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## Pastoral Care and Counseling: Soul Care Centered in the Church

Ronald E. Hawkins

*Liberty University*, rehawkin@liberty.edu

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# PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING

Soul Care Centered in the Church

RON HAWKINS, EDWARD HINDSON, AND TIM CLINTON

*Do not run from [him who gives good counsel] for never in your life will you esteem anyone like him.... Two are better than one, says Scripture.... He who deprives a blind man of his leader, a flock of its shepherd, a lost man of his guide, a child of its father, a patient of his doctor, a ship of its pilot, imperils all. And he who attempts unaided to struggle with the spirits is slain by them.*

—JOHN CLIMACUS, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*

Steel beams covered the ground, each bearing numbers that, although beyond comprehension, were clearly of great significance to some master builder. In the midst of the rusting steel stood a massive crane seven stories high with a boom more than one hundred feet in length. One look and you knew that when connection was made between steel and machine, each piece of rusting steel would leave the ground, make its way to an appointed place in the superstructure of the building yet unformed, and fulfill its preestablished role in bringing to completion the intentions of the master architect. The university community whose life would be enriched by the presence of this huge new edifice watched with excitement as each part was placed into the fabric of the soon-to-be academic structure.

This scene may serve as a metaphor to enhance our understanding of the church and the provisions God has set within her to empower competent Christian counseling as a ministry rooted in the church.

## THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

Ask for a definition of the church today and you will get a variety of answers:

- the building on the corner
- the people who have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
- a place to meet friends and share common interests
- a place to serve the community
- a place to meet with and worship God
- a place (cynics might say) where they always ask for money; a place rigid in its rules and full of hypocrites

Barna (1998) emphasizes the role of the church in contemporary culture: "In the end the Church must address the contradiction between what the Bible exhorts us to pursue spiritually and what Americans have chosen to pursue, based upon cultural assumptions and preferences" (p. 21).

Let's return to our construction metaphor to help us see the church's role and purpose. In Adam, we are like the steel girders lying in the dirt, settled and comfortable in the niches and vices we have cut for ourselves. Comforted by the impressiveness of our mass and weight, we are only moderately aware of the deadly process that is consuming us (Ephesians 2:1-2; Romans 5:12). Occasionally, in more sober moments, we long for someone with the power to lift us to a place of meaningful purpose and with the compassion to use a grand superstructure designed to transcend our temporality.

Jesus said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). He is the Architect, the Master Builder. Colossians 1:18 reveals that he is the head of the body, the church. The biblical account of the birth and growth of the church demonstrates the existence of this compassionate Master Builder (Ephesians 1:1-3; Romans 9:10-29; 1 Corinthians 12:4-27). Sitting exalted in the heavens, Jesus has might and power far beyond that of a massive construction crane. He sees the markings on each corrupted piece of steel that speak clearly to his ownership. He has appointed each piece a place in the superstructure of the church, the blueprints for which have existed from the foundations of eternity (Ephesians 1:4-5).

Through the church's two-thousand-year history, the Master Architect has employed many "subcontractors" to accomplish his purposes (2 Corinthians 5:14-21). Paul said, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder" (1 Corinthians 3:10). Pastor Rick Warren (1995) believes "the church exists to edify, encourage, exalt, equip, and evangelize. To bring people to Jesus Christ and membership in His family, develop them into Christlike maturity, and equip them for their ministry in the church and life mission in the world in order to magnify God's name" (p. 106).

The church is the visible expression of God's compassion for humanity, his passion for connection with a people, and his will to create a community through whom he might reveal his love and glory to a fallen world (Hosea 3:1-2; 1 John 3:1-24). By means of the gospel working through the Son and the Spirit, God frees us from sin and death, lifts us out of our resting place in the earth, and connects us to himself for his heavenly purposes (Galatians 4:1-5:18; Hebrews 10:25).

## THE CHIEF METAPHORS FOR THE CHURCH

The Bible uses many metaphors to describe the church, and each captures some unique element of the nature and character of the body. An examination of several metaphors can sharpen our competency in pastoral care and counseling centered in the church.

### A BUILDING, A DWELLING PLACE FOR GOD

Writing to the church, Peter said, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Paul likewise employed the metaphor of a building to describe the church: "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). These passages relate the spiritual nature of the church and designate it as a dwelling place for God.

Many have written of the need people have for an anchor in their lives. The need to *belong* is at the heart of the human struggle. Peter offered grounds for everyone in the church to feel moored to something permanent, to feel anchored to God himself. Beyond that, Peter provided an argument for every believer to feel a sense of significance. Members of the church are connected to the God of the universe. We were once dead, but we are now living stones. We have a purpose. Life is different for us.

Pastoral care and counseling that is centered in the church delivers a message of life, significance, and purpose for all who embrace the gospel and come alive in the church. The well-being that people experience through embracing these realities must be recognized by caregivers as an essential component of physical, spiritual, relational, and psychological health (Benson, 1975; Hart, 1999).

### A LIVING BODY

The apostle Paul wanted the members of this "spiritual house" to know that theirs is not just a corporate identity. Who we are as individuals—and our providential placement in the building—is a matter of great importance. Consistently, Paul used the metaphor of the body to convey this message. He told the Corinthians

that they were all baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Then he reminded them, "There are diversities of gifts.... But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.... Now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1 Corinthians 12:4,11,18, NKJV).

The Ephesian believers were told that there is one body, that Christ is the head of the church, the Savior of the body, and that he gave himself for it. He designated some to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. The whole body is to "grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16, NKJV).

