

**Experiencing Pastoral Counseling**  
**PM 804 Pastoral Counseling**  
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### **Interview #1**

The first Pastor that I interviewed was Pastor Darrel Gabbard, the Senior Pastor at Dublin Baptist Church. This 1,200 member Southern Baptist Church located in the Columbus suburbs has existed since 1980. Pastor Gabbard has served in ministry for twenty-five years and was very generous in sharing his Pastoral Counseling experience.

Pastor Gabbard discussed the practical challenges that face the Senior Pastor when it comes to counseling. The Senior Pastor “wears so many hats,” he commented. The list of his responsibilities include preaching, teaching, administration, pastoral care in the form of hospital visits, staff development and the important duties of pastoral counseling. Two important insights that Pastor Gabbard shared with me regarding barriers to counseling that Senior Pastors face are the time demands that counseling requires and the emotional and spiritual drain that can be placed on the Pastor as a counselor. Working evenings and odd hours to meet with members along with the frustration and anxiety that can be encountered when they attempt to open up to you, themselves and each other for perhaps the first time.

Pastor Gabbard described his style of counseling as a cognitive therapy approach that utilizes scripture and communication to assist those being counseled in both finding truth and being truthful with themselves. Pastor Gabbard encourages those he counsels to open up and to express and examine their own thoughts and feelings. When possible he encourages those he counsels to suggest their own solutions after examining themselves thoroughly. If he encounters a counseling situation to which there is no progress after 2-3 sessions, a situation that he can tell immediately will require extended counseling or a situation that requires greater expertise than he possesses, Pastor Gabbard will make a referral.

This Pastor takes much care in making referrals and does not do so casually. He takes time in getting to know Counselors in his area. He examines their Christian perspective, their use of Scripture in their lives and in their counseling setting and also gathers feedback from several of their clients in regard to their counseling techniques and effectiveness. He keeps his list of Counselors current and attempts to make sure these biblically sound counselors are involved actively with a community of fellow believers. His referral list also contains notes that help him to match the special needs of those seeking counseling with a counselor who is skilled in that area.

Pastor Gabbard stated that the values he holds clearly direct his approach to counseling. He described these values in four basic steps. First, those he counsels need to realize that God's help is available to them. Secondly, they need to look within themselves for the roots of the problem. Thirdly, they need to apply the principles and values of God's Word to their lives. Experiencing God's forgiveness for both others and themselves is an example of this he provided. Finally, those he counsels need to experience a "healing of the soul" and the healing of damaged emotions.

Pastor Gabbard attributed most of the counseling needs that he has seen as those that have been caused by our own selfishness and self-centeredness and that of others in our lives. He shared that people are desperate for someone to listen and understand them. People need to be heard, understood and loved. They also need to allow Jesus to be at the center of their lives. Knowing that God has a plan for us gives us the confidence we need to go through the struggles and trials of life. Pastor Gabbard said that his purpose in counseling parishioners is "to help them experience the grace of God and be able to fulfill the purpose God has for their lives."

## **Interview #2**

The second Pastor I spoke with was Pastor Wayne Booth of Genoa Baptist Church. He is the Pastoral Care Pastor at this 1,500 member Southern Baptist Church that was founded in 1988. Pastor Wayne has 25 years of pastoral care and counseling experience and I was blessed as I received his input regarding the topic at hand.

Pastor Wayne oversees many of the care and counseling ministries of this church. He is not only called to officiate funerals and weddings, he also performs visitation to hospitals, nursing homes and homes of shut-ins. Currently he is working to expand the care ministries of the church through a new “Sonshine Ministry.” This ministry consists of fifty volunteers that are divided into three teams: hospital visits and care, nursing home visits and care and home visits and care. Pastor Wayne also guides the planning of a yearly ministry fair for seniors called “Senior Fest” and leads other family care retreats throughout the year. One of the reasons that he feels the “Sonshine Ministry” is important to the church is to encourage others to be involved because caring for the needs of others takes time. He also spoke of the major time factor involved in providing proper Christian Counseling.

Pastor Wayne describes his counseling style as somewhat cognitive, but stressed to me the importance of really listening, caring and praying for people. He sees much value in being a connected and caring counselor who can offer the ministry of the church through being close to people. Love and concern for others need to convey the love of Jesus and we must never be afraid to share the gospel truths to those we counsel.

A counselor must rely on Jesus and encourage the counselee to trust both the counselor and his/her Savior as well. A counselor must keep in mind the saying “people don’t care what you know until they know how much you care.”

Pastor Wayne also takes great care in making referrals. In his situation he may counsel for a longer amount of time, but clearly recommends making a referral in situations that exceed his level of counseling ability. Pastor Wayne recommended using a professional Christian counseling agency and also recommended being aware of Doctors that can prescribe drugs and offer other treatment options. In our situation there are church members that meet these criteria and lend their expertise to use as an agency that the church utilizes in making referrals.

Pastor Wayne spoke of three main values that he utilizes in his approach to counseling. His first value is to stress the love and acceptance of Jesus. This close manner of care and compassion are the basis for his ministry. Secondly this pastor encourages the counselee to establish appropriate priorities in his/her life. These five priorities are God, yourself, your family, your work and others. Thirdly Pastor Wayne spoke of the importance of finding contentment in life as the counselee experiences the love of Christ and properly prioritizes his or her life and lives a life trusting God.

