

Getting to the Heart Introduction to Lay Counseling and Discipleship

I. The Role of a Spiritual Leader in Discipleship and Lay Counseling:

A. Life on Life: How and where does counseling and discipleship happen?

Do you see yourself as one of God's instruments or merely as a conduit—a passive channel connecting people to “real” instruments of God? Do you assume that you need the help of your pastor, elder, or a professional counselor to bring about godly change in someone's life?

Scripture is filled with many examples of “life on life” discipleship. More than just leading hurting people to resources, these examples show intentional Christian relationships as the means God uses to grow his people.

Randy Pope put it this way:

Life-on-life discipleship is not curriculum-on-life. We believe that discipleship happens because of relationships, not because of books or materials. There is something organic that takes place in discipleship even as one works through engineered content. Although there is a learning component to discipleship, the focus is on living and sharing truth, not merely learning it.

The theology behind these relationships is profound. Through the mediation of the Spirit, we can embody Christ to one another in a way that can only be described as sacramental (see “Life on Life” handout for fully developed idea). As Martin Luther said:

Now this is the fruit, that even as we have eaten and drunk the body and blood of Christ the Lord, we in turn permit ourselves to be eaten and drunk, and say the same words to our neighbor, Take, eat and drink; and this by no means in jest, but in all seriousness, meaning to offer yourself with all your life, even as Christ did with all that he had, in the sacramental words.

This doesn't just take place in the midst of formal ministry, but can happen in any number of occasions:

- Intentional one-on-one discipleship/mentoring relationships
- Discipleship groups
- Community groups
- In the context of friendships with other members

It must begin by demystifying concepts like “counseling” that have grown into a professionalization and excluded our role as God's instruments. Often we can play the role of friend and support person, but limit ourselves to pointing people to help rather than being used by God to bring about change. Paul Tripp writes,

In personal ministry, I want to bring more than a heart of compassion, a willingness to listen, and a commitment to help bear someone's burden...I

want to bring the heart-changing truths of Scripture to people in the midst of their situations and relationships.

B. The Balcony Paradigm

Often the struggles that a Christian faces is only perceived on the surface. The tangible, visible issues like social, economic, political, and material needs appear to be the real problem. Yet, in reality, there is an underlying cause of sin and suffering that the Christian is blind to. The role of the spiritual leader is to help them see the story behind the story, to get a **balcony** perspective.

Balcony metaphor (from Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*)

"We call this skill 'getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony,' an image that captures the mental activity of stepping back in the midst of action and asking, 'What's really going on here.'"

The spiritual leader is someone who can see things from the balcony. Or, to put it in biblical categories, the spiritual leader functions like a **prophet** providing the vantage point of God.

Walter Brueggemann describes this person as a poet-pastor who confronts us with the *"ready, steady, surprising proposal that the real world in which God invites us to live is not the one made available by the rulers of this age. The preacher has an awesome opportunity to offer...an existence shaped by the news of the gospel...a voice that shatters settled reality and evokes new possibilities."*

From the vantage point of God, the spiritual leader can begin to do the following:

- Adjust expectations
- Revise core values
- Challenge and adjust standard operating procedures, cultural norms
- Step out of the fog and see the greater war

II. Life's Issues are Gospel Issues

It is easy to blame our situation for our stress, anger, depression, fear, lust, etc. Just dealing with the "dance floor" issues will never bring real change and at worst can turn one into a legalist, judgmental and hardened to the gospel.

