

Dear friend,

Every human being is a counselor. How can I say that? I say that because of how counseling; understood in its most basic form, can be defined. Counseling is the use of language to inform, motivate, help, persuade or influence another person. Every human being uses language like this. We regularly share values, information, emotions, opinions, desires, explanations of the world and moral judgments with one another for the purpose of influencing one another. The end to which we are seeking to influence others may not be very well defined or consciously thought out, but we all are aiming to influence others. Often we have more specific and clearly thought out goals for our counsel as when a parent is seeking to persuade a teenager of the value of keeping his or her room clean. The trouble we all face is evaluating whether or not the counsel we daily dispel is good counsel or bad counsel. The question facing each human being is not “do you want to be a counselor?” The question we each face is this, “What kind of a counselor do you want to be?”

Every Christian is under direct command to be a good counselor. Ephesians 5:29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths but only what is helpful for building others up, according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” The implication in this statement is that there is a way to speak, to use language that harms others and there is a way to speak that helps others. We are to consider the needs of others and then speak words that will help them or build them up in light of their particular circumstances and current condition. It is the ambition of every Christian to grow in our ability to restrain our mouths from uttering destructive words and to use our tongues to give constructive words. Here is the scary thing about being a human: all of our words are either destructive or beneficial. There are no neutral words (See Matthew 12:33-37 for further confirmation of this.).

I don't think there is any question but that the NT views the church as a community of people who are growing in their ability to use language for the good of one another. Hebrews 3:12-13 says, “See to it brothers that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God, but encourage one another, day after day, as long as it is still called Today, so that your hearts will not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Then 10:24-25 says, “Let us carefully consider one another for the purpose of provoking one another to love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

In these two passages we are told both the negative and positive goals of our good counsel. We are to use language in one another's life to prevent the hardening of hearts by the deceitfulness of sin and we are to counsel one another so that we live full of love for God and others that is acted out in good deeds. Notice our goal is not good self-esteem or mental health (whatever that is) or the alleviating of emotional distress. Our goal is to help one another hate sin and love God. The fact of the matter is that we are always influencing others to hate something and love something. The question is are we using our tongues to promote hatred of sin and love for God and people.

I don't know about you, but I don't feel very adequate in my “counseling”. I don't have trouble talking with people or sharing my ideas and thoughts in order to influence others. My dilemma is always, am I using my tongue for the good purposes that God wants me to use it? Am I using

my tongue to build others up or am I using it to destroy them? I yearn to be a good counselor and I yearn for each member of our congregation to become better counselors. That is why I am so excited that we have the opportunity to bring the “Changing Hearts, Changing Lives” seminar to Janesville, October 29-30. The goal of this seminar is exactly what we all need. It aims to help us understand why we are the way we are and then to help us learn to counsel one another so that all of us “...grow up and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” I trust that you are making plans to join us at the Holiday Inn Express Conference Center for this important seminar.

Yours for building up one another,