

Christian Servanthood 2

Week Five - Key Pastoral Counseling Tools

Introduction

Tonight we want to discuss three important tools that will help you in your pastoral counseling: listening skills, understanding when to confer or when to keep information confidential, and a communication tool to guide us in helping others to change.

REMEMBER: by "counseling" we include the type of discussions that often, maybe usually, occur in our one-on-one times with people we are shepherding or discipling.

The Role of Listening

The Bible emphasizes the importance of being a good listener. When God tells us that we should be "quick to listen, (and) slow to speak" (James 1:19), he is alerting us to our natural aversion to listening and urging us to bring this area of our lives under his control.

Effective listening is especially important in pastoral counseling. When people come to us with spiritual and relational problems, we may know the answers to their problems. But unless we have learned the art of listening, they will probably not profit from the answers we give them. There are several reasons for this.

Why listening is important

Listening is a basic expression of love. There are many ways to show love, but one of the most basic expressions of love is to take the other person seriously enough to hear what she has to say. By listening, we are affirming and expressing what God says about her--that she is significant. Listening therefore is part of "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15).

There are times when we do not know the answers to the problem, but we can still minister to the person if we listen carefully and lovingly. This is why Job tells his friends, "Listen carefully to my words; let this be the consolation that you give to me" (Job 21:1).

Listening is a prerequisite to discernment. Proverbs 18:13 says, "He who answers before listening--that is his folly and his shame." It is arrogant to begin to answer someone before we truly understand what he needs. If we have humility, we will realize that many times we are wrong in our initial assessment of another person's needs. Before we can properly apply God's Word, we need to understand the other person's situation, what and why he feels the way he does, and what the root issues are. The only way we can discover these things is to carefully and prayerfully listen. Important to the sanguine and the self-confident who believe they have the answer without truly understanding the issues.

Listening promotes receptivity to your counsel. Though it may be assumed that you have credibility because the person is coming to you for counsel, your credibility will be hampered if you are a poor listener. Most people seeking counsel are confused by their problems, or they

wouldn't be seeking help. They can't imagine that anyone could accurately discern the problem and the solution as quickly as you may have done. Until this confidence is gained, the counselee will be reluctant to follow your counsel no matter how sound it may be. Because of this, it is not enough that you accurately understand the issues; it is also necessary that the counselee has confidence that you understand. This confidence is based largely on your willingness to listen and ask questions, sometimes even after you have discerned the issues.

How to listen

Listening is not passive; it is not the same as merely not talking. In fact, concentrated listening is more strenuous than talking because it is easy to talk about our own thoughts, but it is difficult to accurately understand another person's. The following reminders can improve our listening skills so that we may become better servants.

Be spiritually prepared. As Christians, we believe that all spiritual and relational healing is the work of God and not something we can do by our own power. The proof that we believe this is that we bathe our counseling sessions with prayer. It is important to personally express your dependence to God in prayer before the counseling session. Ask God to enable you to put aside other thoughts so that you may listen effectively. Ask him also to grant you the ability to spiritually discern the real issues. Learn the habit of turning to God while in the counseling session to ask for these same things. Sometimes, more experienced Christian workers omit this preparation because they "have had so much experience" in counseling. This attitude is fleshly self-sufficiency and should be consciously resisted.

Lay aside your own preconceptions. Unless you know the other person well, it is important to lay aside your own preconceived ideas about what his needs are. Unless you do this, you will tend to come to a premature discernment and counsel before you understand or be politely silent while you rehearse your response. This is not listening; this is merely waiting for the chance to make the other person listen.

This is especially important when the symptoms of the problem are similar to problems you or other counselees have had. The tendency to project previous situations on to the counselee is a danger to be resisted. Of course, such previous experience may be useful once you establish by careful listening that the situations are truly similar.

Be non-judgmental and empathetic. Avoid the tendency to focus only on evaluating the moral and/or theological correctness of statements the counselee makes. As Christians, we know that truth is important. We know that the counselee will need to bring her thinking into conformity to God's Word in order to be healed. But our ability to apply this truth will be hindered unless we truly understand how she views this area of her life. Be willing to temporarily suspend your immediate right to judge in the interest of better overall understanding of the person. If you are sure about where you stand with the truth, you can afford to do this without fear that you will lose your own theological moorings.

