

# PERCEPTIONS

## Christian Counseling Parallels Christian Discipleship

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“Do you really believe people can change?” It’s something I have been asked many times over the years by people struggling with the hope or belief that they, or their family member, will be able to change their lives for the better. “Yes, I have no doubt about it,” is my response. Everything I believe as a professional counselor and a minister of the Gospel over the last twenty-five years says “Yes” to the possibility of someone being able to experience change in his or her life. In fact, I have found when combined with faith in Christ, the work of counseling becomes even more effective.

I realize that last statement might surprise some people who may think professional counseling and faith do not go together. If that is the case, it is most likely due to the fact that many people do not know exactly what is involved in the counseling process outside of the walls of the church. To be completely honest, a number of years ago when I was a young pastor, I too was suspicious of the notion of sending my parishioners to a “counselor” or even going to one myself during a period I was experiencing professional burnout and depression. The reason for my distrust was that I was concerned that my

parishioners might be led away from trusting God and relying on their faith and taught that they didn’t need to cultivate their faith. I was wrong.

Of course there are some in the field of counseling and psychology who see no need for anyone’s God or faith; this is certainly not the typical response one would receive. Just the opposite would often be true. Now more than ever professionals in the field are trained to understand the value of a person’s faith and to be sensitive to integrating the person’s faith into the counseling process. Many, like me, received their graduate or doctoral degree from a seminary or Christian institution where the mixing of counseling theories and techniques with Biblical truths is strongly taught.

This is where I first realized that what we often call “Christian counseling” closely parallels Christian discipleship. Briefly stated, Christian discipleship is the teaching and learning of how to live-out one’s faith. The American Counseling Association (ACA) defines counseling this way, “Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals.”

But how do these blend? There are better and lengthier explanations, but my way of explaining it is this way: When a professional counselor combines his or her training with an awareness that the will of God and the Word of God are of the utmost importance to the counseling process, and begin to incorporate them into the process of guiding and helping the client reach his or her goals, Christian counseling has begun to take place. In this work the client is assisted in reaching relational, emotional, career, wellness goals and more with an understanding of how these pursuits blend with the living out of their faith.

Consequently, if you’re concerned that going to see a counselor to help address an issue or a problem in your life is going to result in you being encouraged to lay on a couch and talk for endless hours to a therapist about how much you hate your mother, or be taught you don’t need God or faith, or learn to blame the world for the way you are or what has happened to you, I would venture to say you will be pleasantly surprised.