



FIRST COUNSELING

BIBLICAL COUNSELING OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH JACKSONVILLE

Grace and Truth for All of Life

2023

First Counseling, the counseling ministry of First Baptist Church Jacksonville, Florida, is committed to the Word of God and to helping people who struggle with counseling problems. That is why we are committed to *Grace and Truth for All of Life*

Table of Contents

Meet Our Counselors	3-6
• Characteristics of Counselors	
Articles	7-14
• Five Ways to Love with Our Words	
• Connecting Parents to Students	
• Leadership Styles and Conflict	
• The Beauty of Mediation as a Ministry Tool	
Homework Assignments for Conflict	15-26
• Anger	
• Communication	
• Conflict - Relational	
• Living with Difficult People	
• Forgiveness	
• Rebuilding Trust	
• Fighting for Your Marriage	
Recommended Resources for Dealing with Conflict	27
2024 CEU Information	29

Meet our Counselors



DR. RYAN TRZECIAK

Pastor of Counseling and Discipleship, Director of First Counseling

Ryan (D.Min., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as the Pastor of Counseling and Discipleship at First Counseling, the biblical counseling ministry of First Baptist. A native of Southern California, he spent his formative years in church, serving in ministries, and working at youth camps. He married Jennifer in 2001, where they continued together in ministry in Southern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Seattle. Ryan loves serving First Baptist because of the church's devotion to Christ, its commitment to discipleship, and its passion to obey the two greatest commandments: to love God and love others. Ryan and Jennifer have been blessed with five wonderful children: Jacob, Warren, Aubrey, Daniel, and Elise. As a family, they enjoy reading, board games, road trips, movie nights, and pizza Fridays.

When he's not in the office, you can find Ryan running, reading, spending time with friends and family, and cheering on the Chicago Cubs.

DR. ERNIE BAKER

Pastor of Counseling Supervision and Equipping

Ernie (D.Min., Westminster Theological Seminary) has been in ministry for 41 years as a pastor in Virginia and as a professor at The Master's University (Santa Clarita, CA) where he continues to serve as the chair of the online biblical counseling program. He is a fellow with the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors and a certified conciliator with The Institute for Christian Conciliation.



Ernie is passionate about people and serving them for the glory of God and the relevance of the Bible for the many counseling issues humans face. He loves mentoring and discipleship and finds great joy in watching people grow in relationship with the Lord and each other. In his spare time, Ernie enjoys studying The American Civil War, gardening, and hunting.

Ernie and his wife, Rose, are blessed with six children: three boys and three girls. They have 11 grandchildren and can testify to the truth of 3 John 4: "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in truth." Ernie and Rose love the people of First Baptist Church and the blessing of the fellow staff members.



REV. STEVE CLIFTON
Pastor of Care and Discipleship

Steve has served First Baptist Church of Jacksonville since 1996 in a variety of pastoral positions. He and his wife, Laurie, have two adult children, Caleb and Sarah. Born in Los Angeles, CA, Steve was adopted after birth and raised in Dyersburg, TN. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Church Music Performance from Arkansas State University in 1983 and completed post-graduate work in the field of Christian Education. He became certified by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors in 2017 and earned a specialization in addictions counseling in 2021. Steve came to faith in Christ at the age of 21 after spending years as an unregenerate church member. Since then, he has served churches in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Florida. He seeks to provide biblical counseling to all he meets. Steve counsels married couples, those struggling with life-dominating sins, provides oversight to the church’s prison and substance abuse ministries, and ministers to those in the hospitals and during bereavement.

He claims Galatians 2:20-21 as life verses: “I have been crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.”

MRS. MARILYN KIRKPATRICK
Counselor of Women

A native of Kentucky, Marilyn attended a Catholic church throughout her childhood. At the age of 17, she encountered the saving grace of Jesus at a retreat and gave her heart and life to Him (Ephesians 2:8-9). A passion for the Word and the work of God was birthed in Marilyn’s heart at that time. She moved to Jacksonville, Florida, following her graduation from high school, where she met her husband, Mark.



In 1980, they joined First Baptist Church of Jacksonville. Marilyn became the Women’s Ministry Director in 2005, and served in that position until August 2022, overseeing the Women’s Ministry, as well as the Women’s Adult Sunday School ministries. In 2016, Marilyn received her ACBC Certification and has served as a counselor since that time. She currently serves as the Counselor of Women at First Counseling, the biblical counseling ministry of First Baptist. Her heart’s desire is making disciples through “teaching them all that the Lord has commanded.” Her passion to teach the Word in “every-day” life application method is the motivation of her ministry. Her ministry is built on the truths of Colossians 1:29 “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Marilyn and her husband, Mark, have one daughter, Katie. Their daughter is married to Aaron, and they have two children, Charlotte and Liam. In her spare time, she enjoys being a “Mimi” to her grandchildren, sewing, reading, knitting and walking their dog, Cooper.

In addition to our full-time counselors, we have 35 ACBC certified staff and lay counselors who counsel through First Counseling.



CHARACTERISTICS OF COUNSELORS

LOVING

Our Lord is so concerned about love that He makes this the most often repeated command of the New Testament. He also says that the two greatest commandments involve love. Many of our counselees have never experienced biblical love. A counselee ought to say about our counseling, "They really loved me."

HEART-WORSHIP FOCUSED

Humans were created to be worshipers of God but worship false gods due to the Fall. Counselees ought to be able to clearly identify their own false worship tendencies and know how superior worship defeats inferior worship. We, as counselors, should be able to explain our own heart's tendencies and how they influence our ministry to others, as well as how the Great Commission and creating worshipers go hand in hand.

PRAYERFUL

We should bathe our counselees and counseling sessions in prayer on a regular basis.

THOROUGHLY BIBLICAL

Counselees should be able to say when they finish counseling that they know the Bible better and in every counseling session it was obvious that the Bible was the primary tool being used. The counseling should not revolve around the counselor's life experience or personal opinions.

GOSPEL SATURATED

Counselees should graduate from counseling with no doubt what the true gospel is and knowing whether they are showing evidences of true saving faith. It should also be clear that the truths of the gospel apply to relational conflict, guilt, shame, anxiety, fear, and a host of other human maladies.

SENSITIVE TO SUFFERERS

We must not be primarily known as those who are on a hunt for sin/idolatry in a person's life. A counselee should be able to say that we cared for them as Jesus would a sufferer. This means we are moved with compassion for suffering; and if we do not feel compassion, we should ask the Lord to examine our heart and reveal what is hindering "weeping with those who weep."

PRACTICAL NOT THEORETICAL

It is easy to make counseling just about learning more biblical content. We need to make sure the counselees know how to apply truth to their lives, so they become growing disciples. If counselees do not learn how to do this, they will remain immature and will most likely be a counselee again.

EXCELLENCE

It should be obvious that we know the relevant laws, have standard procedures and protocols (e.g., handling confidential information appropriately), and are thorough. A counselee should be able to say, "My counselor was organized, prepared and goal oriented."

SKILLS ORIENTED

Counselees ought to leave our counseling not just with biblical principles but knowing how to live them out in their unique life. For example, we must not just teach about communication principles but actually practice good communication skills in the sessions. We must not just teach biblical principles of conflict resolution but have the counselees practice conflict resolution skills in the sessions.

FIGHTING FOR MARRIAGES

We should be known for fighting hard to save marriages, even if the counselees do not, and for reluctantly ending counseling when it involves a marriage and family.

ALWAYS GROWING AS A COUNSELOR

Humans have a plethora of issues, and the Bible has a plethora of wisdom. We need to always be reading and growing in our understanding of how to apply biblical truth to the seemingly endless ways that humans have been impacted by Genesis 3 both as sufferers and sinners. This means that we should have a personal growth plan and because "leaders are readers" should be regularly reading in the area of pastoral care and counseling.

Five Ways to Love with Our Words

Dr. Ryan Trzeciak

Our tongue is an amazing piece of God's creative handiwork in our bodies! In one sense, it is an anatomical anomaly. The tongue is the only body part that contains muscles that are not attached to a bone at both ends. Unlike your biceps, which are attached to your elbow and shoulder joints, the tongue is an intertwined matrix of muscles that pull on each other, giving it the flexibility to twist and turn into a seemingly endless array of shapes and sizes. It also possesses tremendous stamina as it works tirelessly throughout the day in the activities of talking, eating, and removing food from your teeth. I mean, when was the last time you said, "Boy, my tongue is tired," or "Man, my tongue muscles are sore!" Probably never.

Not only is the tongue an intricate mass of muscles, but God also gave us our tongue to be a powerful tool of communication, and the Bible has much to say about the potential of our words. Proverbs warns us that "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21) and that words are like sword thrusts, but wise words bring healing (Proverbs 12:18). James says that the tongue can be used to both bless or curse (James 3:10). Jesus even teaches that our words will be used as evidence of our justification or our condemnation (Matthew 12:36-37).

From the verses above, we can see that the Bible calls us to use our words to bring life, healing, and blessing to those around us. It has been said that communication is the lifeblood of any relationship, which means that the way we speak is one of the most important, if not the most important, ways we can love one another. Thus, to be people who love well, we need to be people who communicate love with our words. Again, we turn to the Bible for guidance as Ephesians 4 provides us with five guidelines for loving one another with our words.

First, when it comes to godly, loving communication, we must listen patiently. We start here because implied in communication is not only speaking but also listening. And to speak words of love, we must first know who we are speaking to and understand the meaning behind the words they use with us, and that understanding comes only by listening. Ephesians 4:2-3 says that we are to "walk...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." We patiently listen by asking questions to draw out information, seeking clarification on areas of confusion, and focusing on what the other person is saying instead of only thinking about what we will say.

Second, we must speak lovingly. Ephesians 4:15 says that we are to speak the truth in love as we help each other grow in Christ, and in verse 25, we are to speak the truth with our neighbor, "for we are members one of another." Since we have the ability and the responsibility to communicate, we cannot shy away from saying what needs to be said, but when we speak, we cannot be harsh. Our words must be used in ways that convey honesty, yet at the same time, seeks the best for the one spoken to because we are to help each other be more like Christ.

Third, we are to communicate constantly. Paul says, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27). The force of Paul's exhortation is to deal with today's problems today, not allowing issues to fester. The warning of this passage is that if we do not communicate when we should, we open the door for the evil one to work and do damage to our relationships. However, by staying current

in our communication and constantly talking with each other, we give room for the grace of God to work in our lives and in the lives of others.