Give yourself as fully as possible to drawing out and understanding the counselee's situation. Being non-judgmental and empathetic does not mean you should become relativistic

theologically or morally. It does mean that you communicate acceptance to the counselee regardless of her beliefs or behavior.

It also means that you communicate an understanding of the legitimate parts of the counselee's problem, even if you disagree with her response to it.

EG. "I am so discouraged that I want to get a divorce!" You could reply with a mini-lecture about the biblical view of divorce. This statement may be biblically correct, but it may stifle effective interaction. On the other hand, you could say something like "I can see how his lack of sensitivity could make you feel like giving up on the relationship." This statement communicates empathy and encourages further communication without legitimizing divorce as the answer.

Pay attention to non-verbal communication and what is not said. It is helpful to notice the non-verbal communication of the counselee. His facial expressions, body movement, posture, and breathing rate are all important clues to what he is thinking or feeling. The tone, volume and tempo of speech are also important in this regard.

Encourage self-disclosure. Being a good listener involves helping the counselee to disclose to you all that is relevant to her problem. There are a number of practical ways to do this.

You should communicate non-verbally that you are interested in what she is saying.

Maintain an appropriate amount of eye-contact.

Nodding occasionally, coupled with appropriate facial gestures helps to give the other person confidence that you are sincerely interested.

Your own bodily posture is also important. Sitting in an open, relaxed way will encourage self-disclosure; sitting behind a desk with arms folded will impede it. Lean forward at important statements.

Take note of any distracting non-verbal habits you may have and eliminate them. Finger tapping, rocking, or staring off into space may help you to concentrate, but they communicate disinterest to the counselee and therefore discourage self-disclosure.

Give appropriate verbal encouragement. An occasional "uh-huh," as well as questions like "Can you tell me more about that?" communicate interest which encourages self-disclosure.

Check for understanding. Effective listening involves ascertaining that you have properly interpreted the counselee's statements so that you form an accurate picture of the situation. One of the most effective ways to do this is to paraphrase important parts of the counselee's communication. By putting what he just said into your own words and re-stating it, you are letting him know you are listening, and you insure a proper interpretation.

If the counselee is merely reporting what happened, you may need to ask how he interpreted the event, how he feels about it, and what he intends to do about it. For example, if the counselee says, "We had an argument," you may want to inquire how he felt about the

argument in order to understand its actual effect on the situation. Be careful to ask open-ended, non-threatening questions rather than "yes or no" questions.

Take written or mental notes. In the course of the session, the counselee may make a statement about something that is very important to address. Perhaps she reveals animosity toward her parents, or shows an unbiblical attitude about sexuality. These issues are important, but to address them immediately would disrupt the self-disclosure that is taking place. In this case, it is best to make a mental or written note of the issue so you can come back to it at a more appropriate time.

Give hope without "jumping the gun." When people come to you with pressing problems, it is important to find a way encourage them that God can help them. However, it is also important to not be premature about offering specific solutions until you have an accurate discernment of the root issues. This may have an encouraging effect immediately, but it can be very damaging in the long run. When you are not sure about the root issues, resist the urge to "shoot from the hip." Instead, offer more general encouragement by expressing your concern for them and your confidence that God can and will help, and by praying with them for comfort and insight. This encouragement is genuinely helpful and will usually be readily received.

Confidentiality & Conferral

Introduction

Christians are called on to disclose their problems to one another (Gal. 6:2; Jas. 5:16). But is it ever right to discuss another's problem with a third party?

What about leadership teams who need to decide what to do with a member?

What about a lay counselor who feels the need for help from a conferral?

What about a friend who knows something serious about another friend, but the other friend won't agree to disclose the problem?

What about a friend who says, "I've got something to share, but you have to promise not to tell anyone," or "By the way, what I told you was in confidence?"

How do you know when to share something about another person and when not to? Consider some other related questions:

You need help with a problem in someone's life, but you bound yourself in confidence.

You did not bind yourself in confidence, but the other person may perceive it as a breach of confidence.

How many of you have been hurt because things were shared that shouldn't have been? On the other hand, how many of you have been hurt because things weren't shared that should have been?

What does the civil law say about this? More importantly, what does the Bible say about this?

The biblical position

On the one hand, the Bible condemns gossip and defends the idea of confidentiality.

Proverbs 20:19 ". . . do not associate with a gossip." See also Prov. 11:13a; 16:27,28; 17:9b.

Rom. 1:29; 2 Cor. 12:20 - Both passages differentiate gossip from slander and condemn it as the result of a depraved mind, unfitting for Christians.

1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:11 - Both condemn "busybodies" who "speak about things not proper to mention."

Prov. 11:13 - "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy conceals a matter."

Prov. 17:9a - "He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends."

Prov. 25:9,10 - ". . . don't reveal the secret of another, lest he who hears it reproach you, and the evil report about you not pass away."

Matt. 18:15 - "If your brother sins, go and reprove him in private . . ." This implies the desirability of leaving it there if the matter is satisfactorily resolved.

We have all seen the wreckage that gossip can cause: feelings hurt, trust destroyed, relationships ruined - and above all, an atmosphere of mistrust which destroys true community. People may not open up about serious problems, or they may sanitize their versions of those problems unless we can offer them the safety of legitimate confidentiality.

On the other hand, the Bible sometimes speaks strongly about the need to tell others about someone else's problems. Some disciplinary situations require this.

Matt. 18:16,17 - The same passage that recommends resolving it in private commands making it public if necessary.

Gal. 6:1 - "Those who are spiritual" should go and restore the one "caught in a trespass." This implies they were told by the one(s) who caught them!

1 Tim. 5:20 - The elder who "continues in sin" should be rebuked "in the presence of all."

We can conclude from passages like these that in the body of Christ we may sin, but we do not have the right to insist that other Christians cover for us.

Other passages indicate that discussing others' sins may be necessary for the healthy working of the local church.

Passages which speak of corporate leadership (1 Peter 5:1ff) imply telling each other about matters that affect the health of the church. How can they shepherd the flock if they do not have access to knowledge about the sheep? One reason for the requirement that church leaders not be "double-tongued" (1 Timothy 3:8) is so they can be trusted to handle this kind of knowledge responsibly.

Passages which require that leaders be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1) imply that a Christian should come forward if they know that leader or would-be leader is under reproach.

The metaphors of the church as a body and a family argue powerfully for the openness of Christians both with one another and about one another.

The members are affected by those in need (1 Corinthians 12:26); they should help those in need (Romans 12:15), but they cannot help if they are not told of the need.

The "one another passages" (Galatians 6:2; James. 5:16) are in the plural. They are to be understood not only in the individual sense (i.e. one to one), but also as a family helping each other.

See also examples like 1 Corinthians 1:11, where Paul evidently commends "Chloe's people" for disclosing the Corinthians' sins, or Paul's public disclosure of Peter's sin in Galatians 2:11-14, or his discussion of Demas' defection in 2 Tim. 4:10.

In Western culture, where autonomous individualism is prized as a virtue, the "right of individual privacy" is stressed at the expense of individual responsibility to and need for the community. People rarely share their problems with another, and when they do, it's almost exclusively in a client/counselor setting where strict confidentiality is expressly stated and strictly enforced.

The idea that "My life is my business alone and only those I wish to tell" denies the individual Christian's effect on the rest of the community. The result is something every bit as ugly as a church riddled by gossip:

No true community

No church discipline

People wrestling with their sin problems alone instead being helped by the body of Christ.

Gossip vs. Conferral

The above passages are not contradictory. Rather, they describe a tension that requires wisdom, maturity, and is part of authentic Christian community. There are times when it is best to keep divulged information to yourself, and there are times when it is important to bring it to the attention of others.

One key to guidance on this issue is your *reason* for talking about someone else. Are you acting as a family member or spiritual helper, or as a busybody? The Bible condemns and

prohibits gossip for the sake of tearing down. It commends and at times even commands conferral for the sake of building up. Consider the following important distinctions between conferral and gossip.