When I asked Pastor Wayne for his philosophy of counseling he gave me a beautiful description of Pastoral care and counseling that I hope I do not forget. He asked me if I have ever had a warm and comfortable down coat or blanket. I then answered, "Yes, I have." He then asked if I knew where down came from on a bird. "No, I do not," I said this time. Pastor Wayne reminded me of Jesus' words in Matthew 23:37, "I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" as he explained to me that down feathers are those that are soft and warm on the underside of the mother hen's wings and abdomen. These soft warm feathers are used by the mother hen to give comfort, care and warmth to the chicks as the rains and storms come. The mother hen will even turn her back to the storm as the coarse outer feathers repel the wind and rain of the storms. This he shared is what counseling needs to be for

God's people. Christian counseling must bring people to a place of contentment under the warm and loving protection of God's love.

## **My Philosophy of the Ministry of Pastoral Counseling**

### **A. My Purpose in Pastoral Counseling.**

Throughout each of these interviews I was reminded of the words of Wayne Oates and Terry Wardle as they write things such as, "Before her pride and narrow mindedness had constricted these channels through which love must flow" (Oates, 31) and the "debris of sin blocking the flow of the Holy Spirit" (Wardle, Draw, 102). The active removal of barriers that prevent church members from experiencing the true joy and contentment of possessing lives that are rich with the life that the Holy Spirit brings were evident in each of these Pastor's approaches to counseling.

A second aspect that was evident in each interview was each Pastor's willingness to refer members that may need more assistance than what they may have the time or skill to offer. "The pastor must rely upon both God and men for the effectiveness of his counseling ministry" (Oates, 37). This brings to mind a second important concept, that of bringing the counselee into loving fellowship with the body of Christ. In his book Radical Outreach Dr. George Hunter dedicates an entire chapter to the importance of twelve step programs to the church. In this chapter he states "True Christianity is more about good news for new relationships than what people perceive it to basically be about" (Hunter, 139). Building relationships with others in the Christian community that can offer assistance in times of crisis is an effective means of building a network of care for the church. Likewise bringing the counselee to small group settings and finding paths for healing and a return to full fellowship in the body of believers is needed.

Finally, each Pastor spoke of the spiritual and emotional drain that accompanies the task of counseling and the need for prayer and relying on God's strength. Dr. Wardle would suggest

that the caregiver "being filled with the Spirit means surrendering to the full flow of His presence already within the caregiver's life" (Wardle, Draw, 102).

Based on the three factors previously noted, my purpose in Pastoral counseling would speak to each of these needs. First the counselor must care for those that have been closed off from experiencing the rich flow of God's joy in their lives and help them to clear away the stones that block the entrance of joy to their hearts. Secondly the counselor needs to find ways to reconnect them not only to God but also to each other in the body of Christ. Finally a counselor should rely on others in the body and the Holy Spirit Himself in the counseling process.

### **B. My Guiding Values**

The book, Aftershock: What to do When Leaders Fail You, by Ted Kitchens suggests three valuable guidelines for leaders that comprise the acronym HAT (Kitchens, 194). The first of these is Humility. Through being a humble counselor, I believe I will be able to bring acceptance to those that I am listening to as we explore broken and bruised lives together. Through humility others are also valued and a proper Christian attitude for counseling is established. Accountability is the next piece of HAT and I believe it is important for a counselor to be accountable to the truth of God's word and in a cognitive approach this truth can assist a counselee in seeing the truth of what is happening in their life as they seek God's heart. The third and final letter refers to being Teachable. For both counselor and counselee it seems this is a highly needed trait for counseling work to be successful. A teachable spirit will enable the counselor and counselee to try various strategies together until a successful result can be accomplished. Refusal to 'try something new' by either in the counseling process can be disastrous when the Holy Spirit is prompting this approach.

Knowing that people matter to God and that everyone involved in Christian counseling is required to be humble, accountable and teachable before God's Spirit and Word are values that I will utilize in my ministry of Pastoral counseling.

### **C. My Strategy when doing Counseling**

In his book, Draw Close to the Fire, Dr. Terry Wardle has a chapter named *Healthy Relationships Move you Toward Spiritual Maturity* (Wardle, Draw, 147). In conducting these interviews, I was struck by how each pastor referenced the importance of providing pre-marital counseling to couples in the church. Each utilized this as a teaching point to suggest the need for counseling prior to the development of unhealthy relationships that lead people into isolation and self-destructive behavior.

Creating a place where young couples can truly listen to each other and share their views of what love, money, success, forgiveness, family and faith mean to them is vitally important if they are going to build a home that is healthy, Christ centered, Spirit filled, grace empowered, vulnerable, available, praying, celebrating, serving and accountable to God (Wardle, Healing, 158-163). This result can only come through the young couple sitting down and beginning to learn how to really listen to each other. Pre-marital counseling must develop skills that teach the couple how to accept their differences and value the other's opinions. God's Spirit will help us if we can learn from a spiritual director. We can learn how to listen to the Holy Spirit as He guides our lives and listen to each other as we travel on this transforming journey together.

My strategy in providing counsel to others will be to listen and then invite them to listen to themselves and the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit along with other healthy Christian relationships begins to create an environment for change to take place and for the counselee to find support, guidance and freedom in the body of Christ.

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