The body metaphor conveys a sense of connection with community, a family identity. It conveys, like the building metaphor, a sense of belonging, an anchor point that is of vital significance for individual health and growth. Individual contributions to the larger body are rooted in personal giftedness, and they impact others for good. This ability to make an impact validates personal significance and is inherently therapeutic. It calls for the establishment of personal boundaries, contributes to a sense of healthy uniqueness, and calls forth the confessional praise, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made...and that my soul knows very well" (Psalm 139:14, NKJV).

Equipping people in the church to make such a confession should be a high priority in the delivery of competent pastoral care. It equips people with a testimony infused with celebration that is catalytic in the conversion of the unregenerate (Cloud & Townsend, 1999; Crabb, 1999).

### THE PEOPLE OF GOD, A HOLY NATION

The church is also described in the Bible as the people of God. Peter, commenting on the nature of the church, said followers of Christ "are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10, NKJV).

It is impossible to fully comprehend Peter's words without understanding their source. In the Old Testament book of Hosea, we see the heart and holiness of God as it unfolds in the life of a family. Hosea comes home from a hard day in the life of a prophet to find that his wife is gone. She has taken to playing the harlot and

has abandoned Hosea and his children. The children bear the names *Lo-Ruhamah* and *Lo-Ammi*, which translated mean "no love" and "not my people." Hosea's tragic family situation is a metaphor for Israel's abandonment of God and subsequent harlotry.

In Hosea 3 we discover something that is of inestimable value for pastoral-care ministry. God instructed Hosea, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites" (verse 1). In obedience to God's command, Hosea redeemed his wife for fifteen shekels of silver, half the going rate for a slave.

Clowney (1976) remarks, "The people of God are not an already existing nation brought into relationship with him. They are constituted by God's assembly and God's dwelling" (p. 15). It is God, in the mystery of his own willfulness, who is the designer of the church's composition as well as the stipulator of its structures (Ephesians 1:1-6). No matter how far we may run away from God, our life as a covenanting people is shaped by the directives received for the Master Architect in his Word.

The assembly of God's people is not, however, an end in itself. Rather, "the church as a people-in-covenant is related to God's larger intention" (Grenz, 1994, p. 614). The definitions that shape our mission and build our character are not derived from earthly regents, but rather from One who reigns supreme and has chosen us for a place in the church. Our view of the church must always be understood within the larger context of the reign of God. We are a people of his choosing, formed for his purposes to bear the marks of his kingdom. As the people of his kingdom, we are people with a future. This sense of purpose and connection to the future is vital to our emotional and physical health (Frankl, 1984; Moltmann, 1993).

This is a powerful message, one that is at the heart of pastoral care. It is a message of unfathomable love and grace that speaks of a God who pursues the fallen sinner and rebellious saint to the darkest corners of our escape attempts. It is a story of God's insistence and pursuit, and of his refusal to surrender us to our sins (Hosea 11:9-11). Hosea informs us that God really does love us, really can heal us, really can make his way to where we are.

Pastoral care requires a heavy emphasis on the nature of God as invasive in his compassion, invested in the creation of a godly seed, and highly intentional in his resolve to use that seed for the accomplishment of his purposes (Genesis 1:27-28; Hosea 3:1-5; 11:9-11; Malachi 2:11-15). It further requires that we portray God as sovereign and beyond human attempts to frustrate his purposes (Ecclesiastes 3:11; Romans 8:28-30).

### THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE SPIRIT

The church is also the fellowship of the Spirit. The people of God are possessed by the Spirit of God, renewed, assembled in the body under the headship of Christ, and destined for full maturity in Christ (John 3:3-8; Galatians 5:22-23). The Spirit brings a power for transformation that surpasses what is normal. His supernatural empowerment provides Christian counselors a level of competence that revolutionizes our optimism regarding potential for change.

Paul spent major portions of his writings exhorting believers to fulfill the truths embodied in the above metaphors and confronting them regarding their failures to do so (Galatians 4-6; Ephesians 4-6). Additionally, he prescribed a structure to oversee and direct the worship and ministry of the church. Paul's counsel in the New Testament is still totally appropriate for our context today. We will now develop that structure and move on to examine where the church of the third millennium finds itself.

### THE ROLE AND PURPOSE OF THE PASTOR

People still seek pastoral care in life's darkest hours and grandest moments. Central to the work of the church is the caring pastor (Hart, Gulbranson, & Smith, 1992; Miller, 1985; Warren, 1995). The Master Builder has placed in the church "some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13, NKJV). Pastors are vital to the success of the program Jesus has committed to his church and are God's gift to the church (Murren, 1999; Warren, 1995).

Hart, Gulbranson, and Smith (1992) describe the power of the preaching and counseling work of a pastor to bring about the transformation of individuals and families:

Because a preacher got close enough to understand what was going on and help us through the struggles, we made it. I can't imagine my preaching apart from being involved with people in counseling. To get close and wrestle with the human condition and to explore the depths of God's Word, to speak to people's situations from the pulpit and in the counseling setting—these are to me the perfect, indispensable complements of pastoral ministry. (p. 51)

Hurting people who make their way into our churches need a pastor who, in his shepherding ministry, imitates the Good Shepherd. As Isaiah 40:11 says, "He

tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart." Adams (1975) states:

Pastoral counseling is a special, not separate, area of pastoral activity; indeed it is close to the heart of shepherding. It involves the extension of help to wandering, torn, defeated, dispirited sheep who need the restoring mentioned in Psalm 23:3. Restoration here means refreshment. It constitutes the work of putting new life into one by convicting and changing, encouraging and strengthening after trial, defeat, failure, and/or discouragement. (p. 14)

The apostle Paul appointed caring shepherds and elders in every town where he planted a church, and he carefully prescribed their duties (Titus 1:5; 3:9). He reminded Timothy that "elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor" (1 Timothy 5:17). Paul affectionately described his engagement of the pastoral task (Acts 20:22-31) and offered an example of a discipling relationship (2 Timothy).