Conferral	Gossip
Motivated by the desire to help the person and the local church	Motivated by lack of concern or even the desire to hurt the person and exalt yourself
Confers only with responsible people who can help	Talks to whomever you please without regard for its effect on the other person
Confers only about live issues	Talks past, dead, purely personal issues
Does so in addition to talking to the person if needed	Does so instead of talking to the person if needed
Carefully explains the context of the problem to the conferee	Neglects or distorts the context of the problem
Promotes more trust, openness and less gossip in the local church	Promotes fear of openness and more gossip in the local church

We believe that most things divulged to us should not be considered confidential in the strict sense of the word. The principle: *Christians are to relate to each other on the basis of responsible trust.*

If you trust another brother or sister enough to confide in them, you should also trust them enough to do with the information what they think is most helpful for you. You should receive others' sharing in the same way. The issue usually is not "Is the information confidential?" but rather "What is the most responsible and helpful way to respond?"

When considering whether or not to confer with another Christian worker, prayerfully consider the following questions:

Is another person or the witness of the church being injured by your silence? Many issues are of such a purely personal nature (e.g., masturbation), or have taken place so long ago (e.g., sexual sins as a non-Christian) that there is no good reason why they should be shared with others. With these matters, we should the person show acceptance and let him share this with others as he gets to know them.

But many issues are directly affecting another party (e.g., the adulterer's spouse) or the witness of the church (e.g., a brother swindling in business, or a youth worker who has been involved in molesting children) that they should be divulged for that reason. Not to do so is to enter into a "conspiracy of silence" which is hurting others and the witness of Christ.

What is the person's role in the church? Those with more authority are also more accountable. If you know that a deacon or an elder who fell to temptation and got high, you should bring this to the attention a leader. On the other hand, a similar fall by a new Christian may not need any other input if you are the person working with him. However, the person who is working most closely with them should probably know so they can help. Encourage the person to share their fall with this person, and it may be best to check to see if he did this.

What concrete thing do you want to confer about? You should be clear on what and why you want to confer, and you should confer only with those who can help. If you can't answer these questions clearly, more thought is probably needed before you confer.

What is your own tendency in this area? If you tend to "smooth things over" that should be brought out, ask yourself why you shouldn't confer about it. If you tend to be a big-mouth, ask yourself if it is necessary to talk with others about it.

Other practical matters

What about legal liability? Our lay home group leaders have liability in their church roles, but are protected by both Federal statutes (see 'Volunteer Protection Act') and church insurance policies. An ordained minister engaged in official one-on-one client counseling would be bound by confidentiality laws. This is why we have all clients sign a permission form to allow conferral with other members of the pastoral staff, relevant home group leaders and elders.

In the case of known child or other physical abuse, our policy is to report such instances to proper legal authorities in a timely manner, after conferral with church pastoral staff.

In practice, there have been no cases of a minister in Ohio being convicted over breach of confidentiality because it is too difficult to determine that he was actually functioning in his official capacity when he was told something

How to handle "Don't tell anyone." If this is given as a condition before the person divulges information to you, refuse to be put into this position. Assure him that you will not gossip, but tell him that you can't help unless he trusts that you will handle the information responsibly. If he doesn't trust you that much, he should go to someone he can trust.

What if he calls for secrecy after disclosing? State that you did not understand it in that light. If it is a clear case of him wanting to hide his sin, call on him to come out in the light. When others have a right to know (e.g., adultery and their spouse), give him the opportunity to go first, but ascertain that he did do so. If it is a complicated problem, assure him that you will not take it lightly, but what if others can help more?

Should you tell someone you conferred about his situation? You should confer if you feel it is needed in order to help the person. If you think it will be helpful or important to tell him you conferred, tell him, but we do not believe it is always required. Don't be defensive if he asks you if you told someone else. Simply explain your motives for doing so. If you are righteous, you have no reason to be ashamed. If you shared unrighteously, you should repent and apologize.

Conclusion

We should vigorously resist gossip in the body of Christ. We should learn to judge our own flesh before we gossip, and we should apologize when we do it. Cultivate constructive concern for the other person. Learn to ask yourself, "Why do I want to talk to others about this person's situation?"