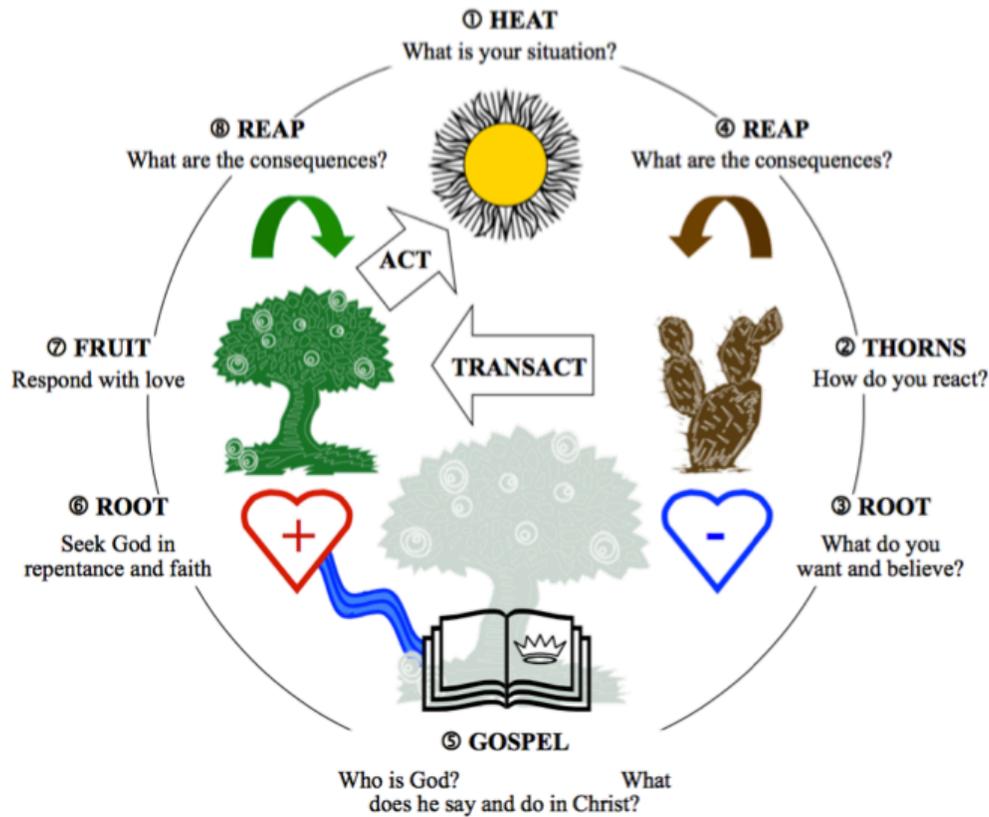
A. The Heart: Getting to the Root of Life's Issues

This means that we must be careful to dig deeper beyond the situation as "the cause" of our sin. The root of sin is always a heart issue.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

One implication of this passage is that you can face any situation and not sin. Our situations might trigger our sin, but only because there is an underlying issue of our heart. That issue is a lie that we tell ourselves about God and/or ourselves.

The following image from Tripp and Powlison illustrate this point:



B. Idolatry: the sin beneath all sins

1 John 5:21 *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*

Created to Worship

We were created to worship God. When sin entered the world that God given function did not cease to exist. We still constantly worship. We worship almost any thing, aside from God.

“The human heart is a factory of idols. Every one of us is, from his mother’s womb, expert in inventing idols.” John Calvin

Romans 1:18-25 [18] *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish*

hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

[24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Colossians 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

“Pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly; whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of.” – Puritan Matthew Henry

Making Good Things into Idols

Mark Driscoll has summarized idolatry in the following statement: *“Idolatry taking a good thing and making it a god thing and then it becomes a bad thing.”*

Idols are good things in the wrong relationship to God. This is why idolatry is so easy to slip into and so desirable when committing. It makes them into ultimate things and begins to define our identity, meaning, worth in terms of it.

(Charts on next page taken from Timothy Keller’s book *Gospel in Life*)

"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have power and influence over others."	(Power idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am loved and respected by _____."	(Approval idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have this kind of pleasure experience, a particular quality of life."	(Comfort idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of _____."	(Control idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... people are dependent on me and need me."	(Helping idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... someone is there to protect me and keep me safe."	(Dependence idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone."	(Independence idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am highly productive and getting a lot done."	(Work idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am being recognized for my accomplishments, and I am excelling in my work."	(Achievement idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions."	(Materialism idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am adhering to my religion's moral codes and accomplished in its activities."	(Religion idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... this one person is in my life and happy to be there, and/or happy with me."	(Individual person idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I feel I am totally independent of organized religion and am living by a self-made morality."	(Irreligion idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior."	(Racial/cultural idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... a particular social grouping or professional grouping or other group lets me in."	(Inner ring idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me."	(Family idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... Mr. or Ms. 'Right' is in love with me."	(Relationship idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am hurting, in a problem; only then do I feel worthy of love or able to deal with guilt."	(Suffering idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my political or social cause is making progress and ascending in influence or power."	(ideology idolatry)
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have a particular kind of look or body image."	(Image idolatry)

If you circled one of the first four on the previous list, the following table may help you think through some of the issues involved.

If you seek	Your greatest nightmare	People around you often feel	Your problem emotion
POWER (Success, winning, influence)	Humiliation	Used	Anger
APPROVAL (Affirmation, love, relationships)	Rejection	Smothered	Cowardice
COMFORT (Privacy, lack of stress, freedom)	Stress, demands	Neglected	Boredom
CONTROL (Self-discipline, certainty, standards)	Uncertainty	Condemned	Worry

Now that you've answered the questions above, look for common themes. What things tend to be too important to you? What are your idols?

:: Confront Your Idols ::

1. Name your idol(s) out loud.
2. Confess your hearts dependence on your idol(s) to God and someone else.
3. Repent, or turn away from, the idol(s) in your life.
4. Rejoice, or take joy in, the absolute certainty of Jesus' mastery of your life.
5. Replace your idol(s) with a renewed passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ.