

Side by Side Counselling and Discipleship

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[0 : 00] All right. I'm just going to I'm going to read a passage, just one, one, two verses for us to get us get our hearts down into the Bible for just a moment.

And then I'll pray for us. So I'm just going to read. Just feel free to listen. This will be a base, a base for what we're going to do tonight. So this is from Ephesians chapter four and from verse 11.

So God gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by everyone to doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

So just read the clause that we focus on tonight. And he gave us the apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Let's pray. Lord, we ask tonight that you would equip us for the work of ministry.

As we come to be better ministers, all of us. And so we ask for help as we think about what it looks like to be friends with one another, to counsel one another, to have conversations that matter with one another.

[1 : 24] And so we know, Lord, that we really, really need this as an aspect of discipleship. And yet we feel like it's something that's a bit distant at times for us. And so we ask that you would convict us tonight wherever we are and direct us from wherever we are at this moment towards people who need counseling and care.

And so we pray for these hearts in Jesus name. Amen. All right. So we're picking back up with our series on biblical counseling. Really, we could also just call this friend friendship.

We could also call this discipleship in a one-on-one type setting. The handout that I've made tonight is less a handout about the stuff we'll talk about bit by bit tonight and more of a guide.

So that's something you could take if you'd like, take a picture of it, whatever you'd like to do. Just a way of helping think through practices of one-on-one relationships.

So we'll come back around to that every time. But also just want to highlight this as well. So we've got a number of copies that were sitting up at the ConnectGest. I'll leave them up here of practicing the Christian life habits. So if you'd like one of those as well, feel free to grab one before the night's out.

[2 : 35] Okay. So we'll come to the guide in just a minute. But let me make a few introductory comments just to pick back up from where we were last time. So we're talking about counseling. We're talking about our relationships with one another.

And tonight's the second and final sort of intro night to this. And what's coming up is Ryan's going to be teaching on ways to focus in on one-on-one conversations with people in the church.

Next time, Louise McMillan's coming a couple of times to talk about very specific pastoral counseling issues. We'll be looking at how to walk with somebody through grief, how to walk with somebody in times of celebration, how to walk through with somebody in times of despair.

When somebody that you know in the church is walking through a real trial. We'll talk one night about how to help somebody that you know fight through sinful patterns that they're coming to look for help with.

So we'll look at very specific counseling practices and the way the Bible guides us in that. So that's what's coming up. The second introductory comment tonight is there is a gap between preaching and teaching on a Sunday, worship and preaching.

[3 : 44] And then the programs we have in our church, like small groups or a Bible study somewhere or, you know, a lunch or anything like that. There's a gap.

And the gap is exactly what we're talking about. So a lot of times it's you could be really faithful in listening to somebody preach. You can be really faithful in attending a city group.

But sometimes you find that the real way to grow immensely is to fill the space between and the space between those two things is to have a real relationship with somebody that is walking with you spiritually and asking, how are you?

What's going on in your heart? How can I pray for you? As basic as that. So that's often the gap. So if you're finding that from worship to city group, there's not a lot.

You just feel like I'm not changing. I don't feel like I'm always walking with the Lord. It may be the case that this is the piece that really needs to be there is do you have a person in your life that you are walking in the faith with, walking alongside that's able to ask you, how are you spiritually?

[4 : 54] All right. So this is and this is exactly what we mean by biblical counseling. All right. So what is biblical counseling? Very quickly. Just a reminder from last time. Biblical counseling is discipleship that emphasizes the relationships of ordinary life.

That's all. It's just a pathway of discipleship emphasizing relationships in ordinary life. It's the oldest form of counseling there is. So that could be a mom to a daughter, a friend to a friend, a pastor to a church member in any kind of setting.

Discipleship that's based on ordinary relationships, everyday life. So 89, 99, 99.9999% of the time, we're not at a professional counselor's office.

We're not in the context of that. And so we're not in any way attempting to replace that venue. That's very good. We need professionals. Absolutely. There's things that pastors and we all can't deal with.

