EASY EFFECTIVE COUNSELING: A STRATEGY FOR BUSY PASTORS

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DEDICATION

First of all, I am awe struck that my God and Father allowed me and enabled me to undertake this project. All glory and praise to Him.

To my wife, lover, and friend, Karen: You have been a constant inspiration to me and a support when I was weak. You have made me into much more than I ever thought I could be. I love you.

To my precious children, Karis, Kyle, and Koen: You are wonderful blessings from God, and I love you always.

To my parents, Gary and Janet: Thank you for your patience, forgiveness, and love. Thank you for bringing me up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

To my brothers, sisters, extended family, friends, and loved ones: Thank you for being my sounding board and for listening to my incessant ramblings. I know at times you must have thought I was crazy, but you listened anyway. Thank you for being a blessing to me and my family.

To my mentors, spiritual advisors, and pastors: Thank you for your guidance, prayers, and support. You often challenged me and pushed me. May I have the wisdom to help others in the ways you have shepherded me. Special thanks to Mary Kay White for being my proofreader.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this project to my mother-in-law. It would seem as if many sons-in-law have not been blessed in the way I have with a loving and godly mother-in-law. Without her, I would not have undertaken this topic. Thank you for your love and support. You are a blessing to me and my family.
ABSTRACT

EASY EFFECTIVE COUNSELING: A STRATEGY FOR BUSY PASTORS

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Pastors are expected to counsel various people with various problems. However, in most circumstances, pastors have little time to prepare for counseling sessions and cannot be long-term therapists. Therefore, it is critical for the pastor to be able to quickly and effectively give substantial guidance to counselees. The purpose of this project is to develop and implement a pastoral counseling program with a decision management focus. A survey will be conducted with at least one hundred (100) pastors who engage in counseling as part of their regular ministry duties. This project will develop and communicate a practical counseling approach for implementation by busy pastors and will be undergirded by case studies. Special attention will be given to developing an electronic tool for pastoral counseling.

Abstract length: 124.
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INTRODUCTION

On a Tuesday morning, Pastor John walks into his church office around 9 a.m. He has a few emails to read and answer as well as a couple of calls on his voice mail. As he begins his day, the receptionist calls his office and tells him that Tony, a member of the church, wishes to see him. Pastor John invites Tony into his office and asks Tony what he can do for him. Looking down at his shoes, Tony tells Pastor John that he needs help because his wife plans to leave him for another man.

Counseling is understood to be one of the duties in which the average evangelical pastor engages as part of performing his ministry to a local church assembly. However, many pastors are not trained to be counselors even with the plethora of information and works dedicated to the subject. A simple Internet search reveals the massive amounts of material available to the evangelical pastor. A lack of knowledge available on counseling subjects is not the problem. The problem many pastors find is that they are faced with counseling situations for which they do not have time to prepare. The case study discussed above is a situation in which any pastor could find himself. If the pastor cannot give help to a counselee at a moment’s notice, the counselee may leave disillusioned and dissatisfied. The counseling experience may impact the way the counselee views God and the Bible’s ability to help people solve their problems.

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1 David Benner, Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 13.

2 Ibid., 24-25.
Therefore, a critical issue is for the pastor to be able to give effective counsel to those who come to him for help. Paul tells Timothy to “Preach the message, be ready whether it is convenient or not, reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and instruction.” While this passage has often been applied to pulpit ministry, the larger context may be applied to other ministry areas including pastoral counseling. To “preach the message” is to “proclaim as a herald,” an idea traced to the time in which a herald proclaimed the coming of his sovereign. Likewise, the pastoral counselor proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ whenever and wherever. Pastoral counseling is rarely convenient, and the pastor is often unable to plan for such encounters. Pastoral counseling involves reproof, meaning “to convict of sin.” Pastoral counseling involves rebuke, meaning “censure.” Pastoral counseling involves exhortation, or “urge and encourage.” Furthermore, patience and instruction are essential to effective pastoral counseling. Due to the spontaneous nature of pastoral counseling, the effective pastoral counselor needs a clear plan for counseling, specific easily accessible information, a sound methodology bringing a counselee to a decision, and the ability to assist the counselee in managing the decision.

Statement of the problem

This project centers on understanding how contemporary evangelical pastors are counseling people who are unscheduled or where the problem is unknown. The pastoral

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3 2 Timothy 4:2, NET
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
counseling program developed in this project has a decision management focus. The project develops an electronic tool that encapsulates a pastoral counseling program and provides easy access to relevant counseling information.

Pastoral counseling helps and aids abound. Many books support the pastoral counselor, and university classes are offered pastors on current methods and strategies for counseling. However, the abundance of resources does not mean that pastors actually use them or that pastors have a plan of action for counseling encounters. Many times, the pastor has resources at his disposal and yet fails to use them because the utilization of the resource is not practical. Rarely do pastors articulate a plan for their counseling sessions. Most likely, the pastor relies on his own knowledge of the Bible and recollection of past learning as his major counseling source. Therefore, it is apparent that pastors need an organized, easily accessible counseling system which provides the information they need quickly and effectively.

Most times, pastors cannot be engaged in long-term counseling due to the nature of their position and are forced to limit their counseling sessions. Consequently, pastors cannot waste available time meandering down the counselee’s past. If an individual is undecided in his/her course of action, the pastor needs to move a person to a point of decision. Dr. Stone remarks, “Thought-out and decisive action leads to growth. In brief pastoral counseling, the need for action emerges almost immediately.” Then, the pastor helps the person manage his/her decision. Managing the decision is critical to the success of the counseling session. Stone writes, “Knowing about a problem but being unable to manage it is a common difficulty."

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8 Benner, Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model, 24-25.
9 Ibid., 26.
Often times a decision is made, but follow-through and management lacks substance. When management of the decision fails, the decision is empty. Pastors should be able to help people make a decision and then be able to give them practical things to do in order to manage the decision.

The problem with many pastoral-counseling sessions becomes pastors who are unable to adequately prepare for what they engage. Many times the pastor does not even know that the session is about to happen. Either the pastor chooses to put off the session, not necessarily a good option, or he engages the person needing help. If the pastor chooses to engage the person, he may face a difficult situation for which he may be ill prepared.

An analogy might be a family doctor who arrives at the hospital. He meets a nurse who takes him into an operating room where a patient is prepared for open-heart surgery. With no time to prepare, the family doctor is expected to save a man’s life by performing a heart transplant. The family doctor had one class about ten years ago on heart transplants, but he has never faced this situation. He cannot walk out of surgery to go get a book on how to do it. This dire situation has an uncertain outcome. The family doctor may or may not be successful.

The local church pastor is like the family doctor. Parishioners expect the local church pastor to do spiritual open-heart surgery without being able to adequately prepare for the procedure. Pastors face numerous unplanned situations for which they may be unprepared. They should not lose the opportunity by asking the counselee to “come back later”, nor is it practical to ask the counselee to wait while the pastor researches the situation. However, if the pastor can utilize an easily accessible resource via the Internet, perhaps a more productive and effective outcome takes place.

