issues will be covered. The purpose is that men and women would know what they should do in a given situation before a problem would arise. They are being taught God’s Principles.

Other books of the Bible place an emphasis on other issues, which need to be dealt with. And if we are faithful to the Word of God we will discover that we are dealing with all the practical aspects of the Christian life. The preacher needs to pray earnestly to discover God’s will as to which book to preach from. Also this kind of teaching is going to take quite a time. But I have found many times that I was preaching on an issue just when it was needed. God had obviously guided me months before. Our God is all knowing and is gracious to his servants if we really desire to serve him faithfully.

Obviously discretion needs to be used when dealing with very personal issues. But even if that is so then all issues can be dealt with from the pulpit in the normal weekly services. What you will discover is that this method will mean that many problems will be solved before they even arise. We remember that the great authority in the Christian faith is the Word of God, so we have a great responsibility to feed our people on it.
Chapter 2 One to one counselling

We have already seen that Christian Counselling is a very important element in Church life. The responsibility for that counselling falls particularly upon the Pastors and Elders of a Church. We have also seen that the most important part of counselling is done through our preaching the Word of God week by week. But of course it does not stop there. There is also the necessity of one to one teaching and perhaps discipline and admonition if needed. The question that we look at now is, ‘How is this to be done?’

One very important and perhaps elementary point needing to be made here is that Pastors and Elders need to be available and approachable to members of the congregation whenever a problem arises. I have always found that if someone has a problem the sooner it is dealt with the better. If we are not available then the problem can become greater and more complicated. It has rightly been said that a Pastor needs to have a Pastor’s heart. That is a heart filled with compassion and love for the congregation. This is true, but a Pastor’s eye and ear are also needed. That means we need to be aware of what is happening in the lives of the congregation and be ready to help before their problems become grow worse.

We find in reading many of the great preachers and Pastors of the past that they seemed to spend quite some time in writing to people with problems. This is not the same as one to one meetings, but it can be helpful and indeed best in some situations.

We come now to consider counselling when we must meet personally with someone. Again there are some basic principles, which need to be noted. Care must always be taken if a Pastor or Elder is counselling a woman on her own. The Pastor must never visit her in her home if he and she are alone. This can lead to gossip and worse to temptation. Many Pastors have fallen into sin through being unwise in personal counselling. If you are married it is most helpful if your wife accompanies you, and if you are single then it would be most helpful to take another Elder with you. If this is not possible then have the woman visit your home when your wife or someone else is in the home. Another basic principle is never ever tell anyone what has been told you in confidence. If this must be shared with other Elders, then before you leave ask if you may share it with them, but if permission is not granted then keep what’s been told you as confidential. This is vital so that people will know they can trust you. There will be times when you know the best way forward is by having the combined wisdom of your other church Elders, and this should be communicated to the person seeking your help. However, if that permission is not granted then you must maintain confidentiality.
When counselling people, whatever the problem, it is good to have some set procedure. It is very helpful to begin by praying. This sets the tone of the session and indicates we are serious about this matter and we are asking for God’s help, guidance and presence. Always bring your Bible and actually turn to and read any text or passage which is helpful. This sets the basis for our counsel. It is not our wisdom, or thoughts or experience, but the Word of God. We always need to remember that we are there to show what God has said about this matter. This again shows us the need we have to know the Word of God ourselves.