We need professionals sometimes. But 99.999% of the time, most of the counseling we receive is from each other. It's from our spouse or our family, our friend, the person that lives in our flat with us.

[5 : 58] Right? And so the question is not, are we in these relationships, but how are we doing in them? How are we approaching them? Are we awake to this reality that every time we're in a conversation, we have an opportunity to be a counselor, to be a person who is trying to fill that gap of spiritual friendship with Christian to Christian I'm talking about here.

And so I said last time that the way this works is first, in a broad brush, you've got to think about where you are right now spiritually. So the Lord, we saw in Colossians 3, calls us to a life of patience, kindness, meekness, and humility.

That's a fourfold virtue model. We could talk about the fruits of the Spirit. We could talk about all sorts of things. And then you think about the person that Jesus will make you one day when you're glorified, and you think about the gap.

Right? And the gap is different sizes along different virtues for all of us. Right? But there's a gap, definitely. Right? We're not yet the people we want to be.

We struggle. We're struggling. And so in the biblical model, the plan is that the Holy Spirit is working this out for us through our relationships mostly. So most of the time you're not listening to sermons.

[7 : 09] Most of the time you're not sitting at a city group. You know, most of the time you're just talking with people. And when you're talking with Christians, it is the biblical model that the Holy Spirit is working this out through relationships.

And so we read, actually, Ephesians 4.12 that the church exists, the offices of the church exist to equip all the people for ministry, for the building up of the very first clause, for the building up of the body.

So to together towards one another, build up the church in maturity. It mentions maturity. So this exists for our maturity, our growth. This is what counseling is.

And so all we're talking about here is the calling to help each other. That's really it. Okay. Why do we need this? Let me give you a couple reasons that I didn't mention last time that I think that came kind of came up in some of my reading and thinking lately that I think acts in even more why we really need to focus on something like this.

Number one, the Bible tells us that this is the model that the Holy Spirit wants us to have in relationship with one another. Number two, we have a community here at St. Columbus of about 250 people that say St. C's is their church in some way, shape, or form.

[8 : 25] Now, some of that 250 is very occasional. Some is very every week. You know, it's a broad spectrum. And how often we see all 250 of the people that come through our doors on a somewhat regular basis.

But it's not an enormous church. We're not an enormous church. Not by any stretch. But we're also not a small, small church at all either anymore. And that means that it's absolutely impossible for one pastor or two pastors or one pastor and two pastors and a few designated pastoral helps, big time helps in the church to actually know everybody deeply.

It's just not possible in a community that branches much bigger than 100 people. And then that means that most of our pastoral care, most of our needs, most of our growth has got to be with each other.

So this is just a call that it's absolutely necessary and good that 80, 90 percent of all the counseling we get, all the care we get is from each other. And so pastors and women's pastoral team and elders and deacons are all there to aid that and lift that up.

But here we learn in Ephesians that actually the offices are there to equip all the saints, the whole of the church for ministry to each other into the outside world.

[9 : 46] So we're called here that this is all of us. We're all doing this together. So it's not a pastor parishioner model, really. It's a it's a pastor serving to just help aid everybody in the same ministry in some sense that we're all in this together.

So that's the second reason. This is really important. The third reason is let me just focus down on a couple of the ways the commands come to us in the Bible to do this with one another. Think it's hard to it's hard to get out from underneath James chapter five and around verse 16.

So in James chapter five, around verse 16, we get a model for the Christian life in terms of one another here. And this is what it says. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Now he's talking there about either physical or spiritual sickness in that context. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Now, the implicit idea there is that we should be confessing our sins and praying for one another.

Now, that doesn't mean to everybody, but it means that there ought to be a relationship or we should pursue a relationship in our lives where we have the ability to actually talk to somebody to the point where we say, this is what I'm struggling with.

[11 : 00] And this is what I need prayer for from you. And R.C. Sproul, the late R.C. Sproul, the theologian in the States, he, I once heard him give a lecture where he talked about an overcorrection that occurred in the Reformation.

