

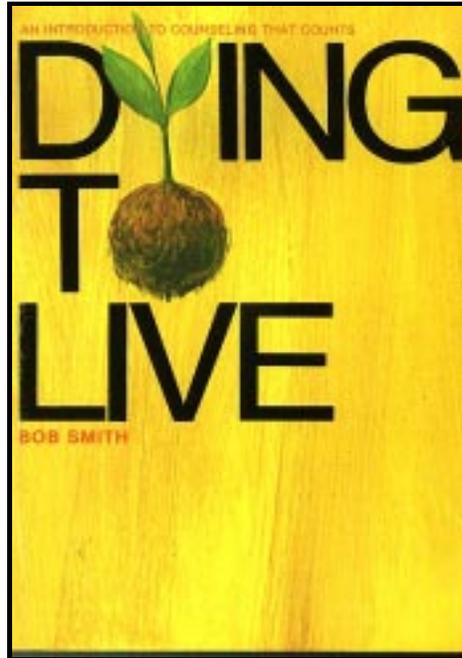
Dying to Live

by Bob Smith

A Peninsula Bible Church Founding Father writes on Biblical Counseling Principles. First published 1976.

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Bob Smith was one of the five founders of Peninsula Bible Church of Palo Alto, California. As pastor and elder he specialized in scriptural counseling, expository teaching, home Bible class development, and church government.



Acknowledgement

To the two Mary's: Mary Ann Barnett and Marylou Roe, two faithful women whose initiation and operation of the Compassion Corps at Peninsula Bible Church has conclusively proved the thesis of this book long before it was written. And to all those committed Christians who are engaged in a fruitful counseling ministry--scared, but not scared out of this most necessary aspect of the ministry of the saints, because they keep listening to and trusting the Wonderful Counselor.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counselor...
(Isaiah 9)

Contents

[Foreword](#)

[Preface](#)

I. A Biblical Basis Of Counseling

Considering the possibilities of Christians really becoming available to God in his business of making men whole.

[Chapter 1. Comes the Revolution!](#)

[Chapter 2. A Ministry of the Saints](#)

[Chapter 3. Preview of the Process](#)

[Chapter 4. In the Beginning](#)

[Chapter 5. The Psychology of Sin](#)

II. Understanding Man And His Problems

Using the inside information God has revealed to us in his Word about the nature of man and how to handle a major problem--the flesh

[Chapter 6. Man--As Seen by Man](#)

[Chapter 7. Man As God Sees Him](#)

[Chapter 8. The Enemy Within](#)

[Chapter 9. Death and Freedom](#)

III. The Therapy Of Redemptive Truth

Making men whole (including ourselves) through the application of God's redemptive Word. Dealing with the major issues of life in ways that make life worth living

[Chapter 10. Spirit, Soul, and Body](#)

[Chapter 11. Moving toward Mental Health](#)

[Chapter 12. Healing Hurting Hearts](#)

[Chapter 13. Entering God's Rest](#)

[Chapter 14. Identity and Identification](#)

[Appendices A-F](#)

*And may the God of peace himself fulfill his good purposes
in your life to the very end for which he made you,
and may your entire being--spirit, soul and body--
be kept free of reproach and wholly satisfactory to him
in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ upon his arrival.*

Faithful is the one calling you, who surely will do it!

(1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, freely translated)

Foreword

Since World War II we have witnessed a rapidly growing interest in mental health and its many aberrations. The number of people involved in the mental health field has increased to a degree that would have been unthought of thirty years ago. Characteristic of this burgeoning field has been the great variety of theoretical systems proposed as a means to understand and explain poor mental health, or even to deny that poor mental health exists. Methods of evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment are so varied and numerous as to cause some professionals in the mental health field to describe the situation as "chaotic."

Why so many differing and often conflicting theoretical formulations and treatment modalities? The reason is obvious: none have proven themselves, except to their own most subjective adherents, to be clearly and

uncontroversially sound. In fact, the opposite is the case! Validation has been highly questionable in every instance due to inconsistent, unpredictable, and unmeasurable results.

Bob Smith, a pastor at Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, has had extensive experience in counseling and teaching the principles of counseling as found in God's Word. Here he discusses that "missing dimension" of mental health that has been so ignored and in most instances even denied by the professionals in the present mental health explosion. The "missing dimension" without which true mental health cannot exist!