Jay Adams, who has written on Counselling, gives us this advice which is very helpful and very necessary. Ask some very probing questions. First, ‘What is your problem?’ Get to the real hub of the problem. Do not be satisfied with a vague answer. They need to face up to the problem themselves and acknowledge it. Secondly ask, ‘What have you done about it?’ They might have tried many things before turning to you, and often this further complicates the issue. Thirdly, a very important question, ‘What do you want me to do about it?’ This might seem a very futile question to ask, but when we really get down to an answer we might find that, while they have a problem, they may not be willing to face up to the Biblical demands which would solve their problem. Many only want you to take the problem away without dealing with the underlying issue. For example, it may necessitate a total change of life for them, especially if their attitudes and behaviour have been sinful and selfish, and perhaps they are unwilling to change. Unless they are, you can do very little for them. They have to accept the teaching of Scripture. But, and this is very important, make sure that it is the demands of Scripture which you place before them and not your own particular views and theories. Always make sure you are not demanding more than that demanded by the Bible. And always be gracious, particularly when you know the Bible’s answer is not going to be easy for them to accept.

There are some other important matters to keep in mind and these refer to counselling someone who has fallen into sin. Remember the exhortation of Scripture (Galatians 6:1) “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted.” Sadly there are many examples of those who were not careful and fell themselves in exactly the same way as the person they originally set out to help. Therefore, walk humbly before God. Have a real Christian love for all who turn to you for help. Be honest and frank with them, keep all confidences, deal with any sin and always give the hope of the Scriptures. Seek always to point men and women to a life, which will bring glory to God and exalt the Lord Jesus.

**Part 2: Counselling cases**

**Chapter 3 Counselling the dying**
We come now to look at particular issues, which confront every Church leader in these days. In this chapter we look at a matter, which will confront every Pastor, that is ‘Counselling the dying’. What do we have to say to someone who is dying? Often it will be an older person, but not always as sometimes it can be a younger person with some particular disease.

As we approach this we need to remember some basic facts about death before we can bring help to others. It has come into the world because of sin; therefore death is the common certainty of all because all have sinned.

What happens at death? However we die, death basically means the end of life on this earth. It is a person leaving this earthly life, leaving the body, leaving friends and loved ones, leaving their home and all that they have on this earth. In the light of this we need to concentrate on three matters.

First, do they need to put anything right with God? In leaving this earth we go into eternity, so we must ask, ‘Is this person ready for eternity?’ If we are not sure of their personal faith, then we need to urge them to be prepared to meet God. The Bible says in Hebrews 9:27 (NKJ), “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this, the judgement.” Their only hope is in Christ Jesus and in his great salvation. If we are sure the person is a true believer then we need also to remind them that they are about to meet with God and therefore there is urgency for them to put right anything in their life that still exists.

Second, in leaving this earth, do they have to put anything right with others? By this we mean do they need to forgive someone or need forgiveness from anyone? Sometimes this may involve us in giving help in other practical matters. For example, giving guidance over any debts they need to settle. If they have any possessions, they may want us to ensure the right people will inherit. They may also need guidance over making provision for any family they might have. In this the Pastor can very often show love and kindness in attending to very ordinary and very practical matters and relieve the person of any anxiety or worry they might have.

Thirdly, the dying will need spiritual comfort. There will be those who will appreciate others from the Church visiting also, but perhaps as death nears may be too weak or in too much pain to be able to have a visit from many people. In this case perhaps only the Pastor or a particular Elder or friend from the Church could visit. Make the visits brief, and then they will be appreciated all the more.

But what do we say to someone who is dying? How can we comfort them? There are many Scriptures, which will
do this. Remind them much of God’s Fatherly care and love for them. We can think of favourite passages of Scripture like Romans 8:28-39. Explain to them that the chapter opens with ‘no condemnation’, to those who are in Christ Jesus. This will give them assurance of salvation at a time when they may be doubting because of Satan’s assaults. Remind them Christ has removed all our sin and the penalty of sin. Then, we read in verse 28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” They may wonder why they are being taken at this particular time, especially if they are younger, or have a family, etc. This reminds us that nothing happens by chance. It is all God’s perfect will. Then show them v31, which assures us that “If God is for us, who can be against us?” We need not fear anything, in either life or death. Show them too that nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. Another favourite passage is Psalm 23. Here we have God’s provision for us right throughout life, God taking care of us as the Divine Shepherd takes care of his sheep. But remind them that they are not alone in death because when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death he is with us, and his rod and staff will comfort us. Another wonderful text is found in Psalm 116:15 which is helpful for many people who fear death itself. God’s Word reminds us, “Precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of His saints.”