So sometimes these things happen, right, where you have reform movements and they overcorrect an abuse. And the abuse that they were fighting was the confessional where a priest would actually say by the mediation of the priest's own authority, holding the keys of the kingdom in the Roman Catholic Church's theology, the priest could absolve your sins.

Right. And so that's a different view of what Jesus means by the keys of the kingdom in the Gospels. And Calvin and Luther and Zwingli and other reformers said we need to get rid of the confessional because of this abuse.

And R.C. Sproul talks about how what happened is, you know, as with many ways, we threw everything out and lost a sense. And sometimes in Protestantism that the Bible does at the same time tell us, come and confess your sins to somebody and talk to somebody about what you're struggling with.

Right. So we see that very explicitly here in James chapter five. OK, how do we get started? And this is where I want to focus for the rest of our time. How do we get started? Number one, First Corinthians one is a and as well as Philipians one is a base text for counseling.

[12 : 25] First Corinthians one says, consider your calling, brothers and sisters, people of the church, Christians. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many of you are powerful. Not many of you were of noble birth.

But God shows what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. God shows what is weak in the world to shame the strong. That's verse 26 and 27 of First Corinthians one. And what is he talking about? He's saying none of us were big deals out in the world.

And he's saying, but God, God shows you. He's reminding us there of humility as the basic disposition of a Christian humility. And you could go to Philipians one, put on the humility of Christ himself, other places like that.

Now, that's the beginning of real counseling and real spiritual relationships and friendships in our community, because a growing culture of side by side, face to face Christian friendship begins with recognizing personal neediness.

So the humility to start by saying, I know that I want to give care to somebody in this church because I know how much I need it.

[13 : 35] So personal neediness, real deep humility is the beginning. So the ability to say, I cannot boast of where I am in terms of spiritual growth and the presence of God or others, because any progress that I've made has been by grace.

So God pursued me and I have deep neediness. And so I want to pursue other people and their neediness and their spiritual needs. So that's the beginning. So we can look at ourselves and say, I have a lack of wisdom in my life.

I have a lack of clarity on this decision I need to make. I have an abundance of hurt or pain over this or that issue or this or that event that happened in my past.

I'm fighting a particular sin pattern, anger, laziness, lust, grudge bearing, gossip, discouragement, envy, boasting, pride. We can all look at ourselves and find ourselves in that list, maybe across the whole of it, right, if we're honest.

And say, I have deep neediness. I am not yet the person God has promised to make me in glorification. That's the beginning of deep spiritual relationships is actually the ability to come to somebody else and say, I have neediness in my life.

[14 : 48] There's a humility there that allows us to do that. It's actually, I heard one teacher on this idea say, it's very honoring and elevating to other people when you can come to them and say, will you pray for me over this issue?

And that means you're saying to them, I trust you. I love you. And I see you as a person who's seriously trying to grow in the Lord, right? When you come to somebody else and ask, will you pray for me over this?

You're elevating them. And it's an encouragement, actually, to them because you're telling them, I see you as a person who's at least serious enough to pray for me. It's actually going to do it, right? And so that's the beginning, actually, of a culture. And so one of the first things you can do is you can just say, I need to go ask other people for help.

For, hey, I need prayer. I need you to pray for me. And that's actually kind of the secret sauce of creating a culture of counseling, a culture of spiritual friendship across an entire community.

And so let me just ask you on this point. You know, of course, that begins with praying your real needs to God. So it's probably not going to be the case that we're going to go and ask other people to pray for us over specific issues.

[15 : 54] If we're not praying those needs to God, that's probably happening. One writer says you got to here's how to do it. You got to pray what you got.

What do they mean? Pray what you got, meaning do you have a lot of bad right now, a lot of struggle, a lot of doubt, a lot of grief, a lot of pain? And the idea is you got to just be praying what you got.

Whatever it is you got right now, you need to pray it. So that's prayer is just being real enough to pray whatever it is that you have. If you have a lot of anger on your heart right now, pray what you got. Pray that anger to God.

