

We have been for 8 sessions looking at the topic of biblical counseling. I have tried to emphasize that, while the terminology itself sounds like I am speaking about a "specialist", we are all to be giving counsel to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, to our children, and to some extent even to unbelievers that we interface with.

Last week we started looking at the subject of "Key Elements." By this I mean several things, by way of method, that can be helpful in seeking to help one another. We saw the first three: (1.) gather data, (2.) discern the problem, and (3.) establish involvement. This week we come to the last three.

IV. GIVE HOPE

If we are to help others, we must give them hope. Without hope, there will not be the motivation to do anything. This is true about just about anything in our lives. Hope is like a fuel that burns to produce the heat of effort. When there is not hope, then effort diminishes. Without hope, there is little or no motivation to change.

When dealing with biblical hope, it is something different than what we normally think in regards to hope. Someone says "well, I hope that things will turn out all right." What is often meant is that there is uncertainty, and there is a desire that things will turn out okay in the end. However, there is no assurance, no confidence that it will be so.

Biblical hope is not like this. We look at a key passage in the Bible about what hope is from the Christian's perspective found in **Hebrews 6:19-20**. Hope in this passage is like an anchor for the soul, something that holds it steady and keeps it from being blown around in the storms of life. This hope is not a dreamy wish, but rooted in the Word of God and His promises. It is not an unfounded optimism, a kind of "don't worry, be happy", but a trust in the truthfulness of God and His Word.

A. The Benefits of Hope

Lets look together at what the Scriptures say about what biblical hope will give to us, and to those that we counsel. First, it does not disappoint. We see this in **Romans 5:5**. The hope spoken of here is the glory of God in the midst of tribulations. When in the midst of difficulties and trials (whether physical, spiritual, or interpersonal), there is a working of endurance, development of character, and hope. It is seeing what God is doing in us through the process, in making us into the image of Christ. We have spoken before of the importance of seeing God orchestrating all things for our good in making us like Christ. This is the hope that needs to be instilled. While we cannot promise that God will remove the difficulty, we can promise them that God intends for these things to be used to glorify Him and make us like Christ. If they do not have this as the ultimate desire in the midst of those difficulties, then we have to direct them as believers in Christ to conform their thinking to God's Word.

The second benefit of hope is that it tempers our grief. We see this in **1 Thessalonians 4:13**. This passage was penned by the Apostle Paul to help Christians to cope with the loss of loved ones who were dying before the anticipated return of the Lord Jesus Christ in glory. Notice that Paul writes that he wanted to give information to them that would help them in this circumstance, so that in the midst of their sorrow, they would not do so as those who have no hope. This is where the unbeliever stands. When someone denies the reality of the afterlife, and the age to come, all they can do is sorrow without genuine hope. But the Christian has the confidence that those who die "in the Lord" will return with Him in His return (**v.16**). There is also the truth that for that believer who has died, though they are absent from the body, they are present with the Lord (**2 Corinthians 5:8**).

This means that as we seek to help people, we will not necessarily completely eliminate the sorrow they experience as a result of the consequences of sin. But we can help them to temper the realities of the spiritual or physical pain they feel with the hope of the Word of God.

The third benefit of hope is that it helps someone through difficult circumstances. This is closely connected to the previous point. Notice what is written in **2 Corinthians 4:8-10**. Paul was able to endure incredible physical suffering (see **2 Corinthians 11:23-27**), disappointment of failed relationship and personal betrayals (**2 Timothy 4:16-18**) because of the acceptance that the present difficulties are temporary, but the day is coming when these will pass away and the reality of the perfected world will come (**2 Corinthians 4:16-18**). This kept him from being crushed, despairing, feeling forsaken.

Just as hope has benefits, lack of hope has consequences. We see in **Psalms 42:5** that the Psalmist calls himself to hope in God as the remedy of being "cast down" (we would say depression) and "disquieted" which carries the meaning of growling, rumbling, to be in a commotion or stir (we would probably say anxious). The proper response isn't "just stop being depressed and anxious", but rather "hope in God." Notice also in **Proverbs 13:12** that when hope is deferred (or postponed), kept at a distance, then the result is a sick heart. When someone doesn't have hope, it is like a sickness. It is a sickness that weakens and detrimental to the inner man.

B. Ways to Give Hope

How do we do this? What are some ways that we should try to impart hope to the person (and gain hope ourselves)?

1.) Point people to the promises of God.