The fourth guideline is to edify graciously. In verse 29, Paul commands, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." Sinful words corrode and pollute our interactions with others and suck the life out of any relationship. In contrast, the Lord wants us to speak in such a way that builds up and gives grace. As Proverbs says, "A word fitly spoken...refreshes the soul" (Proverbs 25:11-13).

Fifth, Paul calls us to act kindly. In Ephesians 4:31-32, we read that we are to be skilled in the actions of kindness and tenderheartedness rather than bitterness, anger, and wrath. Our world is well-versed in these sinful reactions, seen every night on the news or on social media. These words flow from selfish hearts that seek to attack others. Christians have been given a new heart and are to shine the light of the gospel through words of kindness and compassion that flow from hearts full of love because of the forgiveness received from God in Christ.

What do these five guidelines look like practically? Here are three helpful questions to ask yourself about your words: Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind? To put it another way, is what I am about to say honest, or is there any hint of deceit, exaggeration, or half-truths? Does what I am about to say need to be said right now, or at all, or can it wait for a better time? Is what I am about to say meant to show love and build up, or will my words hurt and tear down? And if our words fail any one of those three tests, those words are probably better left unsaid.

Our God loves and communicates lovingly. He spoke this world into existence, and he speaks to us through his Word. But the greatest expression of his loving communication was when he sent his Son, who is The Word, to rescue us from our sin (John 1:12-14). In Christ, we have been unfathomably loved. As those who have been greatly loved, we are to greatly love others. Through the gracious gift of our tongue, we can use our words to bring blessing and share the love of Christ with others. May we love others well with our words!

Ryan Trzeciak (D.Min., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves First Baptist Church as the Director of First Counseling.

Connecting Parents to Students

Matt Cummings

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”
Proverbs 22:6

The Bible is clear that our goal as parents should be to raise our kids in such a way that they will be lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a simple goal that we should all easily agree with. The reality is that parenting is one of the hardest things you will ever do. Parenting can feel like a roller coaster. There will be times that you wonder if you and your teenager are even speaking the same language!

Summer is a wonderful opportunity for you to connect with your students. There is more time for you to spend intentional time with your students, so here are some tips on how you can better connect with them. What I hope to do in this post is give you a few practical ideas that you can do to connect with your teenager. This list is not meant to be exhaustive. The important thing is that you are doing something to cultivate a relationship with your teenager.

While it won't be easy, it will be rewarding, and it will be worth it.

1. Eat dinner together with no distractions.

In a world where life moves so fast, and our calendars are full, the dinner table has become a forgotten commodity. The dinner table is one of the best ways to slow life down and be together. Eating dinner together is one of the best times to have meaningful conversations. Conversations can range from discussing your day to discussing spiritual matters. Fathers are called to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). The instruction of a father and the teaching of a mother are described in the Proverbs as a graceful garland for their head and pendant for their neck (Proverbs 1:8-9). One of the best times to engage in family worship is around the dinner table. My family loves flowing from dinner into family worship. The opportunities are endless! One warning is in order, though. Distractions can derail what you are trying to accomplish at the dinner table. If the TV is on, or everyone is on their phones, you are no longer together. Turn off the TV, turn off the phones, and have some great conversations.

2. Take interest in what they are interested in.

I know. This one will be hard for you. But when you take an interest in something that your teenager is interested in, you will see your relationship grow quickly. Teenagers want to know that you care, and one of the best ways to communicate that you do care is by being interested in what they are interested in. The Bible tells us that we should count others as more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3). When we count others as more significant than ourselves, we have the same mind as Jesus (Philippians 2:5). We can imitate Jesus by caring about what our teens care about. Don't just dismiss what your teens are interested in but ask questions. Research it on your own time. While I don't have a teenager, my son has things he is interested in. I don't particularly care to play video games, but I have played more Madden in the last two years than I ever have in my life. It is a great time to connect. Take the time and become interested in what they are interested in and watch your relationship grow.

3. Spend one-on-one intentional time with them.

Spending one-on-one time with your teenager is a very easy way to build depth in your relationship. Teenagers often will not be very open at home or around other people, but when you get them one-on-one, they will open up. Ask them questions that get them talking. Ask them what their fears are. Ask them how their relationships are going. Ask them how their relationship with Jesus is going. Let them ask you questions. Do your best to hear them out and not default to helping them fix their problems. The Bible says that we should be quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19). Use this one-on-one time to hear from your teen. This time together is an amazing opportunity to build depth and closeness in your relationship with your teenager. Invite them to run errands with you. Go out to dinner together. Find a hobby you can do together. My son and I love going to look at sports cards. Just do something where you can focus on building a relationship with your teenager away from the hustle and bustle of life.

4. Apologize when you mess up.

One of the best ways you can connect with your teenager is to have the humility to admit when you are wrong. James 5:16 says, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working." When we mess up, we should ask for our teenagers' forgiveness. This is not the most fun thing in the world to do, but it is needed. If you do not ask your teenagers for forgiveness when you mess up, you are placing unnecessary barriers between you and your teenager. Teenagers are very sensitive when things are unjust against them. Holding them to a standard you are not upholding is not a loving way to build a strong relationship with your teenager. When you mess up, tell them how you messed up and ask them to forgive you.