DR. JOHN C. WAKEFIELD, M.D.

(Practicing psychiatrist in Los Gatos, California, trained in the Menninger School of Psychiatry)

Preface

Everyone's dying to live! But many today are just dying, period. Theirs is the walking death of futility and frustration, the utter boredom and pointlessness of existing without living.

The Lord Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life--the more abundant kind" (John 10:10b) . Yet many of us fail to realize the full potential of all means. But the promise of the Lord stands unabridged--waiting only to be claimed by faith. How to achieve some of that fullness of life--for ourselves and others--is the subject of this book.

Our social consciousness of a deeply hurting world keenly accentuated these days. To do something about it personally is the concern of every Christian heart, I believe--yet how to put in our time and energy where they really count is a common point of frustration for many of us. Our desire in this volume is to suggest some biblical ways we *can* effect healing in the lives we touch, by sharing the redemptive truth of God in a counseling ministry, as part of the ministry of the saints.

The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians, "So death is at work in us, but life in you" (2 Cor. 4:12). There are two kinds of dying. One, as we have mentioned, is the expression of futility and despair through failure to relate to the one who is to be our *life*, thus missing out on the fullness and fulfillment he gives. The other is dying to one's own ambitions and plans in favor of a better way, God's way, resulting in freedom to be a positive, constructive factor in every situation.

This second kind of dying thus becomes an expression of the *life* of Jesus Christ--for it's the very hallmark of the way he is and does. Could it be we need to die a little--our own selfish interests and pursuits, so that others who are "dying to live" might *live*?

Dear Brothers,

If a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path remembering that next time it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other's troubles and problems, and so obey our Lord's command. If anyone thinks he is too great to stoop to this, he is fooling himself. (Galatians 6:1-3, The Living Bible)

I. A Biblical Basis Of Counseling (Outline, Chapters 1-5)

Considering the possibilities of Christians really becoming available to God in his business of making men whole.

Chapter 1 Comes The Revolution!

Counselors Wanted
But Who Qualifies?
Revolution
A New Kind of Therapy--From an Old Book
Back to Basics

Chapter 2 A Ministry Of The Saints

The Basis for Confidence
Full of Goodness?
Filled with Knowledge
Able to Counsel
What Do We Say?
Wisdom and Power
Strength--But from Where?

Chapter 3 Preview Of The Process

A Simple Procedure
First--Listen!
With Compassion
Help Them Be at Ease
Identify with Them
Ask God for Wisdom
Highlight Results of Alternative Courses
Christ's Formula for Freedom
Help Them Discover
The Lord's Alternative to Failure
Don't Tell Them What to Do
Leave the Decision Squarely on Them
Remind Them They Will Live with Their Choice
Pray with Them and for Them
Now--The Hard Part

Chapter 4 In The Beginning

Who Started It?
But God, Who Is Great in Mercy
The Long Ending

Chapter 5 The Psychology Of Sin

Old Testament Concepts
The Rock of Truth
The Truth about Consequences
Tracking Down the Greek
The Tragedy of Greek Tragedy
Sin the New Testament
The Greeks Had a Word for It
The Savior's Word
Who Else Can "Fix Sin"?

Chapter One

Comes the Revolution!

Have you ever longed to be a more effective part of that body of Christians who enjoy a consistently redemptive ministry toward this old, bleeding world? There is such a group, you know--God's Compassion Corps, engaged in a wonderfully healing ministry to the many wounded and hurting ones who are all around us today. Their work is the follow-up on our Lord's own ministry to "...proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed..." (Luke 4:18).

I believe that it is God's desire for *all* who are Christ's own to engage in this redemptive program. Although it's certainly a privilege to be involved in God's work of healing, that privilege is not reserved for a select few. All Christians are uniquely qualified to be so employed by virtue of the inside information we have about life and the inner fortification we enjoy through the presence of our risen Lord. We shall attempt to document this premise from the Scriptures. It seems, though, that many of us are hesitant to make ourselves available and vulnerable to such a ministry--either because we feel it would be presumptuous to think we are qualified without professional training or because we think it might cost us too much. But the Lord of the church wants us to get over both these hurdles, at least to the point where we can say, "Lord, I'm willing to be convinced--just show me how it's possible. I'm available."