Addressing the counseling challenges in a local church can benefit the overall effectiveness of pastoral ministry. As MacArthur and Mack (1994) write, "When a pastor neglects the ministry of counseling others, crucial areas of his ministry suffer. For example, his preaching is dramatically affected. He loses touch with the people's difficulties and the thought processes and habits that lead to problems. Thus he is not prepared to provide the spiritual weapons they need to overcome those problems" (p. 303). Counseling provides preachers with real-life illustrations, keeps them in touch with the emotions of their people, and makes their preaching more applicable to the challenges their listeners confront in daily life.

Because of the multiple demands of ministry, however, pastors should keep in mind the following guidelines for counseling:

1. Pastors should limit the amount of time they spend in counseling. They have many responsibilities and must jealously guard the time they give to their counseling ministries.
2. Pastors should pursue training for their counseling ministry and seek to become as effective as possible in the fulfillment of this aspect of their ministry.
3. Pastors should structure their counseling ministry and be clear with leadership and care-seekers regarding schedules, setting, time constraints, referrals, and so on.
4. Pastors should assure that counseling takes place in a protected environment where any possibility of impropriety is ruled out.
5. Pastors should limit both the number and the length of sessions.

6. Pastors should spread out responsibilities for the management of parishioners' problems. In addition to the support offered by pastor-counselors, it is best to pair every care-seeker with a spiritual director, a friend, or a confidant. In more difficult cases, it is best to pair care-seekers with a professional counselor and have the pastor act as spiritual director and team manager.
7. Pastors should manage confidentiality issues well.
8. Pastors should guard against trying to meet needs beyond their level of training, and they should be prepared to refer parishioners to well-qualified agencies and professionals.
9. Pastors should learn to weigh the personal impact of their engagements with hurting people and be willing always to live with the fallout of their decisions.
10. Pastors should oversee the development of groups to meet specific needs (divorce recovery, for example) as well as the training of lay caregivers and staff members.

### THE ROLE OF LAY HELPERS

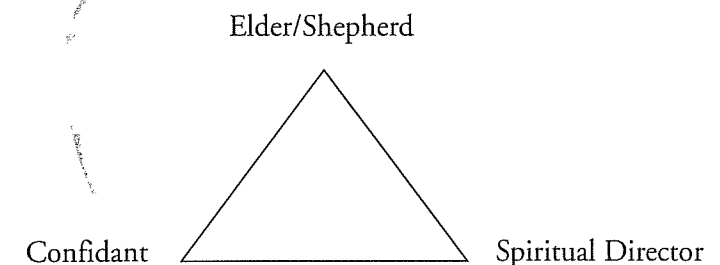
At least two considerations motivate a pastor's concern to develop lay caregivers. First, if he attempts to fulfill the ministry of caregiving alone, he will be overwhelmed. "Our pastors cannot lead alone. They need others to come alongside to assist and encourage" (Wagner & Martin, 1998, p. 55). Second, it is the pastor's responsibility to train church members to use their gifts for the edification and growth of the body (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Pastors understand that "as the members of the body minister to each other, speaking the truth in love, the church is built up. The strengthening of each member results in a collective growing up to the fullness of the stature of Christ. Thus the entire body is matured as the members minister to each other according to their giftedness" (MacArthur & Mack, 1994, p. 312).

Counseling is therefore to be conducted by the entire body. Each member is filled with goodness to counsel (Romans 15:14). The church is brought to maturity only as every Spirit-gifted member serves God, one another, and those outside the church (1 Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:7-16). The assembly gathers for instruction and worship, but equally important is their commitment to encourage one another toward love and good works. This commitment often requires that members exhort one another in light of the calling that rests upon the assembly and of the approaching day of Christ's return (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The call to collective ministry in the body and the need to fulfill the biblical mandate to make disciples mean that all new Christians should be engaged with a "triangle" of caregivers (see figure 17.1). Although this arrangement might involve any number of people, three roles are critical: (1) an elder or shepherd, who acts as a team coordinator overseeing a discipling process; (2) a caring confidant, who offers acceptance and encouragement no matter what; and (3) a spiritual director, who provides guidance and accountability (Ecclesiastes 4:12).

FIG. 17.1. TRIANGLE OF CAREGIVERS



When a disciple gets stuck on a personal issue, the help of a well-trained pastoral or professional Christian counselor should be inserted into the growth triangle. The professional joins the team for as long as it takes to get the disciple healthier and then transitions to a consultant role as the church-based discipleship team continues its work.

### WHO'S COMING TO CHURCH IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM?

Determining precisely who is coming to church is vitally important as pastoral and professional Christian counselors seek to deliver the most competent and helpful care in a ministry context (Backus, 1987; Barna, 1998; MacArthur & Mack, 1994; Murren, 1999).

### SOME ARE DEAD AT THE CORE OF THEIR PERSONALITIES

Hart et al. (1992) describe the tragic condition of those men and women who are in Adam: "God's image is encapsulated by a fallen sinful core that becomes surrounded by stiff defenses. But before it can be adequately contained, sin will have

contaminated the rest of the self, both ego- and self-system, leaving us tainted by evil, replete with many bad habits and tendencies" (p. 180).