We should be unsympathetic (but not self-righteous) with gossip on the part of others. After all, which of us can say we have never done it? If you discern that someone is gossiping, you can ask "Why are you telling me this?" or "What did they say when you confronted them about this?" Mature Christians should be able to "vent" around their colleagues; we can't avoid getting frustrated with people. But with this freedom comes the responsibility to help each other into a more constructive attitude.

We should resist just as vigorously the unqualified "right to privacy" attitude described above. So often, my concern that other brothers and sisters not know something about me is a desire to hide my sin, or my own insecurity. Paul freely told others about his worst sins, and the whole church seemed to know about Peter's embarrassing denial of Christ. This concern should be viewed as a sign of spiritual immaturity. Appropriating the grace of God and letting God help me through his people is the path of growth.

The Christian who says "I am open with God, but not with other Christians" is fooling himself. To be open with God will involve being open with other Christians because God ministers to us through his Body.

Cultivate "community openness" as an essential aspect of Body-life (1 John 1:7; Galatians 6:2; James 5:16). We should be moving toward the place where we live openly before each other, trusting that our brothers and sisters love us and will help us. As privacy and secrecy increases, closeness in community decreases.

To use gossip abuse as an excuse for not being open is to throw the baby out with the bath water. We should confront and discourage gossip, but we should also practice, model and encourage openness. We should be willing to pay the price of dealing with gossip as it occurs in order to cultivate an atmosphere of community openness in the body of Christ.

Communication Guide - The Dynamic Change Model

Introduction

In the past few weeks we have discussed the Christian worker's role in pastoral counseling. This counseling most commonly occurs in the context of a discipling relationship. Such counseling will of course address serious sins of commission like those "deeds of the flesh" listed in Galatians 5:19. But it will also address questionable values and priorities (e.g., materialistic aspirations) and areas of omission (e.g., neglect of outreach or building relationships with younger Christians).

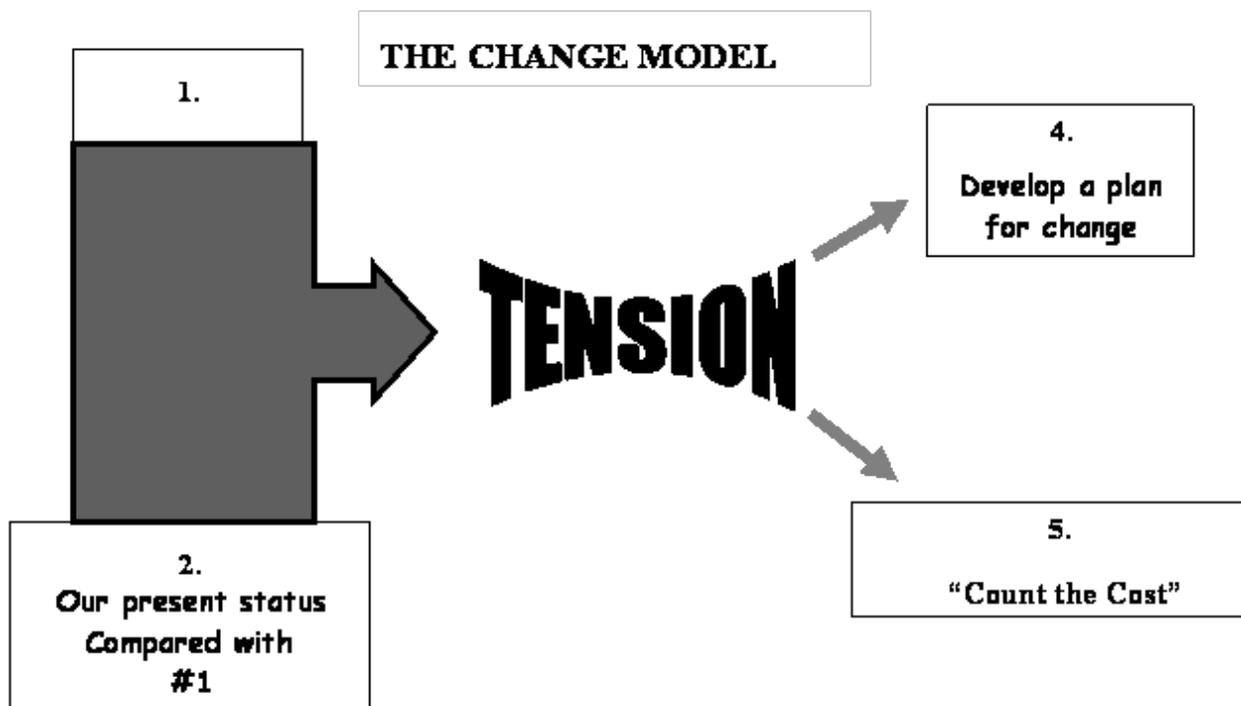
We have discussed a model for change reflecting the Romans 6 description of appropriating our new identity, and we have looked into Love Therapy’s understanding of the dynamics of biblical love. The basic assumption of the Biblical Model is that people are already motivated to change. But we have not discussed how we are going to actually communicate this information in a way that facilitates change. Some important practical questions remain unanswered:

“I agree with the importance of helping them come to their own convictions, rather than just telling them what I think, but how?”

“I would like to see them motivated to change, but so often they are not even convinced that they need to change. What then?”

The answer to these questions is not a script, but rather an understanding of what dynamics usually come together in a person to promote redemptive change in his life. First we’ll attempt to understand the change process, and then we’ll look at how to apply it in a discipling/counseling situation.

The Basic Elements of Change



Real, substantial, and lasting change does not happen over night. Even that “single moment” of enlightenment that seems to change us permanently did not occur in a vacuum. It happened in the context of other elements leading to that moment. Nor do the elements that work together toward change always occur in the exact same order or magnitude. However, the same common elements are usually all present when change occurs. These elements are:

1. Vision, or goals.

How does God envision you living out this area of your life? We should have a clear *vision* and/or goals for how you could or should be in this area--how your relationships could change, how you could be used by God. Part of the answer to this question includes knowing and considering your new identity (stages 2 & 3 in our pastoral counseling model).

Without seeing the way you could be (e.g., without an anger problem; not holding grudges; leading people to Christ, helping younger Christians grow, etc.), and seeing why you should be that way, there will be little or no motivation to change.

Strong motivation for deep-seated change requires that you internalize God's vision of growth for you. Usually this internalization develops over time and often requires Christians who are willing to be used by God to consider and communicate that vision.

2. Honest evaluation of my present status in that area.

You might agree with God and desire change in a particular character area (the vision of #1), but if you do not admit from the heart where you are NOT living up to that vision, you will not be motivated to change in a substantive way.

QUALIFICATION: This honest introspection must be done under grace. You can be 100% honest with your shortcomings only if you are appropriating God's grace.

IE. he accepts you 100% regardless of those faults and that he is 100% committed to empowering you to change.

Beware of moving to a plan for change until *both* of these realizations (#1 & #2) are present.

NOTE: Sometimes this honest evaluation comes *before* getting a vision for how you could be. The order is unimportant as long as both #1 & #2 are present.

Before proceeding, let's take a moment to see where we have come so far. What happens when you combine #1 & #2? When you have a clear vision of what you could be in an area of your life, and when you connect that to an honest assessment (under grace) of how you do NOT live up to that vision, this creates...

3. Tension!!!

This is the motivation or internal drive for change.

#1 The discrepancy between what you truly value and

#2 how well you are actually living out that value

#3 produces an internal tension that swells into desire or motivation to change.

4. Develop a plan for change.

You might be clear on how you'd like to act, on where you mess up, and be well-motivated to change. But that doesn't mean you have a clue on *how* to change. "Presenting ourselves to Christ as instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:13) means that you choose to act

consistently with who you are (my new identity). Many of the strategies we talked about last week belong here. Below are some additional possible elements of a good plan:

Think through what it would look like to act consistently with the truth in this area. It helps to mentally review past failures, or potential future challenges, and how we *should* respond. If we do not prepare this way, it is unlikely we will automatically react like a person of God in the next situation.

This plan might include calling a mature Christian friend for counsel at the moment things begin to go awry. It might include retreating back into your notes on God's view in this area before you react in an ungodly manner.

