

# “Elders and Counseling”

By Prof. B. Gritters

Sponsored by Hudsonville PRC Consistory

Sunday, 2PM, October 7, 14, 21, November 4

**Class Overview: *The Lord willing, we will treat the following topics, subject to the will of those who attend:***

Week #1 (Oct 7): The *Need for* and the *Ability of* Others (elders especially) to Help Pastors in Counseling

1. Pastors are not able to handle all the counseling needs in a church. Statistics in the PRC.
2. Elders are called to do this work, but are qualified for it, too. The congregation must learn this.
3. Scripture teaches that all the members have a “competency to counsel.” If so, elders certainly do.
4. How, specifically, can the elders take on this work in their office?
  - a. Elderly, shut-ins, etc.
  - b. Counseling with the minister
  - c. Supervising the counseling done by professionals

Week #2 (Oct 14): The *Elements* of a Good Counseling Session/Visit

1. How to schedule meetings; how often to meet.
2. An outline of any visit should include.... How to make an agenda.
3. The absolute necessity of using Scripture. And how to use it.
4. Developing the skill to listen in order to make judgments. Taking notes....
5. Giving assignments to the members we counsel.
6. Footnote: May an elder counsel a woman? Alone?

Week #3 (Oct 21): *Change* in Counseling: The Primary (and Hopeful!) Doctrine of *Conversion*

1. Most of counseling involves dealing with problems that require *change*...
2. The doctrinal foundation of our approach to change.
3. Six essential elements from LD 33.
4. How to require change. How much pressure may be exerted.
5. When to bring to the body of the elders for discipline?
6. How to instill hope in the struggling people of God.

Week #4: (Nov 4): *Marriages*: Problems and Prevention (final topic subject to change, depends on elder’s wishes)

(notice the “off-week.” I will be in Redlands on October 28, DV. Thus, the last meeting is November 4).

Please invite others who may be interested in this class. It is not limited to elders or prospective elders.

**Basic Books:** (more suggestions for books in specific areas will come with later classes)

1. **Paul David Tripp**, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*. One of the nicest books from a biblical perspective. The book I now require students to read. There is a study guide and a leader's guide (Facilitator's guide) to help work through the book. Perhaps next year this group would want to have this book alone as the focus of the study.
2. **Jay E. Adams**, *Competent to Counsel*. The *first* good book in the past 2 generations that promoted biblical counseling over against secular psychology, and addressed counseling from a very *biblical* viewpoint. First published in 1970, the book was the standard for many years in conservative Christian circles. It's weaknesses are that 1) it's a little dated, and 2) it takes a little too simplistic view of many problems. Examples: Adams believes that any problem should be solved in 12 visits, and that all depression that is not obviously physically caused is cured by simple repentance and faith. But the book is excellent for the basics of Christian counseling. Other books and pamphlets (many!) by Adams are worth picking up. Adams has all kinds of very practical advice for counseling, like giving homework, setting up a "discussion table," making an agenda for your meetings, etc.
3. **John MacArthur, Jr.**, *Our Sufficiency in Christ: Three Deadly Influences that Undermine your Spiritual Life*. MacArthur is a Calvinistic Baptist, popular radio preacher and writer, who has written a nice book reminding that the help people need is in Christ. Some of the chapter headings include, "Does God Need a Psychiatrist?" and "Psychological Sanctification." Don't be intimidated by the titles; MacArthur writes for the common man.
4. **Wayne Mack**, *Strengthening Your Marriage*. Mack was one of Jay Adams' early disciples, who wrote a nice workbook to use for dealing with marriage problems. As elders address *specific* problems that they see in the marriage, they can use this book at the same time for assignments, to go through marriage in a systematic way, so that other problems may reveal themselves that may have been hidden.
5. **Edward Welch** is worth reading on any subject he tackles, and his book in depression is no exception. It's called *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness*. Other books by Ed Welch that *every* consistory library ought to have: a) *Blame It On the Brain: Distinguishing Chemical Imbalances, Brain Disorders, and Disobedience*; (this book helps sort out the difference between problems that are obviously sinful, obviously not caused by sin, and those that are in between) b) *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel*; c) ***When People Are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man.***

**Web-sites:**

The **Christian Counseling Education Foundation** (CCEF) has one of the most helpful sites available.