Pray it Godward. That's exactly what the Psalms do. And then that probably will begin a helpful process of being able to come to somebody else and say, well, you pray for me as well. And so secondly, on this point, just the best helpers, the best counselors, the best spiritual guides and friends and disciples in the church are typically ones who are most needy in the sense that they have the humility to know how deep their need is.

And they're the ones that have sought help. That's quite often the case. Okay, so I'll move on. But you can think about places like Job 38 to 40 where God just reminds us.

[17 : 08] He says, if you don't remember how needy you are, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Job 38 to 40, all that whole list of God just saying to Job, you're nothing. Where were you when I did everything, when I created the world?

Or Romans 2 where there's somebody in the church in Rome who's accusing the Gentiles of constantly being bad people and breaking the law and these kind of things.

And what does Paul say in Romans 2? He says, do you use the law of God to judge other people yet you don't see what's going on in your own heart? He says, you have no excuse, oh man.

You Christian person who's looking at everybody else, he says, you have no excuse, oh man. Look at your own heart. You're struggling with the same exact sins, right? So we can look at our own neediness there.

1 Peter 1, Peter says, you're going to walk through fire in this life. And so he says, you can experience your neediness all over again through just thinking about the suffering that's around you and the suffering and the pain of circumstances quite often reminds us of neediness.

[18 : 06] 1 Corinthians 12, the body is so interdependent. You know, we got around here in this room right now, we have fingers, toes, arms, legs, heads, mouths, noses, and the metaphor of the body of Christ.

And in 1 Corinthians 12, there's a real accent on, you know, the body parts that aren't as, we don't think of as a big of a deal. But he's saying every single piece has got to be for one another.

The interdependent body all needs each other, right? And so, boy, if you, your heart is really important. But if you break your big toe, you also know that life becomes very difficult.

If you break a big toe, right, you can't, you can't get around hardly at all. And the whole thing is very important. All of us are for one another, interconnected. Okay, so if you take your hand out, let me just run through these models real quick with you and we'll finish.

Okay, so this is something to take away and to think about, maybe to pray over, stick in a Bible, because this is the basics. We had a conversation here about 18 months ago at St. Columbus amongst some of the leaders.

[19 : 12] And one of the conversations we had was just in the future trying to produce some quick, helpful, maybe this is helpful, I don't know, but some guides to think, what do I do if I actually do sit down with somebody and have a, and I'm there to try to have a meaningful spiritual relationship, encounter, say, hey, why don't we get together and read the Bible?

Why don't we get together and work through some of these things? Well, what do you do? How can you approach it? And so this is a starting place. And I think Ryan's going to come back next time and make it way better than this.

I know that that's the plan. So let me run through this real quick with you. Here's the most basic thought, the top. Just look at the first two lines. The most basic thing is that all we're attempting to do is know people and be known.

So being known is neediness, allowing ourselves to be known. There's a vulnerability that has to take place in a deep spiritual friendship. And then there's a desire to actually be curious enough to know somebody else and to kind of get past self-interest enough to pursue.

And so I've just written there, we pursue people and we're open to meaningful relationships beyond whatever is your current normal. So one way to think about this is wherever you are with this right now.

[20 : 26] So some of us will say, I have like 11 of these already and I cannot add anybody else to my discipleship list. But some of us will not yet have a relationship like this where we're thinking, who is it that I could walk alongside?

Or who is it I could ask for help? Because I'm struggling spiritually and I haven't yet taken a step towards this. What would it look like tonight to just think this would be the first step beyond my current normal?

Because all of us will have a different normal in this right now to know and to be known. Secondly on that is really all you need to do is have two questions for when you're helping or walking with somebody or attempting to be helped.

And that's to ask, how are you and how can I pray for you? And if you have those two questions with a listening ear, everything else can kind of fill in really typically. So that's the most basic way.

So you pay money, you go to seminary and they just say, try to know somebody and ask them, how are you and how can I pray for you? And that's pretty much it.

