

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-18 Temptation: No One Understands

Often the first to respond to a person's distress are close friends and family members. Many of these people, however, have very little experience in helping in a crisis situation. They love and care for the person and want to 'fix' what they think is 'broken.' Sometimes their advice can be judgmental and threatening. Often their advice is unwelcome and not helpful to the person in need of counseling. It may be seen rather as blaming or accusing the person in need. Too often advice is given before someone really listens to the person or finds out what the crisis is. Too quickly a friend or family member may say, "I told you this would happen if you did not change your ways." Or with a confident voice they declare, "I knew this would happen."

As a Christian adviser or leader, you should listen first. Then ask helpful questions to clarify what the person is feeling. Do not adopt a superior or know-it-all attitude. Let the person explain. A Christian counselor must keep an open heart and patiently wait for the person to speak. He or she should not jump to conclusions or try to make a judgment about what is causing the person's distress.

Friends can offer solutions and present reasons for a crisis, but may not be able to actually provide help. Because they do not know what else to do, they may just spout out some quick advice. This may ease the adviser's discomfort in the situation, but may be a very premature conclusion. When someone is in crisis, it is the time to listen and offer them support. As you understand the need, you can better rely on the Holy Spirit. He will help you provide support for the person bearing this burden.

The Book of Job describes the conversation between God and Satan concerning Job's faithfulness. We know what neither Job, nor his wife, nor his friends knew. God and Satan were discussing the character of Job. God saw Job as a faithful and just servant. Satan claimed that Job only served God because God had caused him to prosper. He believed that if God would take his hand off Job, he would be no different than a nonbeliever. Only the listener knows about the challenge given by Satan to God, and how God met that challenge.

One day the angels came to present themselves before Yahweh, and Satan also came with them. He had been roaming back and forth on the earth. Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of Yahweh (Job 1:6-12). Satan struck Job's oxen, donkeys, sheep, camels, and servants. He also caused a fierce wind to collapse a house and kill Job's children. Job mourned, but still praised and worshiped Yahweh.

Later Satan again came to God's throne and asked to take away Job's health. God allowed it, but Satan was not allowed to take Job's life. The great question was whether Job would be faithful, or whether he would curse God. Because his confidence in Job was solid, Yahweh allowed the testing to take place.

Job's crisis was to continue to follow God, after losing his family, fortune, and livelihood. Humans who are in need often turn to their family and friends for support. If the support is misguided, it offers little comfort to that needy person. Job's three friends came uninvited to offer counsel during his temptation. After observing Job for seven days and nights, they asked, "Would it grieve you if we spoke to you?"

The first friend offered this judgment: "As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it" (Job 4:8).

The next friend gave his counsel: "When your children sinned against God, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin." He also said, "Surely God does not reject one who is blameless or strengthen the hands of evildoers" (Job 8:4, 20). The third friend agreed with the first two, that Job's problem surely had come on him because of sin, either his or his family's.

Job's wife was not so concerned with the reasons, but only with what Job should do. She said, "Are you still maintaining your integrity, or believing in your innocence? Curse God and die!" Without the same confidence in God as her husband Job, she had given up all hope. Job asked her whether they should accept only good from God, and not trouble. Job did not sin in what he said (Job 2:9-10).

The counsel Job received was based on people's opinions and observations. They gave their advice before understanding the nature of the crisis. Their advice was a judgment of Job's behavior. Before giving counsel, try to understand the crisis from the point of view of the person in the struggle. Often untrained counselors try to give the solution to a problem before they have really understood what that problem is. Family or people who do not know the person may give advice based on what they have heard about them. It may be someone's opinion or accusation. The information did not come from the person himself.

Someone may give advice on situations they do not understand and have little experience with. They may have never faced such a struggle, so they cannot know what the needy person is going through. The following two simple steps will help in understanding and providing guidance for a person in need:

First, start a conversation with the person seeking counsel. Use open-ended questions that will help you gather information. These questions will help you understand and give godly counsel. Many times the answer to a crisis will come to the person in need as they tell their story. Such questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no will allow the counselor to listen. Then the person and his counselor can understand the issues together. As they understand, the Spirit of God will provide a solution. That solution could be to learn to tolerate the crisis. The Bible makes clear that, "No temptation [test] has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. ... he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1Cor 10:13).

Second, seek in your questions to get to know this person, not just the details of the crisis. Open conversation between a counselor and the person in need, will lead to understanding the test.

It may suggest ways to gain the ability to overcome it. The goal is to have open two-way communication. Ask questions such as, “How do you feel about what you are facing?” Also ask, “What have you done to understand this crisis?” Or, “Tell me what you think would help you bear this crisis.” When the person in need and the helper agree on the nature of the problem, a way to tolerate or overcome the crisis can become more likely.

This lesson is **important** because it illustrates the scriptural truth that whenever we have trials and temptations, God will provide a way of escape.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that in times of crisis, a godly counselor should listen first, learning about the person, and then the crisis. Only then can they offer godly encouragement and guidance based on God’s promises, not personal opinions or outward appearances.

To **review** this lesson, answer the following questions:

1. What can we, as godly counselors, do when someone is in a crisis? [Pause]
A. If you said that we can offer support by first listening, you are correct.
2. What is an important truth to remember, for a person giving crisis counseling? [Pause]
A. If you said, “We need to listen to what the person in need believes the problem is,” you answered correctly.
3. What happens when the helper and the person in need agree on the nature of the problem?
[Pause]
A. If you answered that a way to tolerate or overcome the crisis becomes more likely, you are right.

The **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story of Job and his friends, so you can tell it to someone who might need encouragement. Then share a testimony from your own life of a crisis you faced. Tell the person what God has done in your life and what has happened in your own crises.