Counselors Wanted

No one has to be convinced these days that the whole world needs wise counsel. Psychiatrists, psychologists, and marriage and family counselors are doing a booming business.

Has God missed a cue somehow? Is he unaware and uncaring about the widespread human hurt and heartache? Is he deaf to the cries for help and the agony of despair? If you know the God of the Bible and if he is real and reigning, then you know such an idea is unthinkable.

Well, then, have we Christians missed it? I hate to say it, but I think we have. I think we have almost entirely missed God's plan for healing the world's hurts--largely through inattention to his Word on the subject. I say this not to condemn us but to alert us to the potent possibility that we *can* be God's Compassion Corps, and we can undertake this ministry of counseling with confidence.

We have been convinced in our day that counseling is only for the "pros," the psychologists and psychiatrists. Even pastors have been persuaded that counseling is a specialty in which they are largely incompetent--referrals by pastors to professional psychologists are common. If it is true that counseling is for "pros" only, whether psychologists or pastors, it would seem that the ordinary, plain-vanilla Christian has little or no opportunity to be a competent counselor. But if we dare to take seriously what the Bible says on this subject, we come up with a different answer: The counseling ministry is not only for professionals, but *all* Christians should be able to counsel with confidence.

But Who Qualifies?

When we asked a group of Christians: "Are you competent to counsel?" we got a wide variety of answers. Some thought it was a ridiculous question and didn't even dignify it with an answer; others started to mentally review their college course in psychology.

But one man answered, "I'm not, but Christ is."

What did he mean by that?

Well, knowing him, I think he meant, "By myself I'm not wise enough, but the Lord Jesus who lives in me can supply all I need through his Word and his Spirit to make me adequate."

This may seem far-out, but it's true. The Lord who indwells us is the One whom Isaiah calls, prophetically, "Wonderful Counselor," and he is the *only* one who is truly competent to counsel (see Isa. 9:6). But he makes us adequate as we draw on him. This great truth forms the basis of adequacy in any field of endeavor, but it is especially crucial in counseling.

In our Lord's words this truth is stated negatively in John 15:5: "Without me you can do nothing." Positively, it is put before us again in 2 Corinthians 3:5-6: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us our sufficiency is from God, who *has* qualified us to be ministers of a new covenant..." Are we qualified to counsel? The answer is: "Yes, as the Lord who lives in us makes us adequate, then we are qualified."

Revolution

The world view, however, is that counseling belongs in the hands of the professionals. As if to punctuate that idea, a recent headline blares: "Number Of Children In U.S. Seeing Psychiatrists Soars Dramatically.

We send even our children to psychiatrists. But in the world of *professionally* qualified counselors--particularly in the field of psychiatry--there is something of a revolution going on. To see what I mean by this, read William Glasser's *Reality Therapy*, from which I would like to quote. (Dr. Glasser is a psychiatrist, and this is a secular book, not written from a specifically Christian point of view.) Note what O. Hobart Mowrer (also a psychiatrist) says in the foreword to this book:

For more than a decade now it has been evident that something is seriously amiss in contemporary psychiatry and clinical psychology. Under the sway of Freudian psychoanalysis, these disciplines have not validated themselves either diagnostically or therapeutically. Their practitioners, as persons, have not manifested any exceptional grasp on the virtues and strengths they purportedly help others to acquire. And the impact of their philosophy of life and conception of man and society as a whole has been subtly subversive.

Remember, this is a psychiatrist speaking.

Because they were the main "losers," laymen were the first to become vocal in their discontent, distrust, and cynicism. But today there is a "shaking of the foundations" in professional circles as well. For example, a state hospital superintendent recently said to me, "Yes, we too think we have a good hospital here. At least we aren't doing the patients any harm. And that is progress." In the past, we psychiatrists have often spread the disease we were supposedly treating.

That, I submit, is quite a confession from someone in the world of psychiatry. That world is in the process of questioning its own premises, and Dr. Glasser has emerged from the "shaking of the foundations" with a new approach to therapy--new, that is, from the standpoint of classical psychiatry. But how new is it, really?