[21 : 27] That's what you go to seminary for. All right. Secondly, let's get a little more specific. I'd started this list last time, but the Bible's teaching on counseling. Here's how it can get a little more specific.

And I'll just run through these. Number one, James 1:19. Okay. In that relationship, be quick to listen, slow to speak. So that's a posture of poise, meaning the kind of meekness.

What's meekness? Meekness is self-control. So the self-control that's not reactive. So not reactive towards people's struggle. Not reactive towards people's confession.

Not reactive, meaning never really surprised. Able to handle whatever somebody else is going through. Able to bear that and kind of work with that and be there with them and for them.

A posture of poise and a posture of patience. So this means as a counselor, as a person who's spiritually trying to help somebody, just responsive listening, guarding against any hasty judgments and conclusions, really trying to take the whole picture in of whatever's going on in somebody's life.

[22 : 30] So that's number one. It's really about listening, active listening. Number two, Ephesians 4.32. Be kind and compassionate to one another. So this is a call to try to think about a person's situation through their own lens.

Sometimes in counseling and walking with somebody, one of the things you find is that there's unseen, untold hurt.

So there's pain underneath the pain. And all that's going on is not being said. Right. And that's okay. That person has every right not to say that.

But it's just that compassion includes being aware that I don't want to make any judgments or hasty conclusions here because there's more. There's more going on in the heart than I can see right now.

There's an invisible layer here that I've yet to unpack and unfold with this person. Number three, 1 Corinthians 9.22. Paul says, to the weak, I became weak to win the weak.

[23 : 29] Okay. So this is not to say that we're all out there just as a bunch of weak people. But what is he saying there? He's saying that he will accommodate himself to every single person. And this is a call to accommodate our expectations in ministry conversation and spiritual conversation.

And accommodating our expectations looks like not expecting a person to have fixed themselves or grown up in this issue like that in a jiffy. Right. That sanctification works very slowly and at different levels.

And so it's a willingness. I'll meet anybody wherever they are and not expect them to be so much further down the road to sanctification already. Right. So it's a willingness to accommodate yourself to that.

1 Thessalonians number four. 1 Thessalonians 5.11. And encourage one another and build each other up. So here's the turn. Those first three things are postures.

But now here's the turn. And the turn is, what is your goal in a spiritual friendship and meeting with somebody one-on-one? What is your goal? Your goal is encouragement and edification.

[24 : 33] So in other words, wherever they are, whatever they're struggling with, you want to somehow, someway encourage them. Encourage them not to leave the faith, maybe. Somehow, someway with wisdom.

Encourage them to take a step back towards God. Encourage them by just weeping alongside them. Giving them a hug. Telling them that you're terribly sorry and you just want to pray.

That could be all the encouragement. It depends. Right. And then the edification side, and I'll come back, I'll come to this in just a moment, in the checklist of what to do, not to do at the bottom.

The edification side is giving them advice if solicited. Giving them a biblical wisdom approach if asked for.

That's the edification piece. So piece number one is encouragement. And maybe that's all you need to do. And edification needs to come if asked. If you're in a place where you think this person really is wanting this, is really seeking this.

[25 : 32] Okay, so number five, Galatians 6.2. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you fulfill the law of Christ. So this is, Galatians 6.2 is the famous verse that really you build a diaconal ministry around.

So our deacons need to be structured on Galatians 6.2. And it's the idea, carry, it's the command, carry other people's burdens in the church. Carry their burdens. And look for any way you can help.

So this is just a simple call to be attuned to their needs. And so maybe as much as it's a spiritual conversation, there's kind of an awareness overall of how can I meet a person's needs here.

It could be physical needs as well, material needs as well, at the very same time. So I've just written at the end of that line, number five, a willingness to provide support and also protection.

So sometimes in a spiritual friendship relationship where somebody's coming in neediness, if you've cultivated that and curated that and created that carefully, sometimes what's needed is simply protection.

[26 : 35] And that could be the protection of just what's going on in their heart where I need to put this somewhere. I need to put this in your ear, and I need it to be safe. It's not going anywhere else.