We cannot promise that God will completely remove the difficulty. We must assure them of things like God's promise never to give them more than they are able to endure (**1 Corinthians 10:13**), that He works all things for the good of making them into the image of Christ (**Romans 8:28-29**), that their trials are being used to mature them (**James 1:2-4**), and that the day will come when the difficulties will be removed, but it is in the Lord's timing.

2.) Give an appropriate testimony.

This is one reason we should be sensible of God's working in our life and in the life of others. We should try to keep a mental catalog of God's faithfulness seen in our lives. Then we can speak to someone of how the Lord has given help in the midst of similar circumstances. This would include giving testimony by way of biblical examples as well.

3.) Label sin as sin.

When we see something as defined in Scripture as sin, we must say that it is so. In modern thinking this is seen as condemning and hard, but it is actually the opposite. The reason is that when it is an issue of sin (of thinking or behavior), then we have a solution. If we see someone merely as a passive victim with no responsibility, or that they are just mentally ill, then we can't give hope. But when we say to that person in as gracious a way as we can, "your anger, depression, anxiety, pride, or lust is sin" then we can point them to a solution. We point them to Christ, for the cleaning of that sin. We point them to the Word of God and how it promises that God has given us as believers the ability to change. We give them hope that God is against their sin, and will help them to fight against it if they do it His way.

C. The Necessary Response to the Offer of Hope

What is then necessary is a response of faith from the person. We see this in **Hebrews 11:1**. They must believe God's Word. We should call them to this plainly. We should tell them that without it we cannot help, and God will not help without it. Without faith it is impossible to please Him. And if we are not pleasing Him, we are resisting Him and His help. We must help them to fight unbelief by calling them to renew their mind with the Word of God. They must think differently about things, and out of that respond differently.

V. GIVE PROPER INSTRUCTION

We have already talked about this somewhat under the element of discernment. That point was emphasizing our thinking about a situation biblically, but this one emphasizes our actually imparting biblical directive to them.

As I have said before, if we are to help people, we won't do so by merely listening. There is, as **Ecclesiastes 3:7** says "a time to keep silence, and a time to speak." There is a time to keep silent, and hear what people are saying. But we are called to bring God's Word to bear in ours and others' lives so that we may help them, and ultimately to bring glory to God.

So to give proper instruction, we must know God's solutions to problems. We must be familiar with God's Word. We are called to minister the Word. This means more than off the cuff comments about what "the good book says" (remember Tevia in "Fiddler on the Roof", but actually take them to Scripture and show them. The Bible should be an open book in our conversation, actually looking at passages, not merely referring to them here and there.

We have the privilege of free access to the printed Scriptures, and we should use them vigorously. There is something special about having the passage opened before us, so that it isn't perceived that we are just giving tidbits of our wisdom, but this is what the Word of God says. In doing so we should seek to have at least a basic understanding of theology. We should have a basic working understanding of what the Bible says about living the Christian life, what our purpose is, what sin is, how we change.

With this we must give instruction that is appropriate to that person, their circumstances. We should try to understand at least three things about them in their spiritual condition:

- 1.) **Are they a Christian?** If not, then it isn't practical counsel about how to change that is need, but evangelism.
- 2.) **Are they a babe or mature in Christ?** (**Hebrews 5:12-14**).
- 3.) **Are they rebellious, weak, or faint-hearted?** (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**).

VI. ASSIGN HOMEWORK

This is another area in which there is some distinction in application from a formal setting and informal. In a formal setting, I believe it is important to a person responsibility of things to do. This will do a couple of things, one of them being a testing to see how serious they are about change and how willing they are to work at it. **Proverbs 13:4** says, "the soul of the lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent will be made rich." There are many who desire the consequences of sin removed, but are not willing enough to work for it. Perhaps they want to be mystical and "just pray" about it. But as we have seen, this isn't God's method of change. He calls us to exercise ourselves to godliness (**1 Timothy 4:7**). If someone is not willing to work at change, then we cannot help them.

But even if in an informal setting, we should be able to direct them towards something to do. We see that **James 1:22** calls us to be not only hearers of the Word, but doers. We want to practically be able to suggest things that they can do in response to God's Word today. We want them to see how practical Scripture is. We need not give the impression that maybe some day things can change, but there can be change today, and that God expects us to respond to His Word immediately.

Again, the difference between a formal and informal setting differ greatly, and there is not a one size fits all solution. But we must seek to give responsibility of some sort in that situation to the person, for it only in that that we can give real hope.

So these are some suggestions of how we can approach the issue of biblical counseling in such a way as to help one another as we seek to walk and please God with our lives.

Time for Questions