Paul urged the Ephesian assembly with strong words when he said, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Ephesians 5:14, NKJV). Horton (1994) admonishes the church to beware of attempting to bring about transformation in the lives of people who have never received a new nature. He issues a sobering challenge to those called to pastoral care and counseling:

The liberating power of grace is not found first in its transformative character—important as that is—but in its imputational character. We not only want to appeal to God's grace as something that converts and improves, but as something that declares. It declares the individual righteous even while he or she is still sinful, even before grace has begun its work of moral transformation. Apart from justification of the sinner before the face of God even as sinner, the guilt and just fear of condemnation cannot be dealt with. (p. 240)

At the center of the evangelical call to pastoral care and counseling in the church is the issue of regeneration. Hart et al. (1992) write, "Every evangelical Christian ought to hold dear the doctrine of regeneration which simply means 'rebirth.' No wonder so many people are suspicious of all therapy. As commonly practiced, it often lacks any recognition of the divine work of grace in the heart, or any recognition of how this work can be fostered and developed" (pp. 170-171).

Pastoral counseling centered in the church is rooted in the good news of the gospel. Grenz (1994) asserts,

Conversion occurs as an individual responds to the gospel. In repentance we see ourselves as sinners: as alienated from God, justly condemned, and enslaved by sin. We acknowledge that our life's direction is misguided, we feel remorse for this condition, and we desire to follow a new direction. But we know that we are ultimately helpless. We are unable to begin anew and powerless to remedy our situation. (p. 534)

Faith awakens as we embrace what God has done for us in Christ. Central to regeneration and the experience of baptism is the desire to embrace repentance. Repentance begins with recognizing sin. Paul wrote, "Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10, NKJV). Godly sorrow results in conviction. People are set free from the power of sin only through repentance. According to Jeremias (1971), "Repentance means learning to say 'Abba' again, putting one's whole trust in the heavenly Father, returning to the Father's house

and the Father's arms.... In the last resort, repentance is simply trusting in the grace of God" (p. 156). Romans 7:7-25 makes clear that Christians will still struggle with sin, but they are able to recognize their sin, repent, and restore their relationship with God.

### SOME ARE LIVING "IN THE FLESH"

The apostle Paul said there was something inherent in his natural self that was at odds with God's purposes and plans for him (Romans 7:14-25). This indwelling evil tears at the fabric of the people of God individually, and it severely hinders their fellowship in the Spirit. We call it by different names, but this old sin nature, flesh, or sin principle hates God and everything he seeks to do in our lives. The flesh goads us, as it did Adam and Eve, to rebel against God's Word and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:13-26).

The impartation of new life in Christ generates a desire for God, a bent toward pleasing God. "However, as long as [Christians] are exposed to the influence of the sin principle, which is resident in the body's flesh, they, as well as the unredeemed body, are as susceptible to sin's domination as they are to the Holy Spirit's control" (Barackman, 1981, p. 197; see also Romans 7:17-18,23; Galatians 5:19-21). The people who come to our churches live in unredeemed bodies and feel the pull of the indwelling sin principle called *the flesh*. They often struggle with appetites that desire satisfaction by means contrary to the laws of God and the life of the Spirit. These individuals are in need of our counsel as they seek in their everyday lives to discipline the "self and its flesh" (Hart et al., 1992, p. 145).

### SOME HAVE THOUGHT PATTERNS THAT NEED RENEWAL

Most Christians have spent many years developing thought patterns based on a high degree of error and absorption with self (Backus, 1987; Thurman, 1995; Wilson, 1990). It would be wonderful if God would do a "mind-wipe" as a companion to regeneration, but it doesn't work that way. As Hart et al. (1992) state, "Being born anew is a vital and necessary experience, but it is only the beginning work of grace. Its focus is on healing the core of our being, not our whole being in one fell swoop" (p. 171). Obeying the truth of the Bible and pursuing behavior in harmony with the Holy Spirit are responsibilities of Christians who seek spiritual maturity (Romans 6, Romans 12, Galatians 5, and Ephesians 5).

Renewing our thought life is hard work. Thurman (1995) reminds us that our "brain is like a tape deck. It has access to a personal library of thousands of tapes ready to play at a moment's notice. These tapes contain beliefs, attitudes, and expectations recorded during your life. Some of the tapes are truthful...some of the tapes

are filled with lies. Your emotional and spiritual health hinges on these tapes. The challenge in life is to make our mental tapes as truthful as possible so we can maturely handle whatever circumstances come our way" (pp. 2-3). Paul promoted the same process when he discipled Timothy (2 Timothy 2:15). By replacing error-based thinking with the truth found in God's Word, Timothy would gain the wisdom necessary to overcome his fears (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Paul encouraged the Philippians to renew their thought life and confront their anxieties by choosing to think about things that were "excellent" and "praiseworthy" (Philippians 4:8).

The people who come to church often have minds filled with errors that have been absorbed through years of dialogue with the world, the flesh, and the devil. They may be ignorant of the truths found in God's Word. Their minds are filled with attributions rooted in hurtful memories, with broken relationships, with failed promises, with impossible fantasies, with shattered dreams.

#### **SOME ARE ADDICTED AND NEED TO BE SET FREE**

Some people who come to church are addicted to drugs, sex, money, or the things of the world. They need help learning to dehabituate behaviors that hinder growth in Christ and to habituate new behaviors that build relationship with God and others.

Truthful thinking is only part of the struggle faced by people who want to walk in the ways of Christ. Part of the old walk in Adam involved the habitual practice of behaviors that were contrary to walking in the Spirit. Paul reminded the Philippians that, in addition to renewed minds, they should imitate him if they wanted to move to maturity (Philippians 4:9).

When it comes to Christlikeness, one of the main objectives is to break the power of patterns of wrongdoing and evil that govern our lives because of our long habituation to a world alienated from God. "We must learn to recognize these habitual patterns for what they are and escape from their grasp" (Willard, 1998, p. 341). Paul presented a representative list of these evil habits in Galatians 5:19-21 and Ephesians 4:17-32. Adams (1979) reminds us that it is the process of *dehabituation* and *rehabilitation* that moves the immature toward maturity in Christ. He said, "Paul not only exhorts, he explains how change can be effected. Change is a two-factored process. These two factors always must be present in order to effect genuine change. Putting off will not be permanent without putting on" (p. 239).

