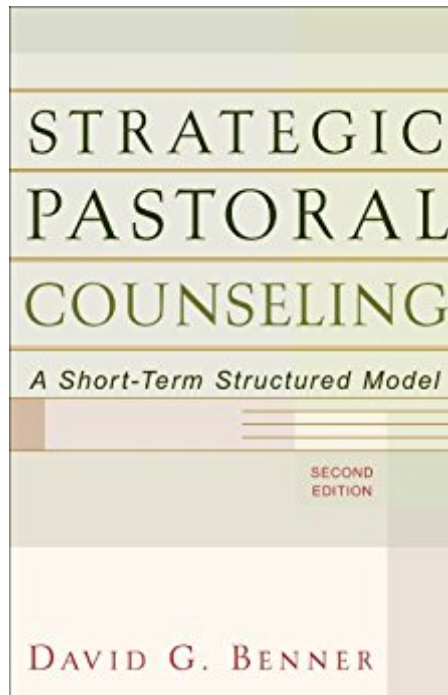




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# Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model



## Synopsis

Therapeutic counseling in a Christian context can be highly effective when it maintains narrowly focused goals in a time-limited setting. The details of this proven model of pastoral counseling are described in this practical guide. This second edition of *Strategic Pastoral Counseling* has been thoroughly revised and includes two new chapters. Benner includes helpful case studies, a new appendix on contemporary ethical issues, and updated chapter bibliographies. His study will continue to serve clergy and students well as a valued practical handbook on pastoral care and counseling.

## Book Information

File Size: 541 KB

Print Length: 160 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 0801026318

Publisher: Baker Academic; 2 edition (September 1, 2003)

Publication Date: September 1, 2003

Sold by:Â Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00B8541G0

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #215,088 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #73

inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Counseling #141 inÂ Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian

Books & Bibles > Ministry & Evangelism > Counseling & Recovery #164 inÂ Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Living > Counseling

## Customer Reviews

I enjoyed this book's ability to take effective counseling strategies and apply them to the pastoral environment. Few other texts treat seriously the need for properly trained counseling pastors, which is surprising since such a huge amount of the counseling that goes on in the world is done by

religious officials. The case study portions definitely made concrete the principles outlined in the rest of the book.

Pastoral Counseling and Soul care are worthy of regular assessment in the typical harried life of a pastor. For the purpose of clarification, Pastoral Care is an aspect of ministry that is mistakenly being relegated to somebody other than the pastor(s) - at least in title. This in no way precludes the pastoral staff from this inherent responsibility. As defined by Clinebell, "Pastoral Ministry ... includes such things as preaching, teaching, leading worship, administration, community service, leadership development, and, of course, pastoral care and counseling." This is all considered to be part of the necessary soul care of those we shepherd. David Benner, in *Strategic Pastoral Counseling*, broadly defines ministry as, "Anything that brings people into contact with God [and] nurtures the growth of their spirits and heals their soul. As such a couple of meaningful considerations offered to those who desire to strengthen their skills in this area: Speak little - listen much. Helpful advice from French theologian, Fenelon, who suggested that we, "think far more of understanding hearts and adapting yourself to their [those we counsel] needs than of saying clever things to them." Counseling is about being - not doing. Contrary to popular thinking, Benner reminds us, counseling is, "... not reducible, therefore, to telling a person what to do or what not to do." Moreover "it is not merely being; it is being with." The weight of offering your presence to those in need should not be minimized. Let's rediscover the value of pastoral care and counseling and continually invest in strengthening the spiritual health of our people.

I chose this book for a Counseling class I am teaching to second year ministerial students. It is clear and well written. David Banner provides useful information for the students as they develop their pastoral skills.

A comprehensive outlook of the skills and competencies of Pastoral Care which includes Pastoral Counseling. It distinguishes it clearly from Psychotherapy and other secular counseling disciplines, and cautions the pastoral counselor against 'taking on' cases outside of his/her competency. It encourages pastoral counselors to be informed and trained in psychotherapy and get acquainted with the code of ethics governing the discipline in order to maximize his/ her ministry. While this is so, I believe there is some level of negative commentary regarding psychotherapy which could be a 'turn-off' to those individuals who are not conversant/trained in the disciplines. Overall, an extremely useful text which every Pastor should have in his/her library.

