



***On The Secret of Success  
In Christian Counseling***

**By**

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*Teaching Notes* are Bible studies we taught before GraceLife Ministries began publishing articles online in 1995. Some were presented as sermons, others as group studies.

Our hope is that these older studies will be a blessing to you in your life and ministry. Please use them in any way God leads you.

These teaching notes are from a sermon about **counseling**.

[These notes are from a sermon series taught more than 40 years ago.]



## Nouthetic Counseling

Turn in your Bibles to Romans 15:14 –

*“And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.”*

The word ‘admonish’ is translated from the Greek word *noutheteó* and speaks of putting one in mind of something, warning by instruction, counseling, exhorting. Pastors and teachers are instructed and warned by the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 10:11).

The word ‘able’ is from the Greek word *dunamai*, which means ‘to have power, demonstrate ability.’ We as Christians are to have power in instructing and warning one another. One Christian writer has called this being ‘competent to counsel.’ (Jay Adams)

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of Ezra and the 7th chapter. Ezra was a Jewish priest and scribe who lived during the 5th Century B.C. in Babylon. Under various leaders, the Temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt and the passover once again kept in Jerusalem. Ezra desired to go to Jerusalem to teach (instruct) and counsel (warn) the people of God. King Artaxerxes of Persian sent Ezra to Jerusalem –

*“Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave unto Ezra the priest, the scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the Lord, and of his statutes to Israel. Artaxerxes, king of kings, unto Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace, and at such a time. I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee. Forasmuch as thou art sent of the king, and of his seven counsellors, to enquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of thy God which is in thine hand; And to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered unto the God of Israel, whose habitation is in Jerusalem, And all the silver and gold that thou canst find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem: That thou mayest buy speedily with this money bullocks, rams, lambs, with their meat offerings and their drink offerings, and offer them upon the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. And whatsoever shall seem good to thee, and to thy brethren, to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, that do after the will of your God. The vessels also that are given thee for the service of the house of thy God, those deliver thou before the God of Jerusalem. And whatsoever more shall be needful for the house of thy God, which thou shalt have occasion to bestow, bestow it out of the king’s treasure house. And I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a decree to all*

*the treasurers which are beyond the river, that whatsoever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done speedily, Unto an hundred talents of silver, and to an hundred measures of wheat, and to an hundred baths of wine, and to an hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven: for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? Also we certify you, that touching any of the priests and Levites, singers, porters, Nethinims, or ministers of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose toll, tribute, or custom, upon them. And thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God, that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not. And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.” Ezra 7:11-26*

Revival came to the nation of Israel through the ministry of Ezra. What was his secret of success as a teacher and counselor? Where did Ezra get his phenomenal power with God?

# Ezra

Let me share with you the secret of success in Christian counseling from the ministry of Ezra.

Turn to Ezra 7 and let's read verses 9 and 10 together –

*“For upon the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” Ezra 7:9-10*

## Secret #1

**Ezra prepared his heart.**

There can be no success in Christian counseling except the heart of the counselor has first been prepared before the Lord. We spend so much time preparing our minds. We read all the right books and attend all the right seminars and compile all the right charts and practice all the right methods — but — we spend little time getting our heart right with God.

Jesus said “Without me ye can do nothing” and that includes counseling.  
(John 15:5)

Our spiritual advice will never be life-changing and life-lasting unless we counsel from a heart that is prepared before the Lord.

How do we prepare our hearts for the work of Christian counseling?