11 Stone, Brief Pastoral Counseling: Short-term Approaches and Strategies, 48.
The following describes special terminology used throughout this project: For the purposes of this project, the term counseling denotes pastoral counseling performed by a local church pastor. Location (i.e. church office) is not important, but rather the person doing the counseling, the pastor, is the focus. Pastoral counseling is spiritual in nature and practical in focus. Pastoral counseling focuses on bringing a person into proper relational alignment with God, with others, and/or with themselves. Oates writes, “…that person’s counseling becomes pastoral when the counselee or the counselor focuses the relationship upon the relation of God to the process of their lives.”\(^\text{12}\) Oates continues to define pastoral counseling by stating, “The awareness of God as reality makes counseling pastoral.”\(^\text{13}\) Additionally, Benner writes, “Pastoral counseling involves the establishment of a time-limited relationship that is structured to provide comfort for troubled persons by enhancing their awareness of God’s grace and faithful presence and thereby increasing their ability to live their lives more fully in the light of these realizations.”\(^\text{14}\) Clinebell adds to this definition when he says, “Pastoral counseling, one dimension of pastoral care, is the utilization of a variety of healing (therapeutic) methods to help people handle their problems and crises more growthfully [sic] and thus experience healing of their brokenness.”\(^\text{15}\)

A counseling pastor performs counseling. He may or may not be the senior pastor in the local church, but he is one who gives spiritual instruction and guidance. People may either approach him with their situations and problems, or he may be the one seeking to counsel those


\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 40.

whom he perceives as having situations and problems with which he can help. Regarded as a
spiritual guide and biblical authority, this pastor may have formal training in counseling, but not

A counselee, the person speaking with the pastoral counselor for spiritual guidance or
instruction, receives counsel on how to deal with a particular situation or event in his/her life.
The counselee is any person who speaks with the pastor counselor and receives guidance. The
counselee is understood to be someone given advice and biblical instruction.

Decision management counseling should be understood to be counseling which assists a
person in making a decision concerning a problem or situation, and then providing a plan of
action in order to implement the decision. The counselee may approach the pastoral counselor
without having made a decision. However, the central thing the pastoral counselor does in the
decision management system is to assist the counselee in making a decision concerning the
problem or situation. The focus in decision management counseling becomes the decision and
the follow through. No further guidance can be given until the counselee agrees on a decision
with the pastoral counselor. Decision management counseling is understood to be brief
counseling and limited by time. Some may think that time limited counseling techniques cannot
help as effectively as long-term counseling and therapies. However, the published research
Talmon, writing to potential counselees, states:

As summarized by leading authorities in psychotherapy research, there is considerable evidence suggesting that brief therapeutic contacts make a significant and lasting clinical impact. The most clear-cut conclusion is that more is not necessarily better. Even if we take a more conservative view of these finding, we can safely conclude that briefer therapy will give you, the client, more therapy for your money and time. You will avoid the risk of large expenses for diminishing returns.

This statement holds even truer for the pastoral counselor. The pastoral counselor should not think he has to provide more sessions in order to be an effective counselor. The focus should not be on the amount of sessions. Rather, the focus of pastoral counseling from a decision management approach should be on the quality of the counseling. When the counseling sessions end, the pastoral counselor should have assisted the counselee in moving from where they are to where God wants them to be.  

Brief pastoral counseling has a limited amount of sessions. The amount of sessions is not important, but normally sessions limit to less than 10. Benner reports, “Background research conducted for the first edition of this book indicated that 87 percent of the pastoral counseling conducted by pastor in general ministry involves five or fewer sessions.” Many times brief pastoral counseling constitutes a single session. The main concept for the brief pastoral counselor is the counseling sessions are not open-ended and will cease at some point. Decision management counseling limits the time spent in face-to-face counseling to one session most of the time.

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18 For more on the clinical and statistical results of first session tasks and brief therapy, see Steve de Shazer, *Keys to Solution in Brief Therapy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 154-159.


Statement of Limitations

This project will develop and implement an easy and effective counseling approach for a pastoral counseling program. This project will not evaluate other systems or approaches that pastors utilize, nor will it address the effectiveness or lack thereof in other counseling methodologies. The project will not examine the differences between a decision management system and a solution-focused system.\(^2\) The project will communicate a decision management structure and will apply the structure to several different issues, but will not apply the decision management structure to all counseling areas or issues. The electronic tool will be in the form of a website with mobile accessibility.

The project will use biblical passages where relevant. The version of the Scriptures utilized by the project will either be the New English Translation (NET), the New International Version (NIV), or the English Standard Version (ESV). In most cases, the translation of the Scripture will not be of great importance to the understanding of the point being conveyed. A biblical basis for pastoral counseling and for decision management pastoral counseling will be examined.

The project will utilize a survey taken by pastors who are doing counseling as part of their ministry. The pastors should not be understood to be professional counselors or to have received any specific training to be counselors. Rather, they should be understood to be local church pastors who have been called by the local church assembly. The pastors are not long-term therapists. They are not necessarily paid to counsel, but counseling is part of their pastoral duties.

\(^2\) For more on Solution Focused Counseling, see Charles Allen Kollar, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).
Theoretical Basis

Pastoral counseling is understood to be part of normal ministerial responsibilities. Throughout history, clergy counsel their parishioners both formally and informally. Formal pastoral counseling is the idea that a person approaches a pastor with the expectation of receiving advice and guidance. Informal pastoral counseling is whenever counsel is given through the normal course of events and situation whereby the pastor interacts with congregants. Pastors regularly find themselves in both formal and informal counseling situations.

However, the very nature of the pastor’s work necessitates directional guidance to the counselee. A pastor represents God and the church at which he is employed.23 The pastor has a sacred responsibility to declare the counsel of God, which is prescriptive and directive. Therefore, the pastor has the responsibility to help a person make a decision and then assist him/her in managing his/her decision. Stone recognizes this concept as he writes, “The real work of counseling does not happen in the one hour of the counseling session – where a safe, friendly environment is established – but in the other 167 hours of the week.”24

In this respect, the modern pastoral counselor functions in the spirit of the Old Testament prophets. One such instance is in 1 Kings 18 where Elijah confronts the people with making a decision as to whom they will be loyal, either Baal or Yahweh. In order to assist them in making a decision, Elijah proposes a test whereby altars are built, and the prophets of Baal appeal to him for fire. Elijah calls out to Yahweh for fire. After the completion of the test, in which Yahweh provides fire, Elijah assists the people in managing their decision to follow Yahweh by the systematic slaughter of the false prophets.

23 Oates, Pastoral Counseling, 18.

24 Stone, Brief Pastoral Counseling: Short-term Approaches and Strategies, 35.
Another example is found in Joshua 24, where Joshua assists the Israelites in making a decision concerning which path they will follow, service to Yahweh or to the false gods. After the Israelites make the decision to follow Yahweh, Joshua gives them prescriptive, directive instructions on what they need to do to follow through on their decision. The pastoral counselor functions in the same manner by helping people make a decision to follow God and then by teaching them what they need to do in order to follow through on their decision.

**Statement of Methodology**

This project will develop an easy effective pastoral counseling approach with a decision management focus. The project will report current counseling methodologies that pastors employ at local churches. An anonymous survey will be conducted with pastors to obtain the necessary information. Finally, a website will be developed for use as a tool for pastoral counseling.