You may need to review the elements of walking in the Spirit so that you are acting in God's power rather than your own. Deep-seated change is a supernatural, spiritual event, not merely an exercise of your own will.

The area needing change might be your value system or priorities. This plan for change might include adjusting your schedule so that you make ourselves available to God and family, re-evaluate your career or school path, etc.

Usually the plan needs to include both "resist" (the sin) and "replace" (with godly action or thinking) elements.

There is one more that might come up several times throughout the process . . .

5. "Counting the cost"

Is the sacrifice (the effort of our plan for change) worth it? You will need to review your convictions of the importance and value of this needed change. You should return to #1 and revisit, probably many times, the value of God's perspective in this area.

The road to change isn't easy, but it is always worth it. In the difficult times, the Evil One may whisper (or shout) "this isn't worth it!" and you will need to answer clearly with God's perspective that clearly states "It is!"

What might that "cost" look like?

Character change in relationships can have high cost. Sometimes the cost is to your pride, getting your way, or to your comfort. Sometimes the plan for change requires that you no longer being passive and allow your spouse to do whatever he wants. Disciplining him, something you've seldom done before, is going to ruffle his feathers and you know you're going to pay when you stand up to his ungodliness. Will you decide that living out God's plan for you in this relationship is worth it?

You should also rehearse how you will trust God in the areas you can't predict, even though you know you are doing the right thing (e.g., your employer's response as you respectfully tell him you cannot work 70 hours per week anymore – are you willing to count any cost necessary to live out God's vision for your life?)

Now that we understand the typical change process, let's superimpose the counselor's role in the change process. This is part and parcel with discipleship. It applies whether we are bringing up a character flaw we've observed and want to help the person change, or motivating him to step up to the plate in ministry, or responding to a deep-seated problem for he has asked our assistance.

The Counselor/discipler's role in facilitating change

Initiating the conversation (#1 or #2)

To initiate a conversation about the topic, discern whether you should first approach the subject of his vision/goals (#1) in the area you are concerned about, or the presenting problem(s) you have noticed (#2).

If it is in an area of omission and you *have never talked* about the subject before, asking questions in the area of his vision for that area (#1) would probably be best.

"I've been thinking and praying about our group and individuals in it. You know about God's plan to reach the lost through the efforts of Christians witnessing (thereby directing him to God's perspective, not yours). Do you see yourself being used by him in this way? Have you given thought about it?" Ask this in a tone of interest, not accusation.

If it is area of omission and you *have talked about* it before, you should probably broach the subject again based on how far you discern he has gone in the change process.

"We talked a few weeks ago about your perspective on outreach. Have you had a chance to give it further thought?" The conversation should go in the direction from where it left off the previous time you spoke.

If it is in an area of commission and you haven't spoken to it before, you should probably speak first to the problem (#2) as you have observed it and/or heard about it.

"You seem to be very unhappy these days and I am concerned for you. Are you aware that you are very negative about your job, our home group, and even your close friends? How can I help?"

Regardless of where you initiate the conversation (#1 vision/goals or #2 assessment of the problem), he must "own" or form personal convictions of *God's view* in BOTH elements. Only then will he experience the "tension" created by dissatisfaction about his present state and with it the drive to change. Without that, there will not be godly motivation to change and any attempt to suggest a plan for change (#4) will fall on deaf ears or (worse) be followed in order to please you (rather than God). This is where we often need to exercise patience and pray for God's conviction.

Take him as far through the process of change as he is willing to go on any one "sitting." If he is already familiar with God's view in the problem area and desires that for his life (#1) and is also

honest about his present situation is (#2), the “tension” (#3) is probably now there. You might now move into developing practical ways (#4) to put these convictions into action.

IMPORTANT: During each of the first two elements, you may need to add to his own understanding. This is important for two reasons:

His understanding of God’s perspective in an area (#1) might be very limited. He might only dimly understand the importance and fulfillment of living out God’s view and have few if any goals in the problem area. So his vision for growth and his goals associated with it might take some additional information from you. Use the Bible for this as much as possible.

Remember that God’s perspective includes God’s grace--his acceptance and his empowering for change. This ensures that entering into #2 (honest assessment of the person’s walk in this area) is not a finger-wagging experience, but truly a humble admission of sin in the presence of God’s grace.

