

The Christian Counselor

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jer. 29:11)

Vol 1 No 2

dedicated to excellence in Christian counseling

Blessings to all of you. Welcome to our second edition of *The Christian Counselor* quarterly newsletter. For those of you who are new to our mailing list, *The Christian Counselor* is a newsletter that provides a means by which I can communicate to you various counseling-related issues with a Biblical perspective. I was thrilled to receive such a favorable response to the first edition, and appreciate such positive feedback. Remember, questions and comments regarding anything in our newsletters are always welcome.

Once again I'd like to thank those of you who have referred friends and acquaintances in need of counseling to me. You can't know how important you and your referrals are to this ministry.

The newsletters will address some issues which may be somewhat controversial. My opinions are based upon sound psychology supported by the inerrant Word of God. I believe the two can and do work together. Psychology defined is "the study of the soul."

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SECULAR AND CHRISTIAN COUNSELING?

Let me start by saying that the goals of both Christian and secular counselors are primarily the same: to provide insight and direction to the individual seeking help with their particular struggle(s), thereby bringing about relief. I also need to clarify that the approach of individual Christian therapists can be as varied as individual secular therapists. However, in short, the Christian counselors who make a practice of listening to and following the promptings of the Holy Spirit lead struggling individuals first into harmony with God, and secondly with themselves. Christian counselors believe that all healing ultimately comes from God, and that He is the Focal Point of the journey toward restoration. Every individual's personal struggles, while painful and not to be taken lightly, pale in significance to the awesome Glory of God.

The approach of the secular therapist is to bring counselees into harmony first with themselves, and secondly with the world, thereby promoting relief to their suffering. This can work for a time until we each ultimately question the meaning of our very existence. In opposition to this counseling philosophy, the Christian is instructed to "conform no longer to the patterns of this world" (Romans 12:2). This means each Christian will, at times, experience great disharmony with the ways and messages of the world. This is the starting point for the Christian counselor.

Whereas many secular counselors teach control through self-empowerment, the Christian counselor teaches control through the acknowledgement of total powerlessness. We are not in complete charge of our lives, as secular society profess-

es. If that were the case, none of us would die and we'd all be driving expensive cars if we ever felt like leaving our expensive homes. How boring! Much of what many therapists do is to confront irrational belief systems (Rational Emotive Therapy) and bring into light new, healthy and rational beliefs. Where therapists differ is in the area of what those belief systems are to be. Here is where it is absolutely critical to select the right therapist. Good Christian counselors ground all beliefs on the inerrant, timeless and ageless Word of God, based upon an absolute Truth. Secular counseling theory claims that there is no absolute truth; all truth is relative. It is on this point that Christian and secular therapy will never agree, and that is an absolute Truth!

WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING A THERAPIST

- Does the counselor use Christian counseling methods? Being a counselor who is a Christian is not the same. Does he or she share your Christian belief system?
- Is the therapist licensed with appropriate graduate training? This is becoming increasingly important. There are many well-meaning yet ill-prepared therapists in practice.
- What are the fees? Does the therapist accept insurance? Is there a sliding fee scale based upon what you can afford?
- What type of therapy is most often used? Have them explain any terms you do not understand.
- Personal information: Does the therapist seem friendly and caring? Does he or she seem approachable and gentle? Do you sense the presence of Jesus in the therapist?

HUMAN SUFFERING

As stated in our first newsletter, I'd love you to join me as I will be starting a class which will address the almost intolerable intellectual problems of human suffering and God's role. This course, based on a case study of the book of Job, will be held at First Christian Church on either Wednesday or Thursday evenings beginning the first week of October. Due to materials, preregistration is required. If you are interested please call me at 498-9591 or the Church at 223-5770 (Let us know what night you'd prefer also).

NEXT ISSUE... Why people are afraid to go to a professional counselor. Confronting some irrational beliefs about professional counseling. How to make a referral when a friend is in need.