Based on all researched and complied material, past this first chapter, the project will be divided into the following chapters:

**Chapter 1: Pastoral counseling methodologies in current practice**

Surveys will be conducted with pastors who are doing counseling through their local church context. The pastors will be questioned as to their current methodologies and length of sessions and will be asked about their number of sessions and the pre-session preparation that they make. Other relevant and significant pastoral counseling facts will be discussed.

**Chapter 2: Easy Effective Pastoral Counseling**

An easy and effective model of counseling will be developed and applied to pastoral setting. Consideration will be given on how to assist counselees in making a decision and how to
support them in managing their decision. The project will consider implementation of the strategy in pastoral counseling. The structure of counseling sessions will be developed.

Chapter 3: A biblical basis for decision management

The Old and New Testaments of the Bible will be examined in order to provide a biblical basis for decision management. Several examples of decision management from the Scriptures will be considered. The point is not to make an argument in favor of decision management as the only method of counseling, but rather to illuminate its precedence in the Bible.

Chapter 4: Case Studies

The project will provide examples of decision management pastoral counseling as applied to counseling situations. The first case study is of a man who comes to a pastor for counseling. In this situation, the man’s wife has decided to leave him and desires a divorce. The second case study is a situation in which parents of a teenager come to a pastor for counseling. In this situation, the parents are having trouble with their teenager, described as difficult, disobedient, and rebellious. The third case study is a situation in which, through conversation, a pastor realizes that a person has trouble with worry. The fourth case study is of a man whose wife recommends him for counseling because he is struggling with a habit of viewing pornography.

In these case studies the pastoral counselor will work to bring the person/people to a point of decision concerning their problem and then guide the counselee(s) to a pathway of managing the decision. The pastoral counselor will demonstrate aiding the counselee in making a decision and then assisting in the management of that decision. In all of these counseling situations the case study will demonstrate ways to follow up with the person to keep his/her accountable for their decision.
Chapter 5: Pastoral Counseling Website

This project will provide an electronic tool for the pastoral counselor in the form of a website. The website will be accessible on mobile devices and will provide the pastoral counselor will the potential of having counseling tools at his/her fingertips. This chapter will provide screen shots of the website. The website can become an important tool for the pastoral counselor involved in counseling.

Review of Literature

Extra-biblical Review

*Pastoral Counseling* written by Wayne E. Oates is a book on the philosophy of pastoral counseling. The book provides a basis for pastoral counseling as a ministry of the local church pastor. Oates relates methods of counseling for application in a local church setting. Oates provides a basis for the pastoral counselor to be a directive counselor.

This project will also utilize *Brief Pastoral Counseling: Short-term Approaches and Strategies* written by Howard Stone. Stone provides a basis for effective pastoral counseling to be accomplished in fewer sessions than previously thought. The book provides a structure to getting to the heart of the counselee’s problems and then working toward a solution as quickly and effectively as possible. Stone makes a strong case for “brief pastoral counseling.”

*Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A short-term structured model* written by David Benner will also be a primary source for this project. Benner recognizes the time restraints that pastors have in their availability and makes the case that pastoral counseling, when performed strategically, is effective and fulfilling. Benner provides a structured model for pastoral counseling and speaks about the uniqueness of pastoral counseling.
Howard Clinebell writes *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*. The book is a standard text for pastoral care and counseling classes. While Clinebell’s book is a more general work, it provides definitions and overviews of different pastoral counseling practices. The book offers foundational material for pastoral counseling.

Another book utilized in this project is Charles Allen Kollar’s book, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track*. Solution-focused pastoral counseling is akin to what this project refers to as decision-management pastoral counseling. Kollar makes the case that counseling does not have to be long term, but rather counseling can produce effective results and be short-term. The book gives a theological basis for short-term counseling. Kollar provides examples of how to move people toward wholeness in a short-term model.

*Single-Session Solutions: A Guide to Practical, Effective, and Affordable Therapy*, written by Moshe Talmon, does not come from a pastoral or biblical counseling perspective, but the book provides a basis for effective single session counseling. Talmon recognizes that therapy does not have to be long-term in order to be effective. The book also gives help on how to have an effective and meaningful single session counseling encounter.

Additionally, this project utilizes *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide* by Gary Collins. A classic in its field, this book covers many topics to aid counselors in their work. Mainly a textbook, the material provides help for pastoral counselors in preparation for dealing with problems. In the section entitled *Introductory Issues*, Collins provides information and perspective for pastoral counselors.

Another source for this project is the book *In Search of Solutions: A New Direction in Psychotherapy* by Bill O’Hanlon and Michele Weiner-Davis. While the content is not about
pastoral counseling, the information does promote positive outcome for counselors performing short-term solution-oriented counseling. The book promotes the idea that change is not necessarily a slow process but can come rapidly and effectively with a properly approached counseling methodology. The book provides a counseling structure for solution-based counseling.

Another book this project utilizes is *Keys to Solution in Brief Therapy* by Steve de Shazer. While this book is not biblically based or from a pastoral counseling perspective, it recognizes a philosophy of short-term counseling that produces positive results. The book discusses concepts of how to reach solutions in a short period of time with counselees. The book provides numerous case studies to demonstrate a solution based brief therapy.

Timothy Clinton and George Ohlschlager edit *Competent Christian Counseling*. This volume discusses many salient counseling topics and provides foundational material for counseling in a multitude of areas from various authors. In several relevant chapters to this project the authors discuss principles of solution-based brief therapy and major application areas for Christian counseling. Due to the nature of the work, the project will only utilize select sections.

This project will also utilize Timothy Clinton and John Trent’s book *The Quick-Reference Guide to Marriage & Family Counseling*. A relevant and helpful guide for counselors dealing with problems related to marriage and family. The book follows an eight-part outline for each problem identified and serves as reference material for the electronic tool and for the case studies.

Another source this project is *The Quick-Reference Guide to Biblical Counseling* by Timothy Clinton and Ron Hawkins. This book furnishes relevant and helpful information for a
counselor dealing with problems in a wide range of circumstances. The guide follows an eight-part outline for each problem identified. The book will be used as reference material for the electronic tool and for the case studies.

This project will also utilize *The Quick-Reference Guide to Sexuality & Relationship Counseling* by Timothy Clinton and Mark Laaser. Relevant and helpful information regarding problems related to the areas of relationships and sexuality are available to the counselor in this source. The guide also follows an eight-part outline for each problem identified and will be used as reference material for the electronic tool and for the case studies.

Also, *Competent to Counsel* by Jay Adams, a pioneer of what he termed “nouthetic counseling” is a source for this project. Adams writes about solving problems through counseling sessions and authoritative counseling and correlates change with sanctification. Adams reveals changes that can take place through pastoral counseling.

Another book by Jay Adams is *Ready to Restore*. This book is mainly written for laypeople who want to help others solve problems. The book provides helpful information and assistance in identifying problems and working toward solutions. Adams also speaks about “making a plan” and “working the plan”, which this project will use as it develops a decision management counseling structure.

Author and speaker Neil Anderson in *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* recognizes counseling to be a function of discipleship. He provides people with specific steps for discovering what God intends them to be in Christ. The book provides a biblical framework for discipleship counseling. Anderson focuses on solving the problem of deception and works to refocus the counselee on the truth.
A further source *Clues: Investigating Solutions in Brief Therapy* by Steve De Shazer is a part of this project. This book is a secular work in which the author strives to focus on solutions to problems rather than the problem itself. The author seeks to provide a brief and effective methodology for psychotherapy. Some of these principles and methods can be adapted for use in a pastoral counseling system.