There is one other aspect of death we need to emphasise in counselling the dying, that is the fact that for the believer, it is absent from the body and present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). The Apostle Paul reminds us that this ’is far better’ (Philippians 1:23). To be ushered into the Lord’s presence and to spend all eternity with him and his people will be glorious. We will meet those who have gone before us including the great saints of the past, and be in the company of the very angels of heaven. For the believer this will also mean for us no more pain, suffering, disease, trials or temptations. All of that will be behind us and we shall know that fullness of joy in the presence of the Lord.

One last word and that is, always commend them to God in prayer. Ask for the Lord’s presence for them and his grace that they may finish the race well.

Chapter 4 Counselling the bereaved

Counselling the bereaved is closely linked with counselling the dying, and often gives the Pastor great opportunities to direct the dead person’s loved ones to the Lord. In this chapter we consider how we do this.

One of the most difficult tasks a Pastor will have is to comfort the family and friends of a person who, in death, was not a believer, or at least, one who did not make an open profession of faith. One thing we cannot do, and indeed must not do, is to give false hope. To say that all
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was well with them and they are in heaven anyway is not true for any unbeliever who dies. To say otherwise is to undermine our preaching and contradict the whole of the Word of God. Yet at the same time we need to show them love and compassion and we can direct them to the Lord. They will miss their loved one and we need to assure them of our prayers at this time. Then we cannot know if God was dealing with that person before death. They may have come to faith just before they died, so we cannot say either that we know that they are eternally lost. This is a time for sensitivity and compassion. We do know that “The Judge of all the earth will do right.” All things are ultimately in his hands.

However, the Pastor and Church can often be of practical help in such a situation. There are many ways in which we can show concern for anyone who is bereaved and extend Christian love to them. Think of very ordinary ways of showing them the love of Christ, especially if they too are unbelievers. There are many practical matters to deal with at the time of a death. You or someone in the church, can perhaps help. Invite them to the church, perhaps even invite them to your home for a meal, or have someone in the church befriend them, someone near to them who can call and see that they are coping. This is a way of seeking to bring the Gospel to them and to win them for Christ.

It is a different matter if the deceased was a believer. The family will still sorrow, but they will not sorrow as those who have no hope. We can remind them of at least three important facts.

One, is their Heavenly Father’s loving care. If, for instance, a husband has died, then remind them of Psalm 146:9, “The Lord... sustains the fatherless and the widow.” You could also turn to Psalm 68:5, The Lord is a “…father to the fatherless and a defender of widows.” All this shows God’s gracious care for the bereaved.

Two, we can remind them that they, if they are believers, will see their loved one again. One day, we too, will be absent from the body and present with the Lord. This is part of what the Apostle Paul meant when he spoke of us not sorrowing as those without hope. This is the glorious hope of every believer in Christ, to be with the Lord and all of His people, for all eternity. We know then that death will never separate us again; there will be no parting there. If some of the family have never come to faith in Christ, this is a good opportunity to witness to them, and remind them of their loved one’s faith in Christ, and urge them also to trust Christ.

Thirdly, we can again help those who sorrow in some practical ways. Often there are many matters, which must be done before and after a funeral. At times like this those who sorrow will not be able to deal with these and will depend upon us or some friend from the Church. Our visits will be a comfort to them as will the reading of the
Scriptures and the knowledge that they are being prayed for by ourselves and the Church.

Many people are most vulnerable at such a time and we need to be sensitive and show much of the love of Christ to them. But this can be a time when unbelievers can see the Church as caring and loving. Neighbours will see and perhaps unbelieving family members will see something of Christ and a Christ like spirit in us.