<http://www.ccef.org/> The CCEF is now publishing their journal for free—you can download any article you want, or read it on-line. They no longer finance their publication from subscriptions. Go to their web-site (Google "CCEF" and it will come up instantly) and go to "RESOURCES." Under "Topics" you find a listing of everything from "Additions" to "Work" and everything in-between, like "Family," "Marriage," "Pornography," "Eating Disorders," "Medications," etc. Under each of these headings is at least one article written (usually) from a Reformed perspective. You could begin with an article about *counseling and the church*, found here: <http://www.ccef.org/jbc/pastor-counselor>. It's a very important article about how the church, pastor, and elders need to take the active and primary role in counseling their members. Another very helpful article, for example, that discusses the role of medications in depression is by Mike Emlet called, "Listening to Prozac... and to the Scriptures." But there are many more here.

# **“Elders and Counseling”**

(Outline Notes)

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**Week #1: The Need for and Ability of Others (elders especially) to Help Pastors in Counseling**

## **Introduction:**

- A. One great goal
- B. A great need, given the size of the average PRC

## **I. Thesis: If the non-elder is able to counsel, God assures us as elders that we are able.**

- A. First, Christians who are not elders are able to counsel.
  - 1. This is a basic Reformation (Reformed) teaching!**
  - 2. Scriptural evidence** (4 important texts, both to memorize and to teach the people of God)
  - 3. Important *applications* for our present subject (that is, seeing to the care of *all* the members):**
- B. Second, elders are both called to and qualified for this important work.
  - 1. Their calling to do this work is sometimes questioned....**
  - 2. We remind ourselves of the Form for Installation and the Church Order, as well as Scripture**

## **II. Three Areas the Elders can Begin**

- A. First, regarding widows, widowers, elderly and shut-in visits.
  - 1. The great need here....**
  - 2. Practical advice for these visits**
    - a.
    - b.
    - c.
    - d.
- B. Second, counseling with the minister, “in tandem” with the minister.
  - 1. The great need here...**
  - 2. Advice for implementing this practice:**
    - a. Choose the elder for ability, experience, knowledge of the case, etc; not placement in a “district”

- b. The elder prepares for the visit and e-mails suggestions to the pastor
- c. The elder takes his own notes, contributes his own part of the counsel (but lets minister lead)
- d. The elder closes with prayer and leaves with the member.

**3. Benefits here are enormous—more than we might first think.**

- a. For the elders
- b. For the minister
- c. For the members, above all:

C. Third, preventative counseling, especially for covenant marriages (save for 4<sup>th</sup> session depending on time)

**1. The need here increases; marriage problems are many and severe.**

- a. Marriage problems are exhausting for ministers. They “drain” him. Some cases he must take.
- b. But “preventative medicine” may be in order here, too.
- c. The Consistory assigns “mentors” to each newly married couple.

**2. How to implement such:**

- a. First, determine who may be appointed “mentors” for the young married couples.
- b. Second, determine (from the minister’s pre-marriage sessions) the subjects to discuss
- c. Third, let the “older women” of the congregation use their God-given abilities especially here

**III. Discussion about utilizing “professional counselors.”**

A. There are times when consistories judge this to be necessary

**1. My judgments have changed over the years... from idealism to optimism to realism (?)**

**2. In what cases should consistories use (or require) professional counseling?**

B. If professional counselors are used, the elders should keep in mind the following:

**1. First, always counsel along-side-of the professional. Never “pass off” the sheep these others.**

**2. Second, direct the members, if possible, to someone you know to be competent and sound. Ask:**

- a. What is your basic approach to counseling?
- b. How will your treatment differ from that of a non-Christian?
- c. What is your view of the relationship between “mental health” and sin? (these questions
- d. Do you use the Bible in counseling? come from an area
- e. Will you work with a psychiatrist if you believe medicine is necessary? Christian professional)
- f. What are your views on marriage, divorce, and remarriage?
- g. What is your perspective on the theory of repressed memory?

**3. Third, have the member sign a “release of information” form with the counselor for you.**