An additional reference for this project is a book entitled *Single Session Therapy* by Moshe Talmon. Talmon, a secular therapist, recognizes that a counselor may only get one encounter with a counselee; therefore, the counselor must be able to conduct an effective session each and every time. A counselor cannot afford to waste a session, as is often the case in long-term therapy. Talmon shows how to have an effective single session encounter.

A further source is Howard Stone’s journal article entitled *Brief Pastoral Counseling*. This article provides the major elements of brief pastoral counseling. He emphasizes the importance of focusing on specific problems that the counselee brings to the table. He addresses the necessity of building a plan for the counseling sessions and working forward with the counselee toward a mutually established goal.

*Staying Solution-Focused in Brief Pastoral Counseling: A Conceptual Schema* is a journal article written by Charles Allen Kollar. In this article, Kollar stresses the importance of focusing on solutions rather than problems. He provides a counseling model and practical working components. Kollar provides specific information concerning how to focus the counselee and maintain the focus throughout the sessions.

Also, *The Power of Valuing in Brief Pastoral Counseling*, written by Jan James, stresses the value of the individual. Due to the Holy Spirit’s indwelling the believer, James writes that answers to problems are already present in the individual, and the counselor should work to bring
these answers to the surface. James recognizes that because of limited time, the counselor must raise the counselee’s ability to help himself/herself toward positive results.

**Biblical Review**

Many passages of Scripture are involved in this project. The Bible relates numerous stories and verses that provide a foundation for pastoral counseling. These passages are not just references but rather provide the very core concepts for pastoral counseling. One may even go as far as to say that the very nature of salvation is for a person to make a decision and then, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, manage that decision for life.25

One passage central to the idea of pastoral counseling is 2 Timothy 4:2. In this passage, Paul tells Timothy, who was a local church pastor, to “Preach the message, be ready whether it is convenient or not, reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and instruction.” This passage, while often applied to the pulpit ministry, also applies to the ministry of a pastoral counselor. The challenge to Timothy and by extension all pastors is to be ready all the time to preach the message through reproving, rebuking, and exhortation. These activities are to be done with complete patience and instruction.

An Old Testament example of counseling is Ezra chapter ten. In this passage, Ezra makes the Levites and all Israel take an oath to carry out their promise to rid themselves of the foreign women they have married and with whom they have children.26 The leaders of Israel listen to the counsel of Ezra concerning what to do about their disobedience and then enact a plan.27 Ezra works with the people to see that the decision is carried out properly.

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25 Philippians 2:12, NET

26 Ezra 10:5, NET
A New Testament example of counseling is Matthew chapter 19. In this passage, a rich young man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus instructs him as to what he needs to do. However, the young man does not listen to Jesus’ advice and leaves saddened by the decision he is encouraged to make.

An additional Old Testament example of counseling is 1 Kings 18. In this passage of Scripture, Elijah asks an important question, “How long are you going to be paralyzed by indecision?” He tells the people how they can make a good informed decision. After the test, the people see the decision they need make. Then, Elijah helps the people manage their decision through the execution of all of the false prophets of Baal.

1 Corinthians 4:14 illustrates one of the facets of pastoral counseling. Paul writes, “I am not writing these things to shame you, but to correct you as my dear children.” Often times, pastoral counseling involves correction in thinking and behavior. The point is not to bring shame to the individual but rather to expose the problems in their behavior and thinking, have the person make a decision concerning the problem, and then move toward spiritual wellness. The Corinthian church experienced many problems that are also present in today’s churches.

Paul, in Galatians 5:7 states, “You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth?” Paul indicates one can start off well and then because of someone confusing the truth, a person can fall into thinking which is in need of correction. The pastoral counselor can fill the role of one who corrects errant thinking. Decision management counseling helps a person whose thinking, behavior, and/or relationships are askew be redirected through positive decision making.

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27 Ezra 10:10-14, NET
28 1 Kings 18:21, NET
In Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3, Paul uses an analogy of an old man and new man to describe the movement of a person through the process of sanctification. The pastoral counselor aids in the sanctification process by helping a person identify the characteristics of the old man and replacing them with the characteristics of the new man. Paul identifies several things that are of the old man that need to be done away with and replaced with things of the new man.

The book of Proverbs provides wise advice to those who heed what it says. Some of the passages, written as from a father to a son, instruct the son in the ways of wisdom. Many counseling sessions utilize verses and passages from Proverbs for instructing the counselee in the ways of wisdom. Due to the nature of the book of Proverbs, one may even suggest the memorization of key passages on the subject for which counsel is being given. Space constraints limit a topical listing of the contents of Proverbs; however, many passages from Proverbs contain ideas and concepts on which this project is based.

It should be understood that the Bible is the foundation of the counsel given by a pastoral counselor. Psychological, sociological, and other disciplines may be used as counseling aids and understandings, but the Bible is the source book for the pastoral counseling. The presupposition of this project is that the Bible is the Word of God and contains the information necessary to assist a person toward life and godliness. As the apostle Peter states in 2 Peter 1:3, “I can pray this because his divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence.” The pastoral counselor must recognize the superiority of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to be change agents in the life of an individual.

29 Colossians 3:1-17, NET; Ephesians 4:17-32, NET
30 Proverbs 1:7-9; 2:1, NET
31 Proverbs 11:14; 15:22-23; 20:18, NET
CHAPTER ONE

PASTORAL COUNSELING METHOLOGIES IN CURRENT PRACTICE

In order to better understand how pastors are conducting themselves as they counsel the people under their care, a survey was conducted. The anonymous survey solicited responses from pastors across all fifty states. One-hundred and two pastors responded to the survey. The survey was conducted online through the web service Survey Monkey. The survey is composed of nine questions, which relate to the experience and methodology of the respondents. The survey reveals how pastors approach counseling sessions.

The Survey Questions and Data

Participants provided some background information concerning their pastoral and counseling experience in the first two question of the survey. The first question was “How many years have you been in the ministry?” Forty-eight percent of respondents indicated they had been in ministry more than twenty years. Twenty-eight point four percent indicated they had been in ministry between ten and twenty years. Seventeen point six percent indicated they had been in ministry between five to ten years. Finally, five point nine percent of pastors marked they had been in ministry five years or less.

The second question, another qualification question, asked “Do you perform counseling as part of your regular pastoral duties?” An overwhelming ninety-seven point one percent of
participants indicated that they did perform counseling as part of their regular pastoral duties. These results are illustrated in figure 1.1 and 1.2.

Figure 1.1

How many years have you been in the ministry?

- 0-5: 48.0%
- 5-10: 17.6%
- 10-20: 28.4%
- More than 20: 5.9%

Figure 1.2

Do you perform counseling as part of your regular pastoral duties?