Remember that as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ we are to take him as our example in everything. We see his concern when brought face to face with death. Think of Lazarus, for instance. As Jesus stood before the grave of his earthly friend he wept. We too are to weep with those who weep. We see also his teaching of the Word of God, to the sisters of Lazarus. May he be our example and may we bring glory to him as we follow him and his example in this as in everything.

Chapter 5 Counselling the backslidden believer

One of the most common conditions you will have to deal with will be backsliding. You will find this common in the congregation and you will find this common in your own heart. In a sense it is alarming to read Christ’s letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3. There we see that it is possible for a church to be in a backslidden condition. For instance the Church at Ephesus was a Church of works, labour, patience, and one which tested and hated and rejected all that was not true to the Word of God, a very orthodox church, but yet they were backslidden. Besides the Church at Ephesus, there are numerous examples of individuals who in the Scriptures are seen to be in various states of backsliding.

Perhaps we should ask what it means to be backslidden? We need to differentiate between those who have backslidden and those who are false believers who have gone back, because they never were in the faith. Those who had backslidden at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4, had lost their love for the Lord. They had not gone into immorality, or heresy. They had not compromised, nor had they stopped labouring hard for the Lord. Nevertheless, they were backslidden. They had lost their love for the Lord. And this is a common symptom of all who fall into this condition. Their love for Christ diminishes.

This is usually the first thing to go wrong in the backslider, but also it is often difficult to spot in members, as they may be still active in the church. It is also difficult to spot in our own hearts. The next thing that often happens is that the backslider starts to miss prayer meetings, then other important services. They stop witnessing. They perhaps are found generally in the company of unbelievers rather than God’s people. This can then lead to a life of sin and often open sin. Just two of the examples we see in the Bible are, Peter, denying his Lord with oaths and curses,
and David who fell into immorality and committed murder to hide his sin.

What can we do to help someone in such a situation? As in every problem, the sooner it is dealt with the better. This is especially true of us. The Pastor and servant of the Lord are to flee from sin. Seek always to follow closely to the Master. Then we discover in Revelation 2:5 that the exhortation from the Lord himself, is threefold.

First, Remember from where you have fallen.
Second, Repent, exercise Godly sorrow and turn from your sin.
Third, Return, that is do your first works.

This is also important, as it will include the reading and studying of God’s Word, prayer and service for God, and fellowship with his people.

Often there needs to be a restructuring of a way of life. Changes may be essential. Habits may have to be changed. You will want to seek the reason for their backsliding when you counsel them. Then counselling also must include instruction in righteousness, so that they may be aware of the problem and put right whatever led them away from the Lord in the first place.

It is such a consolation that, in spite of our unworthiness and backsliding, we discover some very wonderful and encouraging verses in the Bible. For example, consider the many times God called Israel to return to Him from their backslidings. In Hosea 14:4 (NKJ), he promises, “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.” Then in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We mentioned above Peter and David who backslid, but what happened to them? We find in the penitential Psalms David’s reaction to his sin, and we find his forgiveness and restoration. See for example Psalm 51. The same was true of Peter. There was godly sorrow (Luke 22:61-62), there was love from the Master and his restoration to the twelve and to the work to which he had been called (John 21:15-17). Shortly after this we have Peter preaching on the Day of Pentecost and God using him in a mighty way (Acts 2).

There is mercy and forgiveness with our God. So our ministry to the backslider is not only one of loving rebuke and admonition for their sin, but also one of encouragement and consolation because the Lord God delights to pardon those who humble themselves in true repentance. It is important we maintain that Biblical balance of reprimand and restoration. It will always help us to minister to others in the right way when we remember the way the Lord has dealt with us in his mercy and grace.