- The Preparation of Prayer — we must spend much time before the Lord admitting our unworthiness as counselors and seeing success as coming only from the Lord. We must tell the Lord that He and He alone will receive the glory for any success in our counseling.
- The Preparation of Confession — during our prayer, we must identify our sins (naming each sin that finds life in our hearts and minds) and then confess our sins (truly repenting and turning from that sin to the things of God). 1 John 1:9
- The Preparation of Purity — heart repentance is not completed until it has matured into living holiness. (Ephesians 1:4) To direct others in the 'paths of righteousness' while living unrighteously is a mockery to God.
- The Preparation of Love — an attempt to counsel a brother or sister without true love is like sending a man to empty the Pacific Ocean equipped only with a bottomless bucket. No matter how hard he worked and pleaded and begged, his efforts would be useless. So is the Christian who does not have love, compassion and understanding. He or she can plead and beg, but to no avail. A knife without a sharpened edge may look like a knife and even feel like a knife, but when

put to the test it is dull and useless. And so the Christian counselor without a heart of love may look like a counselor and even act like a counselor, but when put to the test their advice is dull and useless. (1 John 4:7-8)

- The Preparation of Joy — one of the saddest sights in the church is to see a gathering of Christian counselors who only claim to fame is their 30-foot chins dragging the floor of sorrow. King David (a counselor of some measure) was once heard to say, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” (Psalm 51:12-13) If we want to be effective in counseling lost souls into the Kingdom of God and counseling wayward brothers and sisters into the fulness of God, we must first be filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit.

## Secret #2

### Ezra sought out the Word of God.

Only through a deep understand of the doctrines and principles of the Bible can we give spiritual advice of any value and worth. Though secular forms of counseling make their claims to success, only biblical counseling (reality therapy) has results of lasting effectiveness.

Our degree of success in Christian counseling is directly proportionate, I believe, to our knowledge and understanding of God's Word (plus what shared in the last part of our study).

How can we counsel people to be saved? Through God's Word!

*"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16*

*"But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture*

*saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.” Romans 10:8-11*

How can we see hard hearts broken before the Lord? Through God's Word!

*“Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” Jeremiah 23:29*

How can we see sin burned out of sinners and the people of God? Through God's Word!

*“Wherefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them.” Jeremiah 5:14*

How can we teach Christians to defend themselves against supernatural powers of evil? Through the Word of God!

*“Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod*

*with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” Ephesians 6:11-17*

How can we probe beneath the surface problems of God’s people to the underlying root causes? Through God’s Word!

*“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12*

The supreme desire of the Christian counselor should be spiritual wisdom. Solomon, one of God’s greatest counselors, said –

*“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.” Proverbs 4:7*

## Secret #3

### **Ezra obeyed the Word of God.**

It's ridiculous to think that knowledge will ever substitute for obedience. There can be no success in Christian counseling without absolute obedience to God's Word.

*"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."*

*Joshua 1:8*

Being a leader and counselor in Christian circles does not automatically make you a spiritual success.

King Saul was the chief leader and counselor of the nation of Israel. He had prestige and position, but he lacked spiritual power. Saul tried to substitute sacrifice (a creation of the mind) for obedience (a condition of the heart).

Samuel told Saul –

*“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” 1 Samuel 15:22*

If we want to have God’s blessings on our counseling, we must be obedient.

*“But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.” James 1:25*

## Secret #4

### **Ezra counseled others to obey God.**

Ezra poured his life into other people. He invested himself in making others a success.

We find the ultimate example of this investing principle in the person of Jesus Christ who “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28)

The word ‘minister’ comes from the Greek word *diakoneó* and means ‘to serve, to wait upon.’

The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus “made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7).

In Romans 8:29, Paul wrote that God has marked out each of His children to be ‘conformed’ to the image of Christ. What was the ‘form and image’ of Christ? A servant.

The highest position in the Kingdom of God is that of a servant.

*“And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” Matthew 19:28-30*

Jesus had every right to be ministered to and ‘get,’ but instead He took on the form of a servant and ‘gave.’

If we are to be effective in our work as teachers and counselors, we must literally invest our lives in others.

## **In Conclusion**

- Prepare your hearts before the Lord ...
- Go deep into the goldmine of God’s Word ...
- Obey every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of God ...
- Invest your life in the lives of others ...

*“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”*

*Psalm 1:1-3*

[Thank you for reading these teaching notes from more than 40 years ago. My prayer is they will be a blessing to you and your ministry.]