

an essay:

REDEEMING THE TIME - SOLUTION FOCUSED BRIEF COUNSELING

Robert Baral, Chaplain resident
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I. REDEEMING THE TIME

The Lord counsels us through Saint Paul in EPHESIANS 5:15-16, “See therefore, brethren, how you walk circumspectly: not as unwise, But as wise: redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”¹ Time is precious. Every moment that The Lord gives us the breath of life by His Spirit is a Divine Gift. Every meeting between two living souls is precious. Every circumstance is pregnant with opportunity to do GOD’s will. This is especially so in pastoral care when the caregiver is given a limited time and number of visits to minister to those in distress, such as is common in hospital Chaplaincy.

II. SOLUTION FOCUSED BRIEF COUNSELING

Solution-focused brief counseling in the preciously time-limited encounter between helper and sufferer calls us to wisely redeem the time at hand. It requires the active participation of the sufferer. It requires non-coerced consent within relationship. It calls for the one carrying the problem to be voluntarily and actively seeking out resources and implementing daily solutions. The sufferer may be assisted in identifying goals and building a plan of care, but their effectiveness depends upon the sufferer’s insight and motivation. It can not externally forced, but must be internally sought.

Russell Sabella, PhD, has designed the “Solution Focused Brief Counseling” model with this in mind. Emphasis is not on the problems, but on the solutions. Clients are “encouraged to think about times when their problems did not exist... and how to recreate such circumstances in their present situations. Focus is on the client’s strengths and abilities, rather than their weaknesses. Solutions are derived by clients themselves and therefore, not only are they more involved in their success, but the solutions fit their unique lifestyles. Finally, because the clients find their own solutions that work, often self-esteem is increased.”² It is better to teach a hungry man to fish, than to make him dependant on constant handouts.

III. THE BRIEF COUNSELING ENCOUNTER

We may discern the need for the counselor to enter into the sufferer’s story with a set of guiding principles of facilitating, but without a preconceived agenda of imposed fixing: 1. What is the primary issue identified by the client? 2. What is the impact of this primary issue on the daily life of the client? 3. What is the most important goal to be set in order to overcome the primary issue? 4. How can the client best identify and frame that goal? 5. How is the client to carry out the cure from day to day?

We may identify a model question for each of these steps: 1. What is the most pressing problem that has brought you to seek out counseling? 2. How has this most significant problem made your everyday life most difficult for you? 3. What is the most important goal for you now to overcome this problem? 4. What would attaining this

¹ 1, DRA, EPHESIANS 5:15-16.

² 2, Sabella, “Solution Focused Brief Counseling.” “How does this approach differ from other counseling approaches?” p 2.

goal to overcome this problem look like for you? 5. What daily plan of care can you put together from your strengths and resources to meet this goal?

IV. “SMART” GOALS

Goals need to be down to earth, relevant and doable in the sufferer’s real world of daily struggles. Arina Nikitina’s “SMART Goal Setting” acronym offers us this model: “Specific; Measurable; Attainable; Realistic; Timely:” Specific - Goals should “focus our efforts and clearly define what we are going to do.” Measurable - Goals should “establish concrete criteria for measuring progress.” Attainable - Goals should “stretch you slightly so you feel you can do it and it will need a real commitment from you.” Realistic - Goals should “be realistic for you and where you are at the moment.” Timely - Goals should be set in a time frame that “gives you a clear target to work towards.”³

V. THE DAILY BATTLE BELONGS TO THE CLIENT

1. If the heart of pastoral counseling is listening carefully and reflecting back, the counselor is most in need of offering a non-judgemental listening presence. The counselor’s task is to help the client break down the problem into clear and manageable parts. 2. It is the place of the sufferer, not the helper, to discern where the problem inflicts the greatest pain. Insight and control belong to the client, not the counselor.

3. The goal must be the property of the client, and not the counselor, based on the client’s self identified strengths and resources. But if existing strengths and resources are inadequate, he or she may need to be encouraged to think outside the box. 4. The task of the counselor is to help the sufferer identify that goal in concrete “SMART” terms: Specific; Measurable; Attainable; Reasonable; Timely. 5. The sufferer must be fully invested in carrying out the care plan daily. It is for him or her to do the daily work, and not the pastoral caregiver.

VI. IN CONCLUSION

Often today time and opportunities to offer counseling to the suffering is limited. This is especially common in hospital Chaplaincy. So the need is pressing to help clients identify their own realistic goals, develop their own doable care plans and utilize their own resources and skills, which can enable them to recover from and overcome problems in their daily lives. When appropriate, “Solution Focused Brief Counseling” can offer such a model of hope that enables counselors to better redeem the time on behalf of those temporarily placed in their pastoral care by the hand of The Lord.

³ 3, Nikitina, “SMART Goal Setting.”

VII. REFERENCES

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