Chapter 6 Counselling the worried
It is a common misconception that modern day living, in most countries, brings with it worry. However, because Christ had something to say about this, we discover that people were worried in the days when he was on earth. What is worry? In the Bible it is also translated care or anxiety. It is a concern over the future. This is in a very real sense very strange because it is a concern over something we cannot do anything about and in fact do not know anything about. The Greek word for ‘worry’ is very interesting because it means ‘to divide, part, rip or tear apart’. That is exactly what worry does to us. It affects us physically, mentally and spiritually.

It is in the great Sermon on the Mount where Jesus speaks to us about worry. Jesus said in Matthew 6:31, “So do not worry...” But, of course, Jesus does not leave the matter there. He goes on to give examples of the things we worry about, then to explain how we can overcome worry. What are some of the things we worry about? What we eat, what we drink, what we wear. In many parts of the world today people also worry about how they look, their size and shape.

Jesus shows us that worry is a waste of time. In Matthew 6:25 – 34 he asks some very penetrating questions to help us see that worrying is not only a waste of time, but also unnecessary if we belong to the Lord. For example, What is your life? Is it only eating and drinking? And your body, is it not more than clothing? Can you by worrying add to your height? Can you change your appearance? Of course you can’t. What about food and drink? Well just look at the birds, they are cared for by God, but he is your Heavenly Father, does he not care for you more than the birds? Look at the flowers of the field, God has created them and cares for them. Now the life of grass and plants is just for a very brief season, but nevertheless, God cares for them. Will He not care more for you? O you of little faith.

It is here we discover the root of worry. It is a basic lack of faith in God. Worry is a natural characteristic of unbelievers. When the Christian worries; he is acting like an unbeliever. Remember that tomorrow is in the hands of God, we cannot steal it from Him!!! And we need to help those who worry to realise that for themselves.

Now one point we must make here is that Jesus is not saying we should not plan or provide for tomorrow. James in his Epistle has something to add to this (James 4:13ff). We do not take tomorrow into our hands and plan as if it was ours, but rather, we ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we shall live to do this or that.” We do not boast about tomorrow, for we do not know what tomorrow will bring, it is all in God’s hands and control.

How do we go about helping someone who has a problem about worry? The great Apostle Paul gives us some guidelines here. Look at Philippians 4:6ff. “Do not be
anxious about anything.” As a Christian we should not be torn apart by concern for tomorrow, or about things over which we have no control. Then there is the positive side, and this is entirely in keeping with the teaching of Jesus. “But in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” Paul is really saying, ‘Trust God in everything’. That is just what Jesus said!! Peter also, in his first Epistle, tells us the same message, “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). David, the Psalmist said in Psalm 31:15, “My times are in Your Hand.” In Psalm 23 he says, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” To return to what Paul says in Philippians 4, look at verse 7. “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” It is quite interesting that Paul goes on to say in verse 8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.”

I would add one other text, which has been a great help and comfort to me for many years, Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” God is in control. Therefore, have faith in God. You can trust Him, but you cannot trust yourself or anyone else. “Be anxious in nothing.”

Chapter 7 Counselling those battling with temptation

There is a hymn, which has these words: ‘Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin’. Temptation is a subject, which plagues all of us. However that hymn does tell us something very important. Temptation itself is not sin, but it is yielding to temptation, which is sin.

In dealing with this subject there is a text, which is a great help in explaining temptation and how we ought to react to it. It is 1 Corinthians 10:13. “No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. But with the temptation, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand under it.” Temptation will come to you, but God will control what does come. He will always be watching over you and over the tempter. There is that great example in Job. God allowed Satan to tempt and try Job, but always gave Satan the limit to which he might go. The verse tells us that God will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. That is very comforting and very reassuring. Remember that God is faithful. However we are told something else, very important. That is that every temptation which comes to us is common to man. Satan would often try to tell us that what we are going through is something, which is unique. That is not true. Others in the pages of history have been tempted in exactly the same way and the Lord has helped them through. They have been victorious because of the Lord’s strength, and then so can we.
The great reformer Martin Luther gives us a very graphic picture to help us in temptation. Satan comes to us with ideas and thoughts, but we must not dwell upon them, he comes with sinful thoughts, but we must reject all his approaches. Luther says, ‘You can’t stop the birds flying over your head, but you can stop them building their nest in your hair.’

What other help have we in facing temptation? Peter tells us (1 Peter 5:8) that the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, but he tells us to “Resist him, standing firm in the faith.” Peter goes on to tell us that what we endure are the same sufferings, which are experienced by our brothers in Christ in the world, showing us that these things are to be expected while we are in the world.

Further help is given to us by Peter at the beginning of verse 8, “Be self-controlled and alert.” Do not be surprised when Satan comes to you. His great objective is to try to make the Christian sin and thus to discredit the Christian and dishonour God. Therefore always be watchful. Always resist him, and always be steadfast in the faith.

Chapter 8 Counselling those involved in immorality

Often one of the most difficult problems a Pastor/counsellor has to deal with, is that of immorality in the church. It is often difficult to get people to be honest and to accept blame where blame is due. Immorality often has wide ranging effects on others and often people are too willing to gossip and point the finger. It also has an effect on the wider world with charges of hypocrisy etc., levelled at the church. This is especially true if the person charged with immorality is in any office or position of authority in the church, such as an Elder or Pastor.

We are constantly bombarded with television programmes about the lives of ‘film or theatre stars’, etc., where immorality seems to be the norm. Because of this we hear the cry about immoral behaviour, ‘Everybody does it these days’ as if that makes it no longer sinful. Further, Satan is very quick to put temptation in the path of Christians and it is so easy to fall. So how do we counsel those involved?

Again we must start with Biblical Principles and no matter who is responsible, all sin is sin. We discover that we are very quick to excuse any sin we might commit. But as far as God is concerned sin is sin.

We need to show too that all sin has an effect on others. Sin is first of all against God and that has to be put right. Then the sin of immorality affects others as well. Is it a husband who has committed adultery? His wife has been affected. What of the woman, is she married? If so then her husband has been affected. Then the good name of the Church and the name of Christ will be a reproach among
the people. The work of the Gospel has been affected. The Pastor/counsellor will have to deal with all of these as well.

First of all we need to start by stressing that while immorality, in whatever form, is sin, it is not the unforgivable sin. Those who are guilty need to come and confess their sin before God and in repentance seek forgiveness. The outstanding example of this in the Bible is king David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba. He repented deeply of that sin and the Lord in his mercy pardoned him. See 2 Samuel 11 and 12, and Psalm 51.

Second, to show how serious this matter is, there must be Church discipline. This may vary from church to church, but generally all privileges will be withdrawn for a time. They will not be able to fill any office in the church, and therefore minister to others. This is especially true if it is an Elder or Pastor who has sinned. They should be at all the means of grace but not allowed to partake of the Lord’s Supper during their time of discipline. If there has been genuine repentance and reconciliation then the discipline can be lifted, at least in part, but if this is not evident, then further discipline is required.

Third, there must at the same time be counselling. That must include an explanation of sin and its seriousness, as seen in the Word of God. Then we will need to apply the Biblical principle of marriage, and this will be necessary for both parties and their spouses. It could be that the sin occurred because of relationship problems, which might have lasted quite some time. It might therefore take a considerable amount of time to correct wrong attitudes and unscriptural habits of many years. If an office bearer has been guilty then he needs to be shown the responsibilities demanded by Scripture of all who would fill that office in the church. If an Elder or Pastor is guilty, then other Elders need to decide whether it is possible, even with repentance and counselling, for a Pastor to continue in office in the Church. Great demands are made regarding the character of a Pastor/Elder in the Church.

It is always good for Pastors and Elders to make sure that they are never in a vulnerable situation where temptation can arise, and to keep an eye open to ensure that others are equally as guarded. Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, we must always be careful.