In closing, I want to remind you that building a relationship with your teenager is not something you can do passively. It takes action. If you want a good relationship with your teenager, you are going to have to step outside your comfort zone and engage them where they are. As uncomfortable as it may be, the results will be totally worth it. 3 John 4 says, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." While John is referring to his spiritual children, we can have the same joy when our children at home are walking in the truth. I am praying for you as you seek to point your children to Jesus.

Matt Cummings (M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as the Student Pastor at First Baptist Church Jacksonville.

Leadership Styles and Conflict

Dr. Ernie Baker

My Story

In my pre-professor days of pastoring, I often noticed that as the weekend approached, I would get more tense. In particular, on Sunday mornings my stomach would be tied up in a knot and I rarely ate breakfast as I anticipated the worship service.

I began to explore why this pattern was in my life. In the Lord's perfect timing the root of this pattern became evident as part of my own self-counseling project when I started the doctoral program at Westminster Seminary. The Lord was gracious and opened my eyes to understand how my heart was influencing me to respond to life this way. It became clear that one of the themes of my inner person was people pleasing or fear of man. This was confirmed when I realized that one of the thoughts of my heart (Hebrews 4:12) was "I wonder what they'll think of my sermon" along with the accompanying worry or fear.

I soon realized though that this same concern led to passivity as a leader. I was not as aggressive as I should be for setting the pace in the church because there were stronger leaders, and I would have to stand up to them or would have to address issues in the flock that made me uncomfortable. By default, my leadership style was laissez-faire. Because of this non-proactive style, issues that should have been addressed were left to simmer.

Praise God for His work of sanctification though because I have learned a lot about leadership since those days, and the Lord has done a major work in my life teaching me to be much more concerned about what the Lord thinks than what others think. By the grace of God, I have learned much about the truth behind Proverbs 29:25, "The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted."

Another Story

There are many church leaders who are the opposite of me though. They are aggressive and do not seem to care what people think. The culture would say they have an authoritarian or commanding leadership style.

This leader can intimidate people into silence because, sometimes unknowingly (and sometimes purposefully too), they convey that it is not all right to disagree. Then issues are not properly addressed because the atmosphere of the church is not conducive to dialogue. The ministry "climate" is more about uniformity than unity in the midst of the diversity of the gifts in the body (Philippians 2:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12).

The Heart

As mentioned above, I realized that my heart desired the approval of others. To put it bluntly, I served and was overly concerned with the opinions of others. Unfortunately, this revealed my value system or as the Lord said in Matthew 12:33-34, "...For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth what is good...."

Do you see what the Lord is comparing there? In 12:33, He says we speak out of our hearts but in 12:34, Christ switches to a parallel word—treasure. In other words, my heart equals my treasures according to the One who knows how to plumb the depths of our value system more

than anyone. I was treasuring, valuing, bowing down to, and worshipping the approval of others. This was revealed by my thinking and my emotions and influenced the way I led.

But what could be going on in the heart of the more aggressive leader? What could this person be valuing or serving? Maybe his thought life is something like, "No one is going to push me around." Or, "I need others to respect me and do things my way." I would submit for your consideration that those statements could reveal a worship of control or respect. This theme then influences the way the church is led.

Leadership style

Doesn't this raise questions like, "Isn't leadership style just part of my personality?" Of course, it is. But think with me. The secular world speaks of various leadership styles and personality types using terminology like laissez-faire on the one hand and "Type A" authoritarian or commanding on the other but with no consideration of the biblical teaching on the heart.

I think it is safe to say that we have not thought deeply enough about how the heart influences leadership and the personality. We also have not considered that the biblical corrective is to change at the level of the heart rather than just accept that the personality is locked in place.

A Warning and Motivation

A leader might find himself or herself saying, "Well I'm just a Type A and Type A's are aggressive." This thinking carries an underlying assumption that if you have this type of personality, it is just the way you are and you cannot change; your personality is fixed.

Please consider that if this is true you cannot believe in (or your thinking needs to be fine-tuned about) the doctrine of progressive sanctification which tells us that we are growing toward Christlikeness. His leadership style is one of a shepherd (John 10:1-18; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4) who knew when to be gentle and knew when to be aggressive.

This leads us to a chief motivation for being willing to change in that we too are called to be loving shepherds. Stating it differently, learning to be a shepherd demands that out of love for the flock I put to death my natural heart propensities. As a shepherd I am called to lead, feed, protect, and care for the flock. All in gentleness. If a leader does not deal with his own heart tendencies (whether more passive or aggressive because of what is being valued) these primary activities of a shepherd will be out of balance in some way and the church will be more vulnerable to conflict.

The biblical corrective is to both try to understand how the inner person is influencing the way you interact with people and issues and correct it biblically, and also to more completely practice a model of leadership based upon shepherding. To explore this further I would invite you to study a passage that has been tremendously helpful for me. In 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12 we see how Paul interacted with people, and we see the characteristics of a Christ-like leader.

Recommended Resources

- *Motives, Why Do I Do the Things I Do?* Edward T. Welch (Resources for Changing Lives, P&R Publishing).
- *The Leadership Opportunity: Living Out the Gospel Where Conflict and Leadership Intersect*, by Peacemaker Ministries.

The Beauty of Mediation as a Ministry Tool

Dr. Ernie Baker

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men,
the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5, ESV)
...In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself. (2 Corinthians 5:19, ESV)

I want to be a Christ-like counselor, don't you? Well, a chief characteristic of our Lord's ministry was that he was a reconciler of others to his Father. He served as an intermediary who was willing to sacrifice so that our chief relationship could be made right. Wouldn't it make sense that if we serve as intermediaries to help others get right with one another that we are being like our Savior?

Some of the greatest blessings of my ministry years have come through leading mediations—for families, marriages, and churches. I LOVE watching precious people take ownership of sin, ask for forgiveness, and then see others grant forgiveness so they all can be reconciled. I also deeply enjoy the process of working through issues that have divided couples, families, and churches and seeing the parties involved accept brainstormed solutions to the issues. This is a different process than longer term, traditional marriage counseling. As you seek to serve the hurting, it has advantages for you to consider and it is an amazing tool to add to your counseling toolbox!

Here are the advantages: this short-term model can be used to stabilize crisis relationships and deal with the big issues that have caused division. Doing mediation not only gives hope but also causes long-term counseling issues to bubble to the surface. Let me hit some key words or phrases from those two sentences.

Short-term—During 4 or 5 pre-mediation meetings the individuals do homework separately; they understand how their own heart desires have been fueling and shaping their response to the situation, and they begin to take responsibility. This pre-mediation time brings to light the big issues that are causing division as you do data-gathering. You can also give them homework, like reading *Peacemaking for Families* and doing questions from the end of the chapters. The advantage to that assignment is that it helps everyone to understand “peacemaker principles” so that during this process all are using the same tools to try to resolve the conflict.

After the pre-mediation work, and after the parties are spiritually ready (with softer hearts, ready to forgive and ready to confess), you schedule a 1 ½- or 2-day mediation where you work through the main issues/complaints through a structured process. This structured process has rules to follow that help everyone involved feel safe and has a set agenda using the acronym G-O-S-P-E-L, which keeps the process moving, organized, and gospel-focused.

Stabilizes crisis relationships...gives hope.

By addressing the biggest frustrations that are causing the relationship to gasp for air, you breathe in some hope and buy some time to address deeper heart themes in the long-term. You do address the heart at this time, just not at the depth that you can in a longer counseling relationship.

Long-term counseling issues bubble to the surface

As the big roadblocks in the relationship are addressed, and as the participants begin to deal with their hearts, it becomes obvious that there are issues that this short-term approach doesn't handle. But that's not the job of this short-term intervention. I have experienced over and over that the longer term counseling issues become obvious. Allow me to illustrate by telling you about Karen.

She and her husband were only married for 1 ½ years when they asked me to do a mediation. This was a third marriage for both, and they were afraid this one would fail as well. She was extremely angry that she had not been told the whole truth about his financial situation, and he was utterly frustrated at the harshness of her speech. Their marriage was on the brink of disaster.

They both responded well to the pre-mediation work; they did their homework and realized they each had much to confess. When the actual days of mediation came, a story began to unfold that previously had not been clear. As she was revealing her part of the story, and we were digging into why she talked to him the way she did, a horrible story of abuse during childhood came to light. She had been sexually molested repeatedly and out of that had developed an extremely controlling nature as a way to cope with life and to keep others from hurting her again—especially men. This was not an issue we could deal with during mediation. Was it impacting their marriage? Absolutely! But it was not what the big complaints in their marriage were about—at least on the surface.

By dealing with the big complaints, confessing sins, granting forgiveness and brainstorming solutions to those big complaints, the marriage was stabilized. But it was obvious she needed some intensive discipleship to really deal with the sexual abuse and the ways she was worshiping control. I am happy to report that both were a success—the mediation and her long-term discipleship counseling. Karen is a radically different woman, and the marriage is stable.

I enjoy the process of working through issues and being a witness to, at times, dramatic reconciliations. It is Christ-like to serve as a mediator, so I hope you'll consider this tool to imitate him.

This is the briefest of introductions to the topic. If it sounds interesting, please see iccpeace.com for more information. I also wrote a small booklet titled *Help! I'm in a Conflict* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2015) that may be of help as you seek to see others become reconciled.

Homework Assignments for Conflict

*by Dr. Ernie Baker, Association of Certified Biblical Counselors Fellow,
First Baptist Church Pastor of Counseling Supervision and Equipping*

- Anger
- Communication
- Conflict
- Living with Difficult People
- Forgiveness
- Rebuilding Trust
- Fighting for Your Marriage

Anger

These resources and principles would apply to several scenarios like personal and family conflict, general relational conflict (including work conflict), domestic abuse and internal frustration.

Resources:

- *Help! My Anger Is Out of Control*, Jim Newheiser
- *A Small Book about a Big Problem*, Edward Welch

More in depth:

- *Uprooting Anger*, Robert Jones
- *Good and Angry*, David Powlison

Key Discipleship Concepts:

Explore their heart

- Angry, controlling people usually are full of fears so explore, what are their fears?
- What are they wanting that they are not getting? What are they getting that they're not wanting?
- What legitimate desires have turned into demands? What, "I like to have" have turned into "I have to have or else I can't be happy"?