Benner provides an excellent model for counseling with just enough counseling content and technique to communicate how it would work. From the back cover, Benner (Ph.D., York University) is Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Spirituality at the Psychological Studies Institute (Atlanta) and a practicing clinical psychologist. The author or editor of over twenty books, he is the founding director of the Institute for Psychospiritual Health. Benner's preface to his first edition (1992) defends the need for a new book on pastoral counseling, specifically the need for an approach to counseling that is explicitly Christian, holistic, pastoral, fruitful, disciplined, well-founded, and workable. His preface to the second edition (2003) highlights improvements over the first edition. The first chapter locates pastoral counseling in the context of Christian community. The second chapter focuses on how pastoral counseling differs from other kinds of counseling. The third chapter describes Benner's three-stage model for strategic pastoral counseling: encounter, engagement, and disengagement. The last two chapters provide cases studies. An appendix addresses ethical concerns in counseling. If all knowledge were organized into the categories of (1) revelation (religion), (2) speculation (philosophy), (3) investigation (science/wisdom), and (4) mystification (mysticism), then Strategic would fall squarely within the wisdom category since it is largely grounded in and directed toward how pastors, parishioners, and churches can function more wisely. Wisdom is therefore in the forefront. People need counseling (wisdom) because (1) they have made unwise choices and need to recover from them or (2) they are reacting unwisely to situations not of their choosing and need to learn how to react more appropriately. Pastors also need wisdom to know how to counsel more effectively. More specifically, they need a "wise" model for counseling. They need to know their limitations as counselors. They need to know the unique advantages and disadvantages inherent to pastoral counseling. And last but not least, they need to know how to counsel. Benner provides help for all these needs. That help involves a mix of biblical and secular wisdom -- (1) secular wisdom in terms of understanding the interplay of the social self, psychology, and sociology and (2) biblical wisdom in terms of evaluating and applying secular wisdom in counseling to help Christians facing problems. Biblical and secular wisdom, of course, can be brought to bear in many different venues. Benner is helpful in identifying those venues and in distinguishing pastoral counseling from other places of Christian help, such as Christian friendship, pastoral care, and spiritual direction. Secular wisdom is prominent but religious considerations are primary. Benner affirms Christian values as the overarching context for counseling. His use of scripture, however, is sometimes superficial in playing off biblical quotations without regard to their original meanings. For example, the Holy Spirit's help in knowing what to say in times of crisis (John

14:26) has nothing to do with pastoral counseling. Much of Benner's religious message though is grounded in a value system that is simply "humane" rather than explicitly Christian. For example, Clinebell's criteria for healthy religiosity (which Benner apparently approves) include 20 questions, none of which necessarily demands a uniquely Christian response. Such observations are not so much criticisms of Benner as they are a reflection of how difficult the task of Christianizing the secular substitute for religion (i.e., psychology) can be. Benner emphasizes spirituality in terms of three components: thoughts, emotions, and behavior. Although Benner identifies spiritual growth as the main and unique goal of pastoral counseling, the word "spiritual" is notoriously slippery. Apart from its mystical aspects, spirituality is most appropriately anchored in emotionally and behaviorally charged propositions about the meaning of things. Although spirituality is rooted in propositions, it is not merely cognitive because it does have behavioral and emotional components in addition to its mental aspects. None of this analysis of "spirituality" is necessarily Christian, but it is consistent with a Christian understanding of spirituality. Nor should any of the above diminish enthusiasm for Benner's book. His approach is well-suited and much needed by pastors. The notion of a religious status assessment is powerful. The discipline and practice of taking a person's religious history should be a mark of competence. The relative attraction of hurting people to pastoral counseling and the relative success of pastoral counseling compared to other sources should encourage those who practice it. The greater return on investment from short-term counseling (vis-a-vis long-term counseling) is counter-intuitive and Benner provides a necessary and worthy defense. Benner's observation that "people see what they are looking for" explains the blinding effects of both secular and religious professionalism. Secular counselors mostly see the distorting effects of religious beliefs -- hence their generally negative view of religion. If they are any negatives to posit about Benner's presentation, they generally lie in the inherent difficulty of contextualizing a secular discipline within a biblical worldview. Where contextualization is not possible, Benner usually comes down on the right side in such things as the rejection of a therapeutic approach to sin. He is also right in rejecting the compartmentalization of humanity that is so characteristic of secular approaches to counseling. The human mind understands itself in terms of a personal narrative, so many people can be greatly helped simply by "re-storying" themselves. Dysfunctional behavior does have payoffs. Counseling is a roller coaster -- up after the first visit and down after the second once the hard work begins. Values become destructive when they are elevated above their rightful place. Pastors should find all of these insights helpful. Sometimes though, Benner misses the mark a bit. Assessing an individual, for example, in terms of "how well faith is serving him" is too utilitarian to be biblical. Expressions of emotion can be cathartic, but they can also make individuals more practiced

in inappropriate expressions. Benner provides an excellent model for counseling with just enough counseling content and technique to communicate how it would work. Practitioners will have to fill in the gaps with their own practices and understandings of biblical and human nature. Some things I would add would include more attention to the problem of pride. Pride often surfaces in unexpected ways -- low self esteem may be traceable to self-punishment arising out of a prideful self-understanding of oneself. Use of emotional energy for positive purposes would also be powerful. Humans need emotional energy for motivation; and ironically, they get more energy from negative experiences than positive ones. Wisdom is needed to know how to use that energy in constructive ways. Gender counseling to address the distortions inherent to an increasingly androgynous culture would also be an intriguing approach to the problems of many people. Finally, special attention to the function of conscience in demanding confession, justification, reconciliation, and atonement may be one of the most unrecognized dynamics in counseling. As previously noted, Benner's intent in writing *Strategic Pastoral Counseling* was to produce a book on counseling that is explicitly Christian, holistic, pastoral, fruitful, disciplined, well-founded, and workable. He achieves those goals in a concise, readable way. -- Bill Brewer[...]

A great way to create boundaries around the Christian counseling process and to empower counselees to resourcefully use others in their lives and to take ownership of their own issues in order to attain to healing and wholeness. ~C

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