Then we need to remember that the purpose and aim of a counsellor is to counsel in such a way that the counselee is brought to a position in their lives where they conform to the Word of God. Our desire is that God’s people will fulfil His Word and the Church of Jesus Christ will be pure in His eyes.

One final thing. Every time we deal with this problem we need to do so in such a way that we make sure we do not fall in the same way.

Chapter 9 Counselling drug and alcohol abusers
This is an area where a pastor will need to work alongside the medical profession, but we will simply look at it from a pastoral perspective.

There is a sense here in which we are talking about a ‘life-dominating problem’. By this we mean a problem, which the counsellor will see, affects every part of a person’s life. It seems that there is no area, which is not affected. Drug abuse is not a modern problem, but it is a widespread problem now, affecting so many people in so many countries in the world. One of the effects of drug addiction has been an ever-increasing level of crime. In order that the addict might be able to afford the drugs on which they now are dependant they will turn to any crime, which will pay.

When a person becomes addicted to any drug, whatever that might be, they become a slave to it. This is a very serious situation. We should do all in our power to show our young people the problems, which arise with drug addiction. Try to stop the problem before it arises. We need to counsel those who are experimenting with drugs, often because of peer pressure. There will be no easy answer in counselling those who are already addicted. Quite often they will not want to find a solution to their problem. The same is true with alcoholism. What can we do to help those who do want to stop?

One word of caution here, there have been some drug programmes in the past which try to get a person off one drug, but then see them addicted to another. We must be careful with many such schemes. We do remember the promise of the Word of God, ‘He whom the Son sets free is free indeed’. And those who are in Christ are ‘new creations’. However, while we must present the Gospel to those who are unconverted, it can happen that a person who has a real true conversion can become enslaved in this way.

It must be kept in mind that this is a ‘life dominating problem’, and that these drugs have created chemical changes in the body. Because of that, there will be times when some form of medical treatment is needed. But a lot of work needs to be done by the counsellor.

We need to show, as we have done with all these problems, the basic principles of the Bible. We need to show that dependency on any drug is totally contrary to the Bible. We need to show a lot of love and patience in dealing with a drug abuser. A word of warning here. Often those addicted either to alcohol or drugs, cannot always be trusted. They are often trying to find ways to win your confidence to get money or goods from you to pay for their habit. So do be alert to this danger.

When we counsel a drug abuser or anyone with a life dominant problem, we need to restructure the whole of
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their life. They are whole people and their whole lives need to be changed. We need to start with the spiritual side of their life. That means a life that belongs to God and not to self, or drugs or alcohol. Then we need to show them that the believer is one who is ‘filled with the Spirit’. That means that the Holy Spirit actually controls our lives, not self and not some drug.

They will almost certainly need to work on relationships. Possibly the wrong friends led them to drug or alcohol dependency. These ‘friends’ need to be shunned. The same is true when we consider places of social activity. Is that the place where drugs or alcohol were available? Then that too must be avoided. Are there problems at home with husband, wife, or parents? What about finances? What about work? Even the travelling to and from work might be a temptation if it brings them near areas where drugs or alcohol were available to them. They need to become more involved in those things, which will help rather than hinder them. For example, they need to be encouraged to attend the meetings in the Church, and daily reading of the Scriptures and daily times of prayer. This is something that needs to be emphasised because a very important principle we find in the Scripture is what we might call the ‘Principle of Replacement.’ You notice when the Bible tells us to ‘put off’ something, it immediately follows with, ‘put on’. It does not leave us in a vacuum. To focus on the sin and the problem is not enough. In a sense the problem is not a drink or a drug, but addiction, therefore the whole life needs to be restructured. Worldly sinful habits have to be replaced with Biblical habits, which will totally change the life and make the person, as God would have them. That again is our purpose and aim - to counsel in such a way that men and women and young people might be transformed to be like Christ and so bring honour and glory to our God and Father.

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