Direct their thoughts

- Have them study Colossians 3:1-10 and write out what they should be thinking about their anger based upon these verses.
- Have them study the verses listed under "Key Passage" and write out what they should be thinking based upon these verses from Proverbs. Come up with at least five and then have them work on memorizing the list.
- Have them meditate on the love found in the gospel of Jesus.

Encourage their action

- Memorize Ephesians 4:29.
- Whom do they need to ask forgiveness from? (see *Peacemaking for Families*, chapter on confession for a thorough approach to confessions).
- Read Jim Newheiser's booklet on anger (*Help! My Anger Is Out of Control*), answer the questions in the back and then meet with the person to discuss the answers and an action plan.
- Chapter 2 of *Peacemaking for Families* explains how desires turn into demands which result in a critical/judgmental spirit which then leads to punishing people. Have them read this chapter and answer the questions at the end.

General principles to keep in mind

- Outward anger and more subtle inward seething or frustration are directly related to idolatries of the heart.
- The opposites of the character traits in Ephesians 4:1-3 are what set up an ungodly atmosphere in a home and ruin relationships.
- They need to repent.

Concerns to keep in mind

- If the person is married, is there a danger of domestic abuse?
- Is anyone in imminent danger? Talk to church leaders about how and when to alert the authorities.
- Are children in danger? (See condensed policy and procedures manual [Appendix 2] for when a call to DCF [Department of Children and Families] should be made).

For giving hope

- Ephesians 4:20-27 and 31-32, We can put off the old man, our motives/desires can change, and we can put on the new man. Believers are not stuck. They can change to be more Christ like.

A key passage

- Proverbs 14:17, 29; 15:1, 18; 16:32; 17:1; 18:19; 19:11; 21:9; 22:24-25; 26:20-21; 29:22

Areas to explore

- Who is being impacted by the anger?
- How is this hurting the person physically?

Communication

Questions

1. What would encourage better communication in your home?
2. What makes it feel unsafe to talk about concerns in your home?
3. What would make it feel safer?
4. What habits of good communication do you endeavor to practice?

Communication Principles

- Daily investment—staying current—not just on controversial issues but just normal life circumstances (calendar, children). “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” –Ephesians 4:26
- Commitment to being honest—do not lie to one another; speak the truth in love.
- Speak to build up not to tear down. Say nice things just to be an encourager. Before speaking, ask yourself, “Will what I have to say lead the person down the path of sanctification?”
- Work on the atmosphere of your home so it is safer to talk. –Ephesians 4:1-3.
- Ask regularly, “Is there anything we need to talk about?” “Please be honest with me.” Schedule a time to use the PAUSE principle.
- Talk about enjoyable things or just life in general. Develop common interests so you have something to talk about.
- Carry communication questions in your vehicle so that when you are riding together you have questions to prime the pump and help get you talking.

Conflict - Relational

These resources and principles would apply to a number of scenarios like a prolonged illness, grief, job loss, being a caregiver, or abuse.

Resources

- *Help! I'm in a Conflict*, Ernie Baker
- *Help! I Can't Handle All These Trials*, Joel James
- *Help! My Anger Is Out of Control*, Jim Newheiser
- *A Small Book about a Big Problem*, Edward Welch

More in depth:

- *Peacemaking for Families*, Ken Sande
- *Pursuing Peace*, Robert Jones
- *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande
- *Uprooting Anger*, Robert Jones

Key Discipleship Concepts:

Explore their heart

- What are they wanting that they're not getting? What are they getting that they are not wanting?
- What do their emotions reveal about what may be a treasure in their heart? (See Matthew 12:34-35.)

Direct their thoughts

- How should they think about this other person who has offended them based upon Matthew 18:21-35?
- How should they think about anger, bitterness, and forgiveness based upon Ephesians 4:31-32?

Encourage their action

- What would the Lord want them to do based upon Matthew 5:23-25?
- What would the Lord want them to do based upon Matthew 18:21-35?
- What would the Lord want them to do based upon Philippians 2:3-5?
- What would the Lord want them to do based upon Ephesians 4:31-32? (see *The Peacemaker* or *Peacemaking for Families* for the Four Promises of Forgiveness).

General principles to keep in mind

- They are responsible for their part of the conflict even if the other person never takes responsibility (Matthew 7:1-5). Get the log out of our own eye first.
- Our forgiveness of others is to be lavish forgiveness based upon the degree of forgiveness we have received from the Lord (Matthew 18:21-35; Ephesians 4:31-32).
- Others may need to help if they cannot resolve this individually (Matthew 18:15-17).
- There are character traits listed in Ephesians 4:1-3 and Colossians 3:12-15 that make the atmosphere of relationships more Christ-like, but the opposites destroy relationships (harshness, irritability, hard heartedness, etc.).

For giving hope

- Romans 8:18-39–The LORD is up to something good in their life.
- Isaiah 53:3–The LORD can relate to their being rejected by others.

Key passage

- James 4:1-2–What is going on in their desires?

Areas to explore

- How long has this been going on?
- What are the two or three big issues that the conflict revolves around?
- Who is being impacted?

Living with Difficult People– What are your responsibilities?