Humans show a marked preference for behaviors that God condemns, but he condemns these behaviors because they are destructive. The management, dehabituation, and ultimate disempowerment of these habits occur when people receive the transforming presence of the Spirit of life in their core self. They can

then take responsibility for rehabilitating thoughts and behaviors that are contrary to the truth, filling their minds with the Word of God, faithfully practicing the disciplines that support this radical commitment to obedience, and maintaining an attachment to the body of Christ that fosters accountability.

#### **SOME ARE TROUBLED WITH TRAUMA AND POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS**

Some people who come to church have been abused and traumatized in the past (or are being abused and traumatized in the present) and may struggle daily with desperation and despair. They need help understanding and managing their feelings. Paul counseled comfort and patience as the approach for those ministering to the timid ("little of soul") and weak in the church (1 Thessalonians 5:14). He spoke with terms of endearment while seeking to help Timothy rise above his fears (2 Timothy 2:1).

Many who enter our churches struggle with depression, anxiety, fears, anger, and a host of other negative emotions. People are sometimes stuck in hurtful emotional cycles, and they seem unable to free themselves in spite of the fact that they are sincerely engaging the challenges to believe and behave well. Ignorant of the body-mind connection, they don't understand that negative feelings often find their derivation in stress, overwork, lack of sleep, metabolic and biochemical imbalance, and other causes having little to do with thoughts or behaviors.

Such people require counseling to ferret out what is at the root of their hurtful feelings (Hart, 1999; Stoop & Masteller, 1996). The simple discovery that emotions are the consequence not of events but rather of our beliefs about those events can be a revelation for some people.

Additionally, it is helpful to view emotions as indicators and motivators. Emotions provide invaluable assistance in identifying thoughts and behaviors not rooted in truth. Much of our motivation for moving ahead in this life is drawn from positive emotions. Those struggling with understanding, managing, or coping with hurtful emotions are frequenting our churches and are in need of counsel (Hart, 1999; Stoop & Masteller, 1996; Wilson, Wilson, Friesen, Paulson, & Paulson, 1997).

#### **SOME ARE WALKING WOUNDED**

Some people who come to our churches may be struggling with wounds experienced during hurtful relationships in the past. Murren (1999) states:

People today are much more wounded. They suffer from relationship wounds (consider the high percentages of marriages that end in divorce);



emotional wounds (broken, dysfunctional families leave long trails); the wounds of abuse (sexual abuse alone has been perpetrated upon one-quarter of all female baby boomers); the wounds of drug and alcohol addiction and so much more. (p. 220)

People coming from hurtful environments have formed attachments that are often extremely unhealthy for themselves and others. They enter relationships as codependents or predators. These practices do not disappear with spiritual regeneration, and they can be hidden for a time under the initial transformation and healing influence of the Spirit. They often reemerge, however, during periods of high stress and low spiritual vitality. Deliverance for most will not be magical or instantaneous but will require discipline and counsel. Crabb (1997) observes, "Beneath what culture calls psychological disorder is a soul crying out for what only community can provide" (p. xv).

#### SOME ARE BESET BY EVIL POWERS

Not surprisingly, the struggle between light and darkness continues today and seems to be intensifying. Anderson (1995) reports that a great many "professing Christian young people are hearing voices or struggling with bad thoughts" (p. 15). Since the Garden of Eden, the war for the soul of man has raged. We must train some believers in spiritual warfare to help free and insulate the soul.

Paul reminds us that "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age" (Ephesians 6:12, NKJV). Peter admonishes us to "be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9). We read that when Daniel prayed for help, the moment the prayer left his lips, God sent an angel to help him. The angel couldn't get to Daniel for a period of time because "the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia" (Daniel 10:13).

#### THE PRESENT INADEQUACY OF THE CHURCH

So how are we doing with the hurting multitudes? How are we helping those already in the church and the masses yet to come? What are we offering them? Is the church able to fulfill its healing mission and its call to make disciples?

Many pastors and counselors are rightfully concerned about the church's state

of preparedness to meet the needs of those in our congregations. We rely too much on the preaching and teaching ministries of our pastors. We are far too cognitive and propositional in our approach to maturing people in Christ. We are fairly good at being the "spiritual school," but we are failing to be the "spiritual hospital" that so many need.

Anderson (1995) shares this concern: "I was deeply committed to preaching and teaching God's Word, and I still am. But I had just given a person the best possible teaching on the attributes of God, which she listened to three times, and the effect was zero" (p. 110). Sweet (1999) asks, "Can the church stop its puny, hack dreams of trying to make a 'difference in the world' and start dreaming God-sized dreams of making the world different?" (p. 16).

Crabb (1997), too, is concerned about our response to the wounded people who are in our churches: "It is time to go beneath the moralism that assumes the church's job is done when it instructs people in biblical principles and then exhorts them to do right" (p. xvi). He believes that "the greatest need in modern civilization is the development of communities—true communities where the heart of God is home, where the humble and wise learn to shepherd those on the path behind them, where trusting strugglers lock arms with others as together they journey" (p. xvi).

Such is the vision of God for his church. Our challenge is to create a church with global impact that manifests equal regard for winning people to Christ and for maturing people in him (Matthew 28:18-20). This vision can be achieved only if the church is highly intentional in both evangelism and discipleship.

One pastor we know has often said, "The goal at our church is to make disciples." When asked how many converts have been made as a result of his church's ministry, he glowed with gratefulness for the large number who have come to Christ. When asked how many of those people have been disciplined and were discipling others, he confessed his desire to see a great improvement in those numbers. When questioned further about his strategy for achieving better results in fulfilling his expressed mission "to make disciples," he confessed that he had no plan.

#### PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING IN AN INTENTIONAL MODEL FOR CHURCH DISCIPLESHIP

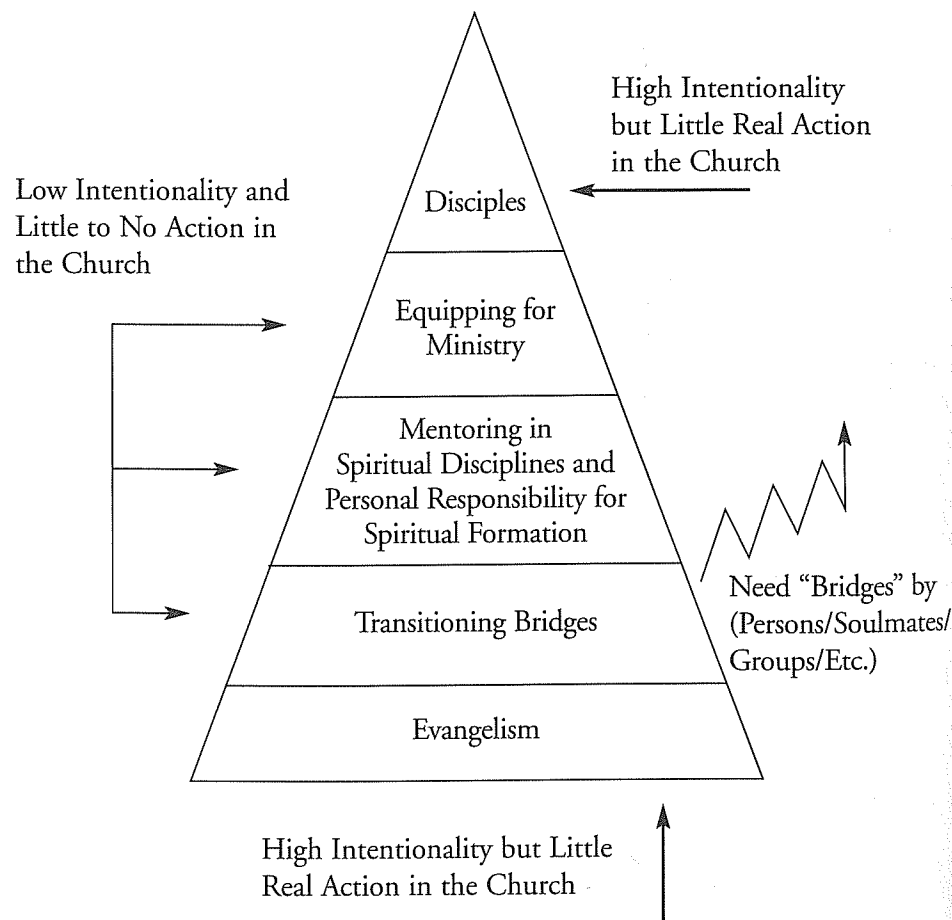
Barna (1998) makes the following observation: "Our approach [to growing the church] must be strategic and intentional. The plan will work best if it incorporates a vision for what we hope to achieve, a strategy for getting there, specific steps we may take to advance toward our vision, and ways of objectively evaluating how

well we are doing” (p. 196). What would the church’s program look like if we agreed with the goal of making disciples? How would the insights gained from biblical counseling and data from the bio-psycho-social sciences contribute to an intentional plan for making disciples?

Figure 17.2 illustrates the current state of disciple making in the church (evaluating both intention and action) and provides an intentional model for disciple making. Each element should be considered critical to achieving this goal and should therefore be approached with a high degree of intentionality and commitment to action.

In this model, the church is a multifaceted fellowship of believers who minister together to evangelize the lost, provide restorative counseling for them, help them grow in spiritual formation, equip them as the saints of God, and disciple

FIG. 17.2. DISCIPLE MAKING IN THE CHURCH



them into mature believers. In these processes, caregivers of all kinds are needed to help resolve personal and relational issues that affect spiritual growth and to prepare the hearts of believers for maturity. Thus we equip caregivers for practical ministries that are an outgrowth of their own spiritual progress. In so doing, we enhance the qualitative growth of the members—helping them grow into true disciples—in order to more effectively assimilate the quantitative growth of the church through outreach.

#### EVANGELISM MINISTRY

God’s passion for evangelism and redemption of the lost is documented consistently throughout the Old and New Testaments. (See the book of Hosea and Luke 19:10.) He commissioned the church to carry out this mission, and he calls believers to share the gospel of reconciliation (Matthew 28:18-20; Romans 1; 2 Corinthians 5:11-21).

Yet we are failing in the call to evangelize because so few churches are intentional and purposeful in their approach to reaching the lost (Bakke, 1997). Warren (1995) laments this lack of intentionality: “The concept of targeting is built into the Great Commission. Each people group needs an evangelistic strategy” (p. 159).

When we come alongside the people of this world, we often discover deep wounds and seeking hearts. Indeed, ours is a generation thirsty for spirituality (Barna, 1998; Horton, 1994). We should view these needs as an open invitation to evangelism, but not as an invitation to slam people with the gospel. Murren (1999) adds, “When broken and disenfranchised people first start coming to church services, they want to feel welcome, yet also remain anonymous. These two desires are not as antithetical as they may seem. Postmodern men and women often require an extended preconversion phase in which they’re allowed to simply sit, watch, and listen for a while. It does no good to force the pace” (p. 219).