So there's a really important call here to meet somebody's needs by being willing to hold in your heart and nowhere else, never letting a word come out of your mouth to anybody else about what that person's walking through without permission.

So that's incredibly important. And if we don't have that, what you'll find is that it can be very difficult. Like if you're married, for example, and you're meeting with somebody, it can be incredibly difficult not to talk to your spouse about what that person is walking through and told you about.

But actually, without their permission, it's very important most of the time, most of the time to be able to protect them if that's what they're coming for spiritual guidance and help with an issue or anything like that.

All right, number six, Leviticus 19.15. Do not pervert justice. Do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great. So this is a call to be a champion of justice, to be impartial, and to not have any hierarchy in a relationship like this.

[27 : 51] So that's to really look for what is the right thing to do here from an impartial perspective? How can I seek justice in this situation in any impartial way?

That's the command here. And then lastly, 2 Timothy 3.16-17. All Scripture is God-breathed. All Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So we're just simply told here, use the Bible. So when it does come time to encouragement and exhortation, we're being told, we've got to seek to have enough ability to know God's Word that I can speak it to somebody else.

That I can take parts of Scripture and say, this is what Jesus was talking about in Matthew 4 or whatever it is, and say, let me help you receive this word that we have from the Bible about this very thing that you're walking through.

So there's a clear command there for that. All right. A couple minutes and I'll be done. Let me just – here's a checklist that you can take with you. This is more practical of what does a one-on-one or a small group discipleship type relationship look like?

[29 : 07] Or somebody's coming to you and saying, can we meet to talk about something? Here's what it can look like. Number one, pray before you meet. Pray for that person. Pray that the Lord would prepare your heart in that person's heart.

That's the first. Second, we've covered this. Listen. Just try to ask a lot of questions. Try to be aware to being led by the Holy Spirit towards the right way to think, to letting sort of Scripture pour through your mind and heart with a humble and gentle attitude.

Number three, keep listening. So tell me more. I don't quite understand. What did you mean by that? Help me kind of – can you say that another way? Questions like that are really helpful. Give people a lot of opportunity to talk and spill their hearts out.

Number four, don't make any assumptions. Even based around your first meeting, always presume that someone is holding something back. There's a hurt maybe in the heart that's not being shared, and that's okay. But don't make any assumptions.

Don't make any hasty judgments. Number five, be a trustworthy person. Have integrity. Don't ever speak badly, even joking about other people in front of them. And I think I would add to that just being able to hold on to what they say to you without telling anybody else.

[30 : 16] And that's – well, that's the next one. Number six, be clear about confidentiality. Keep your word. Number seven, give hope. Give hope. Don't be simplistic. However, if someone comes to you and they have a complicated mess of a life, you want to be able to leave them with hope.

It might be a reassurance that God is not far away or that he does not – or that he – or that he does have you or that he does watch over you. Have easy access to helpful scripture.

And number eight, don't preach. Don't teach. Don't teach. Don't give advice unless it's asked for. Allow God's word in your relationship to do the work of comfort and conviction. And finally, pray.

Pray with them if you can. Right there, that moment. Say, can we pray? And pray with them. Okay. So there's some guides to maybe take a step towards more meaningful relationships.

Some of you will be doing this kind of stuff all the time. But it's a call and an encouragement to take just a step. So let me conclude with this. Is there anybody right now that you can think about that you have a relationship with where you say, I'm a little bit ahead of them in the Christian life and I know that I've been able to get through enough life experience where I could actually help that person maybe.

[31 : 30] So maybe there's a thought there for some of us to go and seek a person and say, I would love to just get to talk and walk with you and maybe read the Bible together and see where you are and see if I could walk with you and learn from you but help you as well.

So there's a discipleship opportunity to look around and say, who needs discipling in my life right now? And then there's the opportunity to say, I am not doing good spiritually and I need to ask somebody to help me.

So there's that other side of it as well. So who among us, all of us are there sometimes, right? And we need to go ask somebody for help. Okay. So let me encourage you to think about that prayer about that and take this with you.