KEY PASSAGES:

Matthew 5:38-48, 5:9; Matthew 18:21-35; I Corinthians 13:4-7; Ephesians 4:1-3; Ephesians 5:22-33; Philippians 2:1-15; I Peter 3:7

QUESTIONS:

Matthew 5:38-48—How are you showing love to your enemy or this difficult person?

How are you turning the other cheek and going the extra mile?

How are you showing grace to this difficult person just as the Lord shows grace on the “unjust?”

How are you showing mercy (holding back what a person deserves) to this difficult person?

If the Lord loved only the lovely, who would get loved?

Matthew 18:21-35—Where would you be in relationship with the Lord if the Lord responded to you the way you are responding to this person?

1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 –How are you doing “enduring all things?”

How are you doing not keeping accounts of wrongs suffered?

Ephesians 4:1-3—What would the opposites of each of these characteristics be?

Which list are you portraying with this difficult person? The list in the verses or the opposites?

Has the Lord had to put up with a lot from you over the years?

Ephesians 5:22-33—How are you showing the sacrificial love of Christ who died for people who sin against Him?

Philippians 2:1-15—Based on these verses what was the Lord’s approach to sinful difficult people?

What are you told to do in relationship with others according to these verses?

What rights do you believe you have that are being violated? Where would we be in relationship to God if Christ had sought to preserve His rights?

Colossians 3:12-19—According to verse 12, what should your demeanor toward others be?

In what ways have you grown bitter?

1 Peter 3:7—What are you told to do in relationship with your spouse? What happens if you don’t?

Forgiveness - Its Healing Power

Abstract: What can bring healing to the disease that destroys relationships? The soothing medicine is forgiveness. Just as this medicine has brought healing to our broken relationship with the Lord it also brings healing to our human relationships when we follow the Lord's example. For the sake of your soul, I hope you'll take the medicine!

The healing power of forgiveness

Humans have a disease that eats away at the soul and relationships. It is a cankerous cancer that leads to shame and brokenness and as it consumes perforates relationship with God and others. Of course, this disease, this cancer, is sin. Is there a soothing medicine that brings healing? What is the liquid that when ingested calms this ulcer? As a counselor I experience the effects of this disease regularly. Just in the last weeks I have consulted on divorce, parent child conflict and church conflict. There is much pain associated with each of these stories as the sickness spreads.

The biblical antidote is the wonderfully soothing and healing message and experience of forgiveness that we remember as part of our Lord's incarnation. This theme is so rich in Scripture that the medicine is described in multiple ways. Let's explore two of the terms used to describe the forgiveness we receive from the Lord and then see how each applies to relationships with others. These terms describe the healing that comes to our perforated relationship with the Lord, they also describe the medicine that when the prescription is taken faithfully brings healing to other relationships as well.

It is my intention to do a brief Greek New Testament word study so that you begin to understand the implications and can worship. I will also pose questions that spring from these words for our relationships with others.

Aphiemi: to send away, let it be, let it go, remove a debt, to forgive¹

You get a sense of the power of this word when you see it in action. It is actually the word used in this famous verse. "And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit."² It's as if the verse is saying that he sent away his spirit. Now let's see how this applies to us.

A verse with wonderful medicine is, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered... (Romans 4:7). How truly blessed we are that he sent away our debt. Sin is too serious though for God to just overlook it – he didn't just make the debt disappear. He actually absorbed it himself!

How about taking a moment to lift praise to the Lord for choosing to send away your debt based upon what your Savior did on the cross. The more you understand the depth of forgiveness the more you will worship (see Luke 7:47-48).

This principle applies to the way we are then to treat other's offenses against us and there are serious ramifications if we don't! "For if you forgive others their trespasses,

¹ Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains, (BibleWorks 4.0) definition 15.43.

² The English Standard Version is being used as the translation.

your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). In other words, our Lord is a God of Justice and gives equitable treatment. An unforgiving attitude also makes a statement about the status of your relationship with him.

Questions to ask yourself or to use with counselees: Have you made a decision to send away the debt that is owed you? Please understand that you will have to absorb some cost and please understand it is a decision, not a feeling.

If you're not willing to forgive or having a hard time forgiving then I would ask you to consider, "What is your fear or concern?" When I've asked this question of counselees, I have gotten the answer that it doesn't seem fair or "I feel like I'm letting the person off too easily." The biblical answer though is that the Lord is a God of justice, and he will make all things right.

Charizdomai: to give undeserved favor, to forgive graciously³

I am so thankful for grace! Our Lord not only sent away our sin (which brings healing to our relationship), choosing to absorb the debt himself. He also extends this forgiveness to those who do nothing to deserve it, and who do not take the initiative! Again, it is more powerful when you see this word being used.

"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses... (Colossians 2:13). This forgiveness was undeserved and oozing with grace (Ephesians 1 calls it "lavish grace"). It was kind and showed benevolence. It is not based upon our initiative but is based upon what Christ did.⁴

This would be a good time to worship the Lord for his undeserved grace toward you.

Just one chapter later Paul uses the same word to describe how we should treat others when this disease hits the church body. "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness.... Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must forgive (3:12-13). What is the medicine that brings healing to "complaints?" It is gracious, undeserved, unmerited favor freely given to another just as we have been forgiven.