His understanding of the seriousness or the frequency of his problem (#2) might not be fully evident to him. He may say, “Yeah, I know I should be investing in non-Christians” or “I know I’m not perfect” or “Yeah, I know I can be kind of negative.” This probably demonstrates that he is not really coming to grips with the problem. You may need to add to his understanding by providing information that shows the real picture.

Edgar Schein calls this “disconfirming data.” For example, if you were trying to motivate a group to do evangelism, but they think they are doing pretty good at it, you might have to provide disconfirming data. You provide a chart with objective evidence that “disconfirms” their view. Assuming they already believe evangelism is central to home group health (#1), this new information will produce tension and motivation for change.

Consider the prior personal examples, “Yes, I’ve been worried that you are so pre-occupied with your career that God’s work takes a back seat. Have you felt that tension?” Or in the other example, “I bring up the negativity because I’ve seen some recent examples that have really hurt some people,” and continue by elaborating. You might even have been given permission by others to tell the person what they have experienced as well. You may encourage the person to courageously, and under grace, ask some other people what they think.

If you have started the conversation on the area of the problem, don’t dwell too long on this. You should begin to communicate God’s view of him (unconditional acceptance) as soon as possible. Then begin to ask questions to discern if he understands God’s vision for him in this area.

Discern the tension level (#3).

Does he now seem genuinely vexed by his weakness or problem? Is he communicating dissatisfaction with his state and an earnest desire for change? If so, good!

Don’t confuse healthy tension with tears or groans of remorse. Coming to grips with our problem (#2) is important and often produces pain, but that is different than being motivated to

change. Having a clear vision and wanting that new way of life that God wants for us is a necessary complement to the remorse. You don't want to see him beating himself up for the problem, but to grasp it under God's grace and be motivated to live as he desires.

If the tension level is not adequate, you will need to wait until it is adequate to move to a plan for change. In the meantime, pray for insight on how to cooperate with him to create this tension.

Assuming the tension level is healthy, he will probably respond very positively to the next suggestion.

Plan for Change (#4)

Now is the time to suggest working on a plan for change. In our counseling model this was termed "Right Actions" and was Stage 4. Often, he will come up with much of this plan because he has received insight from God. But he may need guidance from you if he has little knowledge of the Bible and spiritual maturity.

You might need to help him understand the specific identity issues and how to appropriate those applying to his issue (pastoral counseling model).

Refer to the discussion in the earlier section of this paper, "The Basic Elements of Change."

EXAMPLE: To be used by God in evangelism, he might need to talk to the boss about working less hours, while simultaneously praying for and spending time with non-Christian friends.

Count the Cost (#5)

You need to help him understand the consequences of the proposed changes. Sometimes, the negative consequences are few and there are primarily positive consequences to consider. Other issues require considerable life change, and only after seeing the plan for change does that become apparent.

EXAMPLE: He is now convicted that he has been sinning against his wife by not disciplining her. Yet, now that the plan is clear, he sees that things will be messy at home. There will be arguments where there were none before, and her reactions can't be predicted. This cost requires faith based on knowing he is doing what is right (1 Peter 4:19). By teaching him the necessity of regularly reviewing the 1st aspect of change (God's perspective of the area in question), he will learn to how to dialogue with God during these moments of doubt.

You may also need to remind him of how bad things are in the present situation (#2) and that staying where he is isn't a pleasant option at all.

Counting the cost includes warning him, "Change will be a process that might include some failures, so grasp firmly to the grace of God."

Conclusion

This communication guideline is based on understanding the process people typically go through when becoming motivated to change. The counselor/discipler's role is to help discern where the person is in that process, initiate conversation regarding the problem, and facilitate the person being motivated for change. As you can see, this is not a formula, but rather a set of principles that can help Christian workers communicate the grace of God in the process of helping others grow.

Assignment Due Next Week

Notebook check next week when check into class.

Memory Verses

None this week

Key Points to Know for Exam

1. Know the four questions we should review when determining whether or not to confer with another Christian worker about another person's sin issues.
2. Be able to explain the five elements of the "Change Model."