**Gathering Data & Discerning Problems Biblically**

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**Introduction:**

1. Paul ministered the Word in **two** formats. (Acts. 20:20, 27)

2. The **public** ministry of the Word involves many and is general in nature.

3. The **private** ministry of the Word is limited and is specific and intense.

4. The **keys/skills** to communicate God’s Word effectively in both formats can be learned.

5. The 6 elements of the private ministry of the Word are:

Gathering Data, Discerning the Problems, Establishing Involvement,

Giving Hope, Providing Instruction, and Giving Homework.

**I. Gathering Data** (I like to call it “getting to know the person”)

A. It’s a **crucial** part of the counseling process (Pr. 18:13).

1. Many fail to gather facts first (1 Sam. 1:12-14; Job 4; Acts 2:13).

2. Will determine how effective you will be (Pr. 18:15; Jas. 1:19).

3. Requires good communication (verbal, non-verbal).

**B.** The **six** kinds of data**-** Wayne Mack (*Counseling* by MacArthur)

1. **Physical** – Some contribute directly or indirectly to their problems (2 Cor. 4:16).

- Sleep, diet, exercise, illness (Ps. 32:4; 1 Cor. 11:30; Jn. 9:3)

- Medication *The Christian Counselors Medical Desk Reference*

2. **Resources** – What resources does the counselee bring to the table?

- Spiritual

- Intellectual

3. **Emotions** – Emotions are important aspect of our hearts.

- Emotions can be like a warning light.

- Emotions can be expressed negatively (Eph. 4:26) or positively (Ps. 4:4-5).

4. **Actions** – What they have done or not done that brought them to counseling?

- By commission / omission (Gen. 4:1-7)

- Many Scriptural examples (Ps. 1:1-3; Lk. 6:46-49**;** Jas. 1:25)

5. **Concepts** –What is this person thinking, believing, or worshipping?

- Only God knows the intentions of the heart (Heb. 4:12).

- Motives are key (Mk. 7:18-23; Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 5:16-21; Lk. 6:43-46).

6. **Historical** data – We need to hear the person’s story.

- What are the major events in their lives?

- How has their past influenced them?

C. **Areas to Explore**

1. In General: Spiritual, Family, Work/school, Physical, Financial, Social, Current Concerns.

2. More Specific:

- **Children**: parent/child relationships, peer group, teacher/school

- Older **Children** and Young **Singles**: sexuality issues, dating problems, communication breakdown, life meaning, school/work

- **Older** Singles: resentment regarding marriage, objectionable habits, immorality, disorganized life schedule

- **Married Persons**: husband/wife relationships, parent/child relationships, in-laws, work schedule, finances, sex, immorality, communication breakdown

- **Older** Persons: Loneliness, physical limitations, self-pity, fear of death, wasting time

- Individuals with Disabilities: resentment, loneliness, self-pity, depression, sense of uselessness, manipulation of others

**D. How do we gather data**?

1. **Listen, Listen, Listen,** and Speak. (Prov. 18:13, 15, 17)

2. Use the Personal Data Inventory Form (PDI). (or PHPE)

- Require counselee’s to complete the PDI.

- Review and highlight the PDI carefully.

3. Ask appropriate, relevant questions.

- Be gracious, humble and non-judgmental (Col. 4:6; 1 Cor. 10:12).

- Ask open - ended questions that go both broad and deep.

See X-RAY Questions by David Powlison

http://storage.cloversites.com/crosshaven/documents/xray.pdf

4. Observe non-verbal behavior – their tone, attitudes, & body language (Gen. 3:8).

- Look for facial expressions and posture.

- Watch for patterns and reactions.

**II. Discerning Problems Biblically**

A. Appropriate data **must** be gathered to properly discern problems.

B. An **accurate Biblical** interpretation of the data must be made in order to discern problems correctly.

1. Use Biblical **labels** and **terms** to describe problems.

- It is generally not helpful to use psychological labels.

- Redefine psychological or worldly terms by using biblical language.

For examples: Call sin “sin”, not a weakness, characteristic, trait, disposition, etc.

Call an “affair” adultery. Call “shoplifting” theft. Call “badmouthing” gossip or slander. Call an “addiction” enslavement or bondage.

2. Look for **themes** or **patterns**.

- What is their view of God?

- Do they have a biblical view of mankind?

- What is their view on trials and suffering? (Rom. 8:15-25)

- Whom are they living their life to please?

- How do they identify themselves? (Eph. 1:1-14)

- Whom or what motivates them?

3. Look for complicating factors.

- lack of **discipline**

- lack of creative imagination

- lack of **commitment**

- lack of perseverance

- lack of personal **responsibility**

- lack of biblical objectives

- lack of a **commandment**-orientation

C. Levels of problems to be considered

1. **Presentation** problems: what prompted them to seek help; emotions are frequently prominent.

2. **Performance** problems: actions that produced the difficulties; facts-oriented.

3. **Preconditioning** problems: thinking a behavior patterns repeated so often that they have become habitual.

4. **Heart-level** problems: what the person worships and desires most (Mk. 7:14-23, Rom. 1:25, James 4:1-3) These are what drives a person to do what he does.

D. Other considerations

1. Determine the **person’s relationship with God**

- Is this person saved or unsaved?

- Review their reported spiritual information.

- Have them describe their relationship with God / Jesus Christ.

- If saved then evaluate their spiritual maturity?

- The natural, the spiritual, and the fleshly (1 Cor. 2:14-3:3).

- The idle, the fainthearted, and the weak (1Thess. 5:14).

2. How do you distinguish ***fruit problems* from *root problems*?**

- Look for the common among the uncommon (1 Cor. 10:13).

- Look for connections between problems (presentation, performance, preconditioning, heart)



STEM

ROOT

FRUIT

**Resources:**

Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel,* (Baker, 1970)

Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselors Manual,* (Zondervan, 1973)

John MacArthur, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically,* (Nelson, 2005)

James McDonald (ed.), C*hrist-Centered Biblical Counseling,* (Harvest House, 2013)

Paul Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands*, (P & R Publishing, 2002)