A New Kind of Therapy--From an Old Book

First of all, as I see it, his basic premise is *responsibility instead of* permissiveness. That indeed is a switch from traditional therapeutic approaches, particularly from modern interpretations and the end results of Freudian approaches.

From this base Dr. Glasser, revealing keen insight, points out some very fundamental needs of humanity. Although this is a secular book, Dr. Glasser points up some things that the Bible has been proclaiming all along.

For instance, he bases his therapy on the fact that *men need to love and be loved*. Does that sound like something you might have discovered in the Bible? He goes from there to the fact that *all of us need to feel a sense of worth*; we need to feel worthwhile to ourselves and to others. As a careful student of human nature, Dr. Glasser has discovered a truth that has been revealed in the Bible but ignored by much of the world for

centuries, and he builds his whole approach to counseling on these truths.

To quote *Reality Therapy* again: "At all times in our lives *we must have at least one person who cares about us and for whom we care ourselves. If we do not have this essential person, we will not be able to fulfill our basic needs*" (emphasis mine). With almost no effort, we can fill out Dr. Glasser's insightful words with the truth that we have. Who is he describing? Who is that "essential person"? In my book, his name is Jesus Christ--the one Person who is essential for all of us.

Then Dr. Glasser cites one essential characteristic this person must have: "*He must be in touch with reality himself and able to fulfill his own needs within the world*" (emphasis mine). Who does that describe? Do you know anyone other than our Lord who is fully in touch with reality and who can be completely fourfold in himself?

Dr. Glasser continues: "Without that key person through whom we gain the strength and encouragement to cope with reality, we try desperately in many unrealistic ways to fulfill our needs." Doesn't this perfectly describe people without Christ? I think so. It also fits Christians who are not drawing on his available strength.

Then Dr. Glasser adds: "Therefore, essential to the fulfillment of our needs is a person, *preferably a group of people* with whom we are emotionally involved from the time we are born until the time we die" (emphasis mine). He starts with "a person," whom I identify as Jesus Christ, then spreads out to a *group* of people. Now who might that be in our understanding? Wouldn't it be *the body of Christ*, God's family of believers?

On a secular level, Dr. Glasser is employing truth that you and I have learned from the Word of God. This is a tribute to his astuteness and shows us that in the field of psychology there is a swing back to a better basis of counseling, one related to truth we know from the Word of God.

But secular approaches still lack the basic ingredient--the one which makes it work. The Word of God adds that essential ingredient: "*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*" He's the One who can put it all together and make it work. In counseling, you and I can offer him, the Lord of life, as the one who is available to live in every man and woman, to become to each of us the Wonderful Counselor who is the answer to *all* our problems. Christians have a decided advantage in counseling, because *we have Christ*, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

Back to Basics

It seems that what has happened over the centuries, in effect, is a great robbery. The counseling ministry has been taken away from the people of God and given to professionals--first the professional clergy, then the professional psychologist--to the detriment of the whole race. As a result, the problems faced by pastors and psychiatrists alike have become an overwhelming burden.

What God wants, I believe, is to put the ministry of counseling back on a grass-roots level in which we are bearing one another's burdens and thus strengthening one another. Counseling should be a natural part of our Christian commitment. So it's important that we Christians don't draw back and say, "I don't know enough, I'm not professionally qualified," or "Not me, I don't want to have anything to do with that. It's going to cost me, so I won't get involved." It's true that a brother whom we are counseling may for a time depend rather heavily on us, but what we need to learn is to help him move from that temporary dependence on us to a clear, forthright dependence on Jesus Christ:

He has *all* the information and *all* the wisdom.
He is on twenty-four-hour duty--which we are not.
He is always available, never out to lunch, never on vacation.
He is the one who can do the job as no one else can.
He is the counselors' Counselor.
He is the Wonderful Counselor!

With all this going for us, let's not look to psychologists to do more than they can. Without Christ, they can go

only so far. Rather, let's accept the responsibility of a counseling ministry ourselves. It is clear to me that as Christians, we are not only competent to counsel but are *called* to counsel. This means that counseling is part of our *responsibility* as Christians, and, quite frankly, unless we do it, the job simply won't get done.

Online version originated June 19, 1997 by Lambert Dolphin (dolphin@best.com)

[Go to Chapter Two](#)