Questions for yourself or a counselee: Are you willing to forgive freely based upon what your Savior did for you even though the other does not deserve it? If not, what is this saying about your understanding of the depth of your forgiveness from the Lord? Scripture powerfully models the remedy for the disease that leads to brokenness in relationships. Do you want healthier, godly relationships? You can't get much godlier than when you practice undeserved, gracious, kind, and benevolent forgiveness. What a wonderful way to have a healthy soul and relationships and it is incredibly relevant to start practicing this now!

³ Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains (BibleWorks 4.0), definition 57.102.

⁴ Used in Ephesians 4:32 as well.

Rebuilding Trust

There are key elements that both parties must practice for trust to be re-established.

Repentance

2 Corinthians 7:10-11, Matthew 3:8 (using the 7 A's as a tool to make a thorough confession). This takes humility and brokenness (see Psalm 51).

- This person endeavors to continue to show sincere fruit, keeping promises, confessing and forsaking sin (Proverbs 28:13).
- "I'm a different person in attitudes and actions and will continue to show this as an act of worship to the Lord."

Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:31-32 (based on an understanding and belief in the 4 promises of forgiveness). This takes humility by recognizing personal sin and how much the Lord has forgiven.

- This person reminds him or herself how much he or she has been forgiven (Matthew 18:21-35).
- "I am wretch as well and need the abundant grace of God. Who am I to withhold forgiveness when I have been forgiven?"

Purposeful Rebuilding

As an act of love for the Lord and for the other person. As an act of faith in the Lord. In other words, this is about worship.

- In **thought** life-squash negative thoughts with a thank list of things about the other that you pray back to the Lord. Purposeful prayer for the other. (Philippians 4:8).
- In **actions**—Ephesians 4:31-32 Purposeful actions to rebuild the relationship. This is faith because you are doing it for the Lord and taking a risk.
- In **words**—Ephesians 4:29 Purposeful kind words, loving words

What are 3 things you need to do based on this study?

What are your hesitations?

What should your motivations be for doing so?

Fighting for Your Marriage

We want to help you fight for your marriage. We are motivated to do so because of what scripture teaches about marriage. We would urge you to consider the following questions.

1. What would the LORD want you to do concerning your marriage based upon reading Malachi 2:13-17; 1 Peter 3:7; Colossians 3:12-15; Matthew 19:3-6?
2. What is your understanding of the commitment you made to your spouse when you took your vows?
3. What is your understanding of marriage as a covenant?
4. Understanding a covenant as "a sacred promise before God to live in sealed allegiance to one another," what should you do concerning your marriage?
5. What does God think of those who break covenants (Jeremiah 34:18-20)?
6. What are you thankful for concerning your salvation? What sin or sins are you abundantly grateful to the Lord for giving you grace and forgiving you?
7. Based upon Matthew 18:21-35 and your understanding of how much you have been forgiven, how are you to treat the one who you believe has sinned against you?
8. What would give you hope concerning your marriage?
9. There are other alternatives rather than perpetuating the divorce mentality of our culture. Please read, "When Marriage Problems Become Legal Problems" by Ed Wilde from *Men Counseling Men* (John Street Editor, Harvest House).

Recommended Resources for Dealing with Conflict

Articles

- Helping Counselees Take the First Move (It Wasn't Me! – Getting Traction in Relationship Counseling)
<https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2021/08/30/it-wasnt-me-getting-traction-in-relationship-counseling/>
- Reconciliation: Who Will Make the First Move? The Power of the Gospel in Broken Relationships
<https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2013/07/30/reconciliation-who-will-make-the-first-move/>

Books

- *Anger: Calming Your Heart* (31-Day Devotional), by Robert Jones, P & R Publishing
- *Anger & Stress Management*, by Wayne Mack, P & R Publishing
- *Communication and Conflict Resolution*, by Stuart Scott, Focus Publishing
- *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, by John MacArthur, Crossway
- *Good and Angry*, by David Powlison, New Growth Press
- *The Heart of Anger*, by Lou Priolo, Grace and Truth Books
- *Help! I'm in a Conflict*, by Ernie Baker, Shepherd Press
- *Help! My Anger Is Out of Control*, by Jim Newheiser, Shepherd Press
- *Keeping Your Cool*, by Lou Priolo, P & R Publishing
- *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, by Ken Sande, Baker Books
- *Peacemaking for Families*, by Ken Sande, Focus on the Family
- *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts*, by Robert D. Jones, Crossway
- *Redeeming Church Conflicts*, Tara Barthel and David Edling, Baker Books
- *A Small Book about a Big Problem*, by Ed Welch, New Growth Press
- *Unpacking Forgiveness*, by Chris Brauns, Crossway
- *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem*, by Robert Jones, P & R Publishing

2024 CEUs

All CEUs will be offered as webinars as well as in-person events.

Check <https://biblicalcounseling.com/training/ceu/> this coming November-December for definite dates and registration information.

Tentative CEUs include the following:

Practical Homework Assignments

The Counseling Needs of Senior Adults

Fear and Anxiety

A Theology of Marriage

Neuroscience, the Body and Biblical Counseling

Jesus as Counselor

Counseling and the Heart of Counselors

Hard Cases

A Difficult Marriage Case Study

Domestic Violence

Taught by First Counseling counselors
Dr. Heath Lambert, Dr. Ernie Baker, Dr. Ryan Trzeciak,
Sean Perron, Spencer Harmon, John Blount

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