- Yes: 97.1%
- No: 2.9%
The responses to the first question, concerning length of ministry experience, were encouraging and aid to the validity of the survey concerning the experience of the pastors participating in the survey. The majority of the participants indicated they had more than ten years of experience in the ministry. This leads one to believe they have interacted with various and diverse people and have had experience in dealing with many counseling situations. The second question also provided some encouraging survey data in indicating the vast majority of pastors perform counseling as part of their normal pastoral duties. Pastors are expected to provide counsel to the people in their parishes and even to people outside of their congregations.¹ Many ministers are called upon to deal with different situations requiring insight and experience for which they may or may not have previously confronted in their life experience. Little training is given at the seminary level for counseling parishioners. By most standards, pastors are viewed as sages and wise in their dispensing of truth and guidance. Pastors do more than just fill the pulpit on Sundays; they interact with various people for various reasons and must be ready to provide sound biblical advice and counsel to the people whom they contact.²

After asking these qualifying questions, the survey questioned the methodology of the pastors doing the counseling. Figure 1.3 contains the third question asked, “Of those counseled, would you say that most of your counseling sessions are formal or informal?” The following definitions were supplied to the participants to help them understand what the terms “formal” and “informal” counseling meant. Formal counseling was defined as “planned, scheduled encounters with people (appointments).” Informal counseling was defined as “unplanned, unscheduled appointments with people (walk-ins).”

² Ibid., 36.
Fifty-nine point eight percent of pastors participating in the survey stated, based on the provided definition, they would consider most of their counseling sessions as formal. Forty point two percent of pastors said the opposite; most of their counseling sessions were informal.

Question three provided some interesting information concerning how pastors are interacting with people. Most pastors are trying to set appointments with people for the purpose of counseling. However, some pastors do not have the luxury to be able to prepare for most of their counseling sessions. The lack of being able to prepare for what they are about to involve themselves puts the counseling pastor in a situation where he must either be instantly able to diagnose and handle a problem or miss an opportunity to help the counselee. The pastor must be an expert in helping people. He must have the tools or knowledge of pathways to solutions for people to benefit from having met with him.3 In order to be helpful, the pastor would benefit from spending time preparing a pathway on which the counselee can walk. Benner states, “Good

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counseling always, therefore, involves a marriage of structure and freedom."4 The effective pastoral counselor has a structural system by which he works when conducting a counseling session, as this project demonstrates.

Question four, figure 1.4, asks about how much time pastors are spending doing both formal and informal counseling on a monthly basis.

![Figure 1.4](image)

The majority of pastors reported they spent between five to ten hours of counseling in a monthly period. The categories of five or less hours and eleven to fifteen hours of counseling were statistically close, with slightly more pastors reporting five or less hours of counseling over the indicated time period. Thirteen point nine percent of pastors reported they spent sixteen to twenty hours in counseling sessions a month. Seventeen point eight percent of pastors responded to the last category of spending more than twenty hours a month of counseling.

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Question four speaks to how much time a pastor can expect to spend doing counseling in any given month. Most pastors can plan to spend several hours doing counseling each month. A pastor will mostly likely spend voluminous hours each month developing and writing sermons, for which he will usually spend less than six hours a month delivering. Yet many pastors will spend more time doing counseling for which they spend not nearly as much time preparing. Pastors should expect to do counseling several hours each month and should be spending time in study and preparation for these counseling encounters even if they do not have appointments for counseling. Pastors need to develop their counseling skills and this task is not an easy one. Pastors would be wise to study and utilize tools that can help them effectively counsel. Ultimately, pastors need to utilize the insight and wisdom from the Holy Spirit. Collins notes, “All of this points again to the counselor’s need for wisdom and discernment. Some of this comes with experience, but Christians know that sensitivity more often comes when we pray, asking for the insights, guidance, clarity, and accurate perception that comes from the Holy Spirit.”

Question five, represented in figure 1.5, asked the participants directly about their methodology when approaching counseling sessions. The question asked, “Do you have a standard counseling methodology? If so, please list steps.”

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6 Ibid., 73.
Forty-two point four percent of pastors indicated in the affirmative, while fifty-seven point six percent of counseling pastors stated they did not have a standard counseling methodology. Forty-six participants provided what they considered their counseling methodology.

Question five of the survey reveals some of the strategies and methodologies utilized by pastors who do counseling. Most pastors could not identify or describe their counseling methodology. Therefore, it is evident pastors have a deficiency in counseling methodology and structure. A lack of methodology is indicative of lack of training, planning, and forethought. Pastors must give thought to how they guide their people through the problems they face. Of those who said they did have a standard counseling methodology, forty-six provided what they thought qualified as a methodology. Some respondents spoke of using a twelve-step recovery program. Many stated work to diagnose the problem and use homework to get the counselee moving in the right direction. Some pastoral counselors think of themselves as a first responder who provides first aid to the person and then refers them to a more trained person. Several stated
they try to find a biblical passage to aid the counselee in finding a solution to his/her problem. The responses to the question of methodology are extremely varied. The spectrum of response indicates no universal agreed upon strategy in helping people approach their problems. The answers also indicate the influence of many differing philosophies of helping people solve problems. The pastors who do not have any identifiable methodology should start with finding a counseling strategy that works for them and helps people change. Oates writes, “The pastoral counselor depends neither on his ‘personage’ nor the institution of the church for his professional competence as a counselor. He must have submitted himself to the disciplines and training that equips him as a counselor.”

One may also consider the bigger picture to this problem. Perhaps seminaries are doing a good job of preparing pastors to administrate the church and interpret the Bible; however, they do not impart a practical counseling strategy to their students. Students are often reflections of their teachers and likewise pastors are a reflection of their mentors and seminaries. Pastors must provide effective counseling and finding a proper counseling methodology. Perhaps seminaries and universities need to do a better job equipping pastors in this arena.

The next question concerns the pastoral counselor’s perspective on referring a counselee to a professional counseling service or center. This question is represented in figure 1.6

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Ninety-three point one percent of the survey participants said they would refer. Only six point nine percent said they would not refer.

Question six speaks to the practice of pastors referring people to counseling centers or services. Arguments could be made both for and against referring counselee to a professional counselor. However, at this point, the survey reveals the vast majority of pastors will refer a counselee to a professional counselor. Oates says, “Therefore, the time factor in pastoral counseling becomes a very real issue as an indication for referral. A referral system is indispensable for any effective, formal pastoral counseling.”⁹ One conclusion to this concept is that a pastor has limited available time for counseling. Therefore, most pastors cannot involve themselves in long-term or open-ended counseling. Many sound reasons exist for a pastor’s lack of time for long-term counseling; however, the pastoral counselor should adapt his approach so that he can become for efficient with the time he is able to give to the counselee. The pastoral

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counselor should consider a strategy which is effective and helps him conduct his counseling sessions efficiently. Easy effective pastoral counseling, a type of brief pastoral counseling, fits this need.

Stone writes:

Brief pastoral counseling has a considerably more modest goal: to get people moving in a positive direction of their own choosing and then get out of the way. It aims to help them see things in a slightly new way, do things a little differently, relate to others in a slightly more appropriate way. That is all. Brief pastoral counseling starts the process of planned change; it does not attempt to complete it. It takes for granted that people have many strengths and resources of their own and will use them to continue the process of change. It trusts that the various ministries of the church will support individuals in their walk through life, and simply helps them to turn an important corner in their journey.¹⁰

Benner provides another viewpoint when he writes, “Most pastors simply do not have the necessary background to provide intensive psychotherapy or to provide complete treatment for severely disturbed individuals. Pastors…must, therefore be clearly aware of their limits of competence and ready and willing to make referrals once these limits are reached.”¹¹ A pastor may not feel qualified or able to help a counselee in the way he feels the counselee needs to be helped and so he may refer. The bottom line is to recognize that pastors have a limited number of counseling sessions. A pastoral counselor should have a place to refer counselees. A trusted place for referrals is important to the pastoral counselor who may need to refer counselees needing more time than what he has to offer or who have problems for which he cannot help them.