People called to be healers must learn to listen well, connect through serving, build trust, and meet tangible needs. We must always be ready to speak to the greatest need, which is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Aldrich (1981) insists that Christians be ready to cross traditional boundaries and become the good news of the gospel as Christ ministers through our serving hearts. When people see Christ in our caring, they are more open to our proclamation of the words of the gospel. Aldrich asserts, “Once a thriving church is established, the starting point for evangelism increasingly shifts from proclamation (confrontational) to presence (relational)” (p. 81). Presence is about understanding, acceptance, hope building, and acts of service that validate true love for people where they are.

This kind of presence is not normal for people in love with self and dominated

by a quest for self-fulfillment. The people of God who are trained in communication and listening skills, and who practice loving service that meets real needs, will find the soil fertile for sharing the life-changing hope found in the gospel.

We cannot begin to engage this challenge unless we move beyond the pulpit and our professional offices and involve the people in the pews. However, most parishioners are not ready for this challenge. They require intentional training to come alongside people who have oft-unspoken spiritual questions. They need to learn how to match their life message, the Scriptures, and the gospel call to their immediate context (Ecclesiastes 12:9-10). The wounded of every generation are comforted and encouraged through the stories of healing that come from recovering sufferers empowered by God's love. Evangelism is foundational to any model of intentional discipleship.

#### COUNSELING FOR ASSIMILATION

Barna (1998) indicates that the average newcomer attends church for approximately eight weeks and is not seen again. Other research illustrates the sporadic nature of most people who attend church. "Nearly one-fifth of all churchgoers now attend more than one church and the most committed church people only allocate two blocks of time in their week to church-related activities, down from four blocks twenty years ago" (p. 18).

This tenuous connection with a local church makes most Americans unwilling to be held accountable for their beliefs and behaviors. To use Barna's metaphor, church for the average American has become a place where Christians can make a "pit stop." And we are commanded to make disciples out of such a transient crowd? How are we to accomplish such a worthy goal? What elements should be kept in mind as we seek to assimilate people into the life of the church?

*Purposeful assimilation.* We must become highly intentional about moving people from a positive response to the gospel into a discipleship situation where they can grow and mature. As Warren (1995) says, "Assimilate new members on purpose!" (p. 138). Assimilation must anchor them in the Scriptures and in a vital relationship with God's people.

*Attractive bridges.* Bridges must be securely in place in the church across which these people can safely move to explore opportunities for growth and discipleship. The rationale for these bridges and the call to cross them must be explained in a manner that appeals to and makes sense to the new convert. The benefits of crossing into areas that will stimulate maturity—as well as the disadvantages of doing so—must be clearly set forth.

*Coming alongside.* There must be helpers in the church who are willing and

equipped to provide direction and encouragement to new converts. The relationships will be intense, but they will also be a source of fun and joy to the people on both sides. These helpers will assist people in crossing bridges and in developing spiritual disciplines that promote the imitation of Jesus Christ.

*Skilled communications.* Helpers who disciple others must be thoroughly trained, and, at a minimum, they must understand how to do the following:

- Communicate a biblical worldview.
- Utilize their life messages to bring encouragement and comfort.
- Listen carefully and connect with personal needs.
- Pray for people's needs.
- Share God's love and the gospel message.
- Offer biblical direction on matters of spiritual concern.
- Know when to refer to a pastoral or professional counselor.

*Counseling that renews minds and reshapes behavior.* We must be thoroughly prepared to assist people with the resolution of conflict that is rooted in error-based thinking and destructive behaviors. This is a process of helping others put off the ways of sin and put on new life in Christ.

*Patience and perseverance.* People who are being discipled sometimes get stuck because of unresolved issues in their past. We must be prepared to lead them through the process of repentance, forgiveness, and the biblical resolution of these issues. We must also make a relational investment that builds trust, encourages a healthy identity in Christ, and engages the disciple in acts of service in Jesus' name.

*Small groups.* It is necessary to structure opportunities for small-group involvement that allow new converts to experience appropriate levels of transparency, intimacy, and accountability with fellow believers. Small-group ministry undertakes reparative tasks in the lives of the children of God that should have been accomplished in the family of origin (Erikson, 1950; Stoop & Masteller, 1996; Wilson, 1990). We must help our church families acquire the skills necessary to develop healthy, Christ-centered relationships.

*Fitting the approach to the person.* Remember that Jesus challenged the Pharisees when he said that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-27). Paul counseled flexibility in people helping (1 Thessalonians 5:14). One size does not fit all. The faint of heart require large doses of encouragement. The arrogant who have an idolatrous relationship with their own ideas need to be challenged. Those struggling with addictions need a mixture of support, compassion, and instruction. Effective caregivers are "flexible—that is, they are not tied to a single methodology that they use for all clients.... Flexible counselors adapt. The behavior is always mediated by the question, 'Which technique will

work best for this particular client with this set of problems?" (Cormier & Cormier, 1991, p. 12).

*Expect setbacks.* Growth doesn't follow a consistently upward trajectory. With all its ups and downs, it looks more like a stock market graph. That is why Paul counseled, "Be patient with everyone" (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Sanctification does not occur in one glorious moment; it requires one who walks alongside another to show patience and endurance (Erikson, 1950; Grenz, 1994; Hart et al., 1992).

The small number of genuinely mature believers is due in large part to the lack of mentor-disciplers who facilitate the assimilation of people into the life of the church. People will continue to spill out of our churches—or, worse yet, to stay and sabotage much of the Lord's mission—unless we help individuals move from *convert* to *disciple*. We are not fulfilling the commandment of our Lord to make disciples who can in turn disciple others. We get clobbered in our churches because these undisciplined and immature people then serve on our governing boards, compromise the church's integrity, and often become the pastor's worst nightmare.

### SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: FORMING THE LIFE OF CHRIST WITHIN

The idea of becoming intentional with regard to examining values, beliefs, virtues, attitudes, attributions, and developmental histories strikes fear in some pastors and church leaders. Is it really necessary? Who is prepared for such an undertaking? Most pastors are not negative regarding the advisability of such care, but they're fearful because so few in the church are prepared to undertake the challenge. It was Paul who told the Roman believers of his great confidence in their ability to handle such a ministry of transitional care. He was confident that they were "full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another" (Romans 15:14).

It is our privilege to share the gospel message that redeems people from sin and to engage people intentionally in the process of sanctification. Is training desirable? Yes. Is it available? Yes. Will we still need professional counselors to back us up? Certainly. However, it is amazing to witness the power of a simple testimony wrapped in love and awe to impact another person for powerful life change.

Assimilation into the body of Christ requires growth in the spiritual disciplines, forming the life of Christ within individuals and leading them to mature discipleship. Developing these disciplines will foster in new converts a fuller experience of the Holy Spirit. This experiential spirituality will overwhelm and render powerless many of the wounds that have troubled people in their preconversion

days. Connecting with a pastoral or peer-level caregiver, experiencing intimate connection with caring people in the church, and practicing Spirit-empowering activities will promote transformation for individuals. Spiritual disciplines that must be taught include prayer, worship, Bible study, evangelism, meditation on Scripture, fasting, serving, and solitude (Foster, 1988; Willard, 1998).

An important consideration in teaching the disciplines is modeling for new converts how these are done. We often tell our parishioners to read the Bible, pray, and worship. But the old nature doesn't know how to do these things and really doesn't want to. We must model the spiritual disciplines and encourage new believers until, like children learning to ride a bicycle, they "get it." Accountability is critical, for it alone provides the proper environment for mastering the inner world, the place where deception and compromise are everyday occurrences.

Spiritual formation should never be separated from discipleship. The disciplines alone will prepare the believer for the Spirit's filling, for a lifestyle that reveals personal integrity, and for the spiritual warfare that confronts those who move toward maturity. Failing to address either the training of the caregiver or the disciple may result in an aborted mission: the drifting away of the new believer and the loss of all he or she could have brought to the church. Indeed, many Christians may have a spiritual epitaph that reads, "Died in childhood."

### DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY

Since the process of spiritual formation in the transition phase focuses extensively on reworking the inner life of the new convert, it is an exercise in futility to assume that we can be part of a magnificent superstructure without carefully attending to the foundation.

We are now ready to train for leadership positions those believers who are aware of their internal issues, have experienced healing, and consistently practice the spiritual disciplines. Counselors have gained some interesting insights regarding the demands of certain positions and the qualities individual believers offer to meet those challenges (Bradley & Carty, 1991). Many new converts have poor experiences with assimilation into the body because they are ill-trained and ill-suited to accomplish the tasks assigned to them. Being intentional about equipping people for ministry will include an emphasis on the following six points:

1. *All believers are gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry* (1 Corinthians 12:1-31). The church cannot be effective unless all believers utilize their gifts to serve the body and Christ (Ephesians 4:1-16). Spiritual gifts can be discovered through the use of assessment inventories, the accuracy of which can be confirmed through feedback from mentors. The process of equipping should be highly personalized.

2. *Believers have unique and varied personalities.* Human personality is the result of nature and nurture and their mutual interaction—and it is not easily changed. Sometimes there is a high degree of similarity between spiritual gifts and personality and sometimes not. Assessing personality type should always be utilized as a precursor to equipping for specific tasks in the church. Some personalities fit the demands of certain ministry situations better than others.

3. *Believers have different gifts and leadership styles.* Leadership style can also be determined through assessment. Every gift and style has its own weaknesses and strengths and requires the presence of balancing team members to assure ultimate team effectiveness. Leadership training should always include careful attention to team development and a clear explication of how each person contributes to the overall effectiveness of the team.

4. *Believers have varying degrees of planning ability.* These abilities can be assessed and a team can be formed in a way that allows planners and nonplanners to balance one another. This arrangement will also foster an appreciation for how each individual fits into the overall ministry plan and contributes to its accomplishment.

5. *Frequent retreats for team building are essential.* Retreats serve to build trust, unity, and cooperation. The unique contributions of each individual should be celebrated, and the equipping and encouraging of servants should be a continual process.

6. *Believers should have a designated mentor-coach.* Everyone dedicated to becoming a disciple needs a mentor-coach to confide in and consult with. Training these coaches should be a high priority for church leadership. No equipping ministry should go forward without growth partnerships in which someone (clearly designated) bears the responsibility for the consistent development of those being equipped for and engaging in ministry. Mentors should contract with each recruit and should look for evidence of growth during the recruit's time of service.

### POISED FOR INFLUENCE

The tasks associated with blending evangelism and discipleship in the local body are large indeed. Think about how we began this chapter: the image of all those steel girders on the ground with their mysterious numbering and the mighty crane in their midst. By the power of his grace, God lifts us individually from our earth-bound places and positions us in the great superstructure of the body of Christ.

This structure into which he places us is magnificent beyond words. God has ordained it and configured it to achieve the fullness of his purpose. He is a highly

intentional God. In his church are all the gifts necessary to meet the challenges related to reaching, teaching, and discipling.

Our greatest challenge is to admit our need for the full participation of the people God has placed in the superstructure of his church. We must seek counsel from those whose gifts are different from our own, promote the building of the team, and strive to balance and blend individuals' giftedness. As we honor God by honoring one another, we may focus better on the challenges of evangelism and discipleship that lie before us.

A church that is highly intentional about evangelism and discipleship—and fully equipped to meet the counseling challenges that help people mature spiritually—is a church that is poised for great influence in the third millennium. Pastoral counselors, peer-level caregivers, and professional Christian therapists are uniquely positioned to significantly contribute at every level to this mission of the church.