Question seven, figure 1.7, questioned the participants further concerning their referral practice. The questions asked, “Generally, what is the maximum number of sessions you will have with a counselee before you will refer him/her to a professional counselor?”

¹⁰ Stone, *Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling*, 16.

¹¹ Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 43.
The most popular answer chosen was the category of between one and three sessions followed by between three and six sessions. The categories of between six and eight sessions and more than eight sessions both received four percent of the response.

Question seven speaks to how many sessions a pastor will most likely have before he/she refers. Most pastors refer a counselee between one and three sessions of counseling. Few go to six sessions and even less go allow for more sessions. One should not expect a pastor to have more than six sessions of counseling with a counselee. Oates says, “The amount of time that most pastors can legitimately give to one individual begins to be strained when they go beyond the tenth interview.”\(^\text{12}\) The same conclusions for the previous question apply to this question. Pastors have limited time and may refer for that reason. Pastors may feel as if a professional counselor would better serve a counselee or have other reasons for referring. Kollar gives the

following advice, “It is with great care and caution that any Christian leader should refer a
counselee to someone outside of the local church to get professional counseling from a system
that may lack the loving, forgiving, empowering, and supportive environment of the body of
Christ.”\textsuperscript{\(13\)} As will be shown later, the limits to a pastor’s time and their self-reported limits to
counseling sessions provide a unique and directive opportunity for impacting people.

Questions eight and nine are directed toward the pastoral counselor’s competency. These
results are in figure 1.8 and figure 1.9, respectively. Question eight asked the question directly,
“Do you feel as if you are able to adequately handle most counseling situations?” Question nine
asked if the pastoral counselor felt as if he/she would be able to benefit from an online
counseling tool. The question inquired, “Would you think you would benefit from a free,
biblically based, web-hosted counseling tool with mobile device access?”

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\textsuperscript{\(13\)} Charles Allen Kollar, \textit{Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for
Getting People Back on Track} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 60.
Seventy-six point two percent of participants responded with “yes” and twenty-three point eight percent of participants responded with “no” to question eight. Fifty-nine point four percent of those responding to the survey stated they think they would benefit from such a tool and forty point six percent said they do not think they would benefit from such a tool to question nine.

Question eight speaks to the confidence a pastor feels in actually doing counseling. Most pastors feel as if they are able to handle common counseling situations, but a few think they cannot. Knowing exactly why a pastor would or would not feel confident in counseling sessions is difficult to discern. One could surmise, initial pastoral counseling confidence would be generated from training and later pastoral confidence would be generated from experience. If a pastor experiences good counseling results, perhaps his confidence rises. If a pastor feels or experiences failure in counseling, perhaps his confidence falls. Another idea is recognition of the activity of the Holy Spirit within the life of the counselee. Kollar says, “It is essential to keep in
mind that God has been, and continues to be, thoroughly involved in the counselee’s life before we, as counselors, try to help.” Regardless of reason, most pastors feel as if they can handle most counseling situations with which they are faced. One can only wonder if counselees feel as if the counseling pastor is able to handle the situations with which they are confronted.

Many pastors say they think they would benefit from a biblically based, web-hosted counseling tool with mobile device access. One may see an opportunity in this response. Pastors need to have useful counseling information as their fingertips to be able to maximize their counseling sessions. If they are not able to effectively prepare due to having an informal counseling session, having a tool available may be even more important. Pastors in their ongoing counseling training and study could also use such a tool. Pastors could become familiar with the pathway and strategy employed by the counseling tool and adapt in for their use. Clinebell writes, “To provide help to the maximum number of hurting people, however, pastors need to apply their counseling skills in a host of informal, often unexpected encounters with a person struggling with staggering loads, complex decisions, and agonizing problems.”

Summary

One can draw from the survey some principal thoughts, ideas, and understandings. First, pastors, as expected, are doing counseling as part of their regular pastoral duties. They need tools, training, and experience in performing this vital part of their ministries. A biblical based, web-hosted tool with mobile device access could be a tool used to fit this need. Second, many times pastors are not able to prepare for the counseling they will be doing. Many people will

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14 Kollar, Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track, 62.

15 Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources For The Ministry of Healing & Growth, 36.
walk into a church office and expect to see a pastor, speak with him, and have him provide accurate, helpful, and wise counsel. Pressure is on the pastor to not only be available, but to also be prepared. Pastoral counselors need an easy effective method for conducting counseling sessions. If the counseling methodology is nuanced or complex in design, then the pastoral counselor will choose to counsel without the benefit of a counseling strategy. Third, the majority of pastors do not have an overarching or standard counseling methodology. A lack of standard counseling methodology can be expected to cause problems for the pastoral counselor. The outcome of pastoral counseling is uncertain when one cannot provide a clear direction on which the counseele can proceed. Pastoral counselors must have a memorable and easy system to utilize in counseling sessions. Fourth, a pastoral counselor can be expected to limit his/her sessions with counselees. Oates writes concerning the practicality of this understanding, “…his responsibility to the total group limits the amount of time he can spend with any one individual, regardless of the amount of training he has as a counselor.” Therefore, each session is important and cannot be wasted. Without a clear counseling methodology, wasting a session is a real possibility. Every session a pastoral counselor has with a counselee is essential to moving a person from where they are to where God wants them to be. Lastly, most pastoral counselors feel as if they can handle most counseling situations, but yet think they would benefit from a biblically based, web-hosted counseling tool with mobile device access. This understanding leads one to believe that pastors know they need something to help them become more effective in their counseling sessions. Perhaps pastoral counselors feel as if they are able to handle most counseling sessions due to the recognize presence of the Holy Spirit working through them and yet are uneasy about their level of expertise. A web-hosted counseling tool may be a viable

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16 Oates, Pastoral Counseling, 19.
vehicle for giving pastoral counselors what they need to become more effective in their limited amount of counseling sessions.
CHAPTER TWO

EASY EFFECTIVE PASTORAL COUNSELING

The survey demonstrates an absence of strategy many pastors have when approaching counseling. Pastors may have many reasons for not having a strategy for their counseling sessions. One of the reasons, revealed by the survey, is that many times pastors do not have time to prepare for counseling encounters. The lack of preparation time is due to the nature of the counseling sessions; many are informal. Pastors have many responsibilities and roles to play inside of a church organization; counseling is one part of the larger role of being a local church pastor. Benner recognizes this concept when he says, “Most pastors, except for those who do only counseling, must fit counseling within the range of other responsibilities that fill the week.”\(^1\) Perhaps another reason for a lack of counseling strategy lies in lack of training and continuing education. Counseling methodologies and strategies can be complex, and a busy pastor who has little or no time to prepare for a counseling session will without a doubt go to their “default setting”. For many, the “default setting” is simply “flying-by-the-seat-of-their-pants.” Pastors need an easy and effective model to employ in their counseling sessions. Decision management counseling is a simple approach pastors can implement into their counseling sessions.

\(^1\) David G. Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 58.
**What is Decision Management Counseling?**

Decision management counseling is a synthesis of biblical principles, other counseling models, and practical understandings. Decision management counseling applies the philosophical principle of Ockham’s razor. de Shazer describes the principle of Ockham’s razor well, when he says, “…What can be done with fewer means is done in vain with many.”

Complex counseling approaches mean well, but due to their complexity will fail to really help the counselee. A strategy does not have to be complex to help people solve problems. Rather, the strategy must be memorable, easily implemented, effective, and efficient. Decision management counseling as a pastoral counseling strategy encapsulates the before mentioned ideals.

Decision management counseling is understood as counseling which assists a person in making a decision concerning a problem or situation and then providing a plan of action in order to implement the decision and manage it forward toward resolution. The emphasis in decision management counseling is on helping the counselee in making a decision and then managing that decision forward. Decision management counseling is not a new concept; however decision management counseling is a streamlined approach, easily implementation and utilized by pastoral counselors. Decision management counseling as a pastoral counseling approach, operates with the understanding that most pastoral counseling is related to the rise of crisis within the life of a counselee. As Clinebell states, “The vast majority of the opportunities for caring and counseling in the church occur around life crises.”

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3 Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources For The Ministry of Healing & Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 35.
role is to bring the person to a point of decision concerning their problem and give them practical steps to act upon their decision. The two main facets of decision management counseling, decision making and follow through, are essential.

Decision management counseling combines the best of several counseling disciplines to make an easier streamlined counseling approach. Decision management counseling borrows some concepts from “brief counseling”. However, what it borrows is simply recognition that a pastor’s time is limited, as confirmed in this project’s survey, and that many counselees want counseling to be brief. Decision management counseling borrows from “strategic pastoral counseling”. Benner writes, “Strategic pastoral counseling is a brief, structured counseling approach that is explicitly Christian and that appropriates the insights of contemporary counseling theory without sacrificing the resources of pastoral ministry.” Decision management counseling, designed to be brief in nature, adds to it the concept of providing a structured and strategic counseling approach. Decision management counseling borrows from “solution-focused pastoral counseling.” “SFPC [solution-focused pastoral counseling] teaches that the counselee has all the resources he needs in God. The priority is to help the counselee get unstuck, not to generate personality change.” Decision management counseling gains two ideas from solution-focused pastoral counseling. One, decision management counseling borrows the concept that the counselee has the key to change within him or her by the grace of God. Two, decision management counseling focuses on helping the counselee make a decision to change.

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5 Ibid., 2.

6 Benner, *Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model*, 47.

Decision management counseling also makes use of the classic counseling technique of assigning the counselee homework. Stone writes concerning the importance of homework, “Doing homework emphasizes parishioners’ agency; it places the responsibility for change squarely on their shoulders and ensures that changes occur not only in the rarefied environment of a counseling session, but in the person’s day-to-day life.” Doing the plan is an important part of moving a person from where they are to where God wants them to be.

Decision management counseling differs from other counseling strategies in emphasis. The emphasis in decision management counseling is on helping the counselee make a decision that will help them move from where they are to where God wants them to be. Decision management counseling differs from other counseling strategies in emphasis on accountability. Some counseling strategies assign homework to the counselee, but once the counselee leaves the office they do not provide for a strategy of follow-up unless the counselee returns for more counseling. Decision management counseling addresses this shortcoming. With these two additional understandings, decision management counseling as a pastoral counseling strategy strives to assist the pastoral counselor in assisting others.

Decision management counseling provides a practical and easily implementable methodology for the pastoral counselor. Regardless of how much time the pastoral counselor has available; a decision management strategy for counseling can help him have a productive counseling session. The survey for this research project indicated that most pastors limit the amount of sessions they have with counselees. Stone writes, “After the first session, most people do not return for many additional sessions, if they return at all. The pastoral counseling process

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8 Howard W. Stone, Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 100.
is – by default if not by design – a short one.”

Therefore, every session a pastor has with a counselee is of utmost importance. The pastoral counselor cannot waste time with unproductive sessions. The counselee is looking for a counselor who can help him or her. The pastoral counselor might have as little as one session in which to work. Stone writes, “An indicator of what people want in counseling is what they actually end up doing and one thing most ministers discover after even a brief time in the parish or in specialized counseling ministry is that most people do not return for many sessions after the first one.” The pastoral counselor must utilize every moment he has with the counselee in working toward a decision and then putting into place a plan for action to help the counselee move toward the place God wants them to be.

Decision management counseling may be understood as “the four D’s”. The pastoral counselor should ask the counselee to describe the problem. The pastoral counselor should then assist the counselee to dream about what life would be like without the problem. In this stage, the pastoral counselor performs a reality check with the counselee to help them understand what life might be like without making a proper godly decision. The next two steps in decision management counsel are of great importance. The pastoral counselor must help the counselee decide how God would have them act, behave, think, and change. Finally, the pastoral counselor must help the counselee do what God would have them do concerning the decision that was made.

According to Clinebell, “Pastoral counseling actually begins when the first contact is made by a person to seek help.” Decision management counseling largely agrees with this.

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9 Ibid., 4-5.


11 Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources For The Ministry of Healing & Growth, 72.
assertion, but does not recognize the exclusivity of the counselee in seeking help from the pastoral counselor. Decision management counseling may be either initiated by the counselee or the pastoral counselor. The word “pastor” in Greek refers a person who shepherds a flock of sheep. This word, used in this way only once in the New Testament, is an important description of the work for the modern pastor as a counselor. If a pastor is performing his calling as a shepherd of a congregation, he should not wait for the congregant to initiate contact, but rather he would seek out and watch for those who need pastoral counseling.

**Step One: Describe**

The first step of decision management counseling is for the counselee to describe the problem they are having. The pastoral counselor should ask open-ended assessment questions in order to aid understanding of the problem. Assessment questions may be asked in several ways. A question such as, “How can I help you today?” is one way to phrase the assessment question. Another way of asking the same question is to say, “Why did you come in to see me today?” or “So, what brings you in?” The idea is to aid the counselee in getting to the reason for needing assistance from a counselor today. The pastoral counselor should realize the counselee is seeing him today for a reason. The counselee came because something about their situation caused his/her to look for pastoral counseling.

The pastoral counselor should focus the conversation and not allow the counselee to derail the session by diverting the issue to other extraneous subjects. Perhaps the counselee has

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13 Ephesians 4:11, NET

many things that could be considered problems, but the focus of the pastoral counselor in a
decision management approach is to get the counselee to make a decision concerning the
problem with which they are faced.\textsuperscript{15} Stone says, “One of the first tasks in brief pastoral
counseling is to identify the central problem(s).”\textsuperscript{16} The pastoral counselor may be tempted to try
and uncover some past problem or systemic issue in the life of the counselee. These impulses
must be avoided. Stone writes, “In actual practice, the extensive exploration of a person’s
history and the discovery of a problem’s sources generally are not prerequisites for effective and
lasting change.”\textsuperscript{17} The pastoral counselor should operate on the assumption that the counselee
wants to talk to him at this moment in time for some reason. He did not come concerning past
problems. The main idea is to aid the counselee in describing the problem he/she are currently
having in life. Stone emphasizes this point when he says, “When people come for counseling, it
is critical to explore the reasons that prompted them to come when they did or what prevented
them from realizing that their problems needed to be addressed.”\textsuperscript{18}

Another temptation during this description step of decision management counseling is to
allow the counselee to ramble and unload all of his/her inner thoughts at one time. The pastoral
counselor should refocus on the counselee on one particular problem. Benner states, “The pastor
and parishioner must identify and agree on the primary focus.”\textsuperscript{19} One should not understand this
to mean the other problems a counselee is having are insignificant, but rather that too many
things to deal with at one time will most likely lead to nothing actually happening as a result of

\textsuperscript{15} Moshe Talmon, \textit{Single Session Solutions: A Guide to Practical, Effective, and Affordable Therapy} (New


\textsuperscript{17} Stone, \textit{Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling}, 7.

\textsuperscript{18} Stone, \textit{Brief Pastoral Counseling: Short-term Approaches and Strategies}, 17.

\textsuperscript{19} Benner, \textit{Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model}, 86.
the counseling. This concept is like the proverbial squirrel chasing. If one stopped to chase every squirrel that presented itself on the journey, the person would never get to the destination. Refocusing the counselee onto one situation allows the pastoral counselor to help the counselee arrive at a destination.

As the counselee describes the problem or situation, the pastoral counselor must listen intently to what the counselee is saying. The pastoral counselor should rephrase the counselee’s statements and conversation to gain insight and understanding. The questions may be, “So what I hear you saying is…?” Another question could be, “By saying that, do you mean…?” The purpose of these questions is to echo back to the counselee for the purpose of clarification. The pastoral counselor should work to get the clearest possible understanding of the problem or situation being presented by the counselee.

The pastoral counselor should not linger too long in this description area of the session. As tempting as it is to let the counselee talk about his/her problem, simply talking about a problem or situation does not help the counselee. Once the pastoral counselor has an understanding of the problem or situation, the pastoral counselor should move the counselee into the next phase of the session.

**Step Two: Dream**

Many authors and counselors have written about the importance of getting the counselee to imagine life without the problem. Some authors have called the concept, “the miracle question.”

Talmon states, “The miracle question is: ‘suppose that one night, while you were asleep, there was a miracle and this problem was solved. How would you know? What would

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be different?’”21 The pastoral counselor might phrase the question differently in order to focus the counselee on God’s work in his/her life. The pastoral counselor might say, “Suppose God decided to completely remove this problem or situation from your life. What would be different and how would you know?” The purpose of this exercise is to help them become focused on life without the problem or situation. The counselee needs to realize the problem has a solution. As Kollar states, “Concentrating on solutions, rather than problems, opens up a world of options previously unseen by counselees.”22 Talmon states the same conclusion a little differently when he says, “By focusing on exceptions, client and therapist may discover solutions that they had forgotten about.”23 The idea is to bring the counselee hope that God can do a work in his/her life and that his/her life can be different than what it currently is.

For many counselees, life without the problem, difficulty, or situation is unimaginable because they have been dealing with it for so long. They wake up with the problem and go to sleep with the problem. The problem affects life constantly. The pastoral counselor should help the counselee see that God is a God of hope. The pastoral counselor can help the counselee see that God wants his/her life to be abundant and joyful.24 The counselee must realize his/her life can be different than what it currently is. A key to change is helping the counselee realize things do not have to be the way they are. Step two, dreaming, helps the pastoral counselor accomplish this stage.

The pastoral counselor does not have to spend much time in this stage unless the counselee is unable to picture life without the problem or situation. For many counselees, this

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21 Talmon, Single Session Solutions: A Guide to Practical, Effective, and Affordable Therapy, 163.


23 Talmon, Single Session Solutions: A Guide to Practical, Effective, and Affordable Therapy, 163.

24 John 10:10, NET and Galatians 5:22, NET
stage of counseling will be quick, easy, and fun. However, others might struggle with the notion of not being subject to their problem or situation. For those people, the pastoral counselor should work on finding exceptions to the problem or situation. Kollar writes, “…in every problem that a family or an individual may be going through, there will be some instances in which exceptions occur.” The pastoral counselor should work to find the times when the problem or situation is not happening. From these exceptions, the pastoral counselor can work toward helping the counselee dream about life without the problem.

Another aspect of the “dream” stage in decision management counseling might be termed the “reality check”. Some counselees do not have a proper perspective of the situation. Maybe the counselee has come to a realization of a problem or situation for which he/she needs help, but do not know the future implications of walking on that path. The pastoral counselor should make every effort to help the person understand what happens if change is not undertaken. Not every situation will call for this piece of the conversation, but pastoral counselors will find that giving the person a reality check will be helpful in assisting the person in making a proper, godly decision.

The pastoral counselor should make sure before moving from this stage of counseling that the counselee can imagine life without the problem. If the pastoral counselor moves prematurely from this stage, the counselee will not be ready for the next stage of the counseling session: making a decision. As stated, the dream stage of the session may be a short, quick, fun exercise not requiring much effort, or it may take some true effort on the part of the counselor to bring the counselee to the place where he/she can dream about life without the problem or situation. In either case, this stage of decision-management counseling should not be short-

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25 Kollar, Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling, 69.
changed. The pastoral counselor should help the counselee find hope through imagination and desire for change.

**Step Three: Decide**

After the pastoral counselor has listened to the counselee describe the problem or situation and has helped the counselee dream about his/her life without the problem or situation, the pastoral counselor needs to assist the counselee in making a decision about what God wants done about the problem or situation. Oates writes concerning the importance of decisions, “Decisions are made to move toward a person, to stimulate his sense of need, to remove a hidden agenda of nonverbal awareness that something is wrong. Action is taken. Initiative has its plus factor as well.” For many counselees, the decision is obvious, and they will be ready to make a godly decision concerning their problem relatively quickly. For others, the decision they need to make is not the decision they want to make. In any case, the pastoral counselor must be sure the counselee is making a decision consistent with scriptural principles and a godly life.

In order to help the counselee make a proper decision, the pastoral counselor may ask the counselee, “Now that we have an understanding of what is going on in your life and we can think about life without this trouble, what would God want you to do?” The decision to be made by the counselee should not be a decision without consideration as to what God wants for his/her life.

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Kollar writes:

Christianity assumes that the only way for lasting change is through the conversion that transforms the counselee from the inside out, a transformation that begins with surrendering to God, receiving the gift of the life in Jesus Christ, experiencing the conviction of his Holy Spirit revealing sin, and undergoing the unfolding process of sanctification.\(^ {27} \)

An important factor in this stage of decision management counseling is the counselee’s consideration of his/her problem or situation from the perspective of God’s revealed will and desire for him/her. The pastoral counselor should be ready and able to bring the Scriptures to bear on the situation to aid the counselee in making a proper godly decision. The pastoral counselor should take time to affirm the counselee’s relationship with God. He may say something like this, “John, before we talk about what you need to do about this situation in your life, I need to talk to you about your relationship with Jesus. Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, and is He Lord in your life?” Based on a response to this inquiry, the pastoral counselor may need to take the time to lead the counselee through the gospel because it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that truly changes people.

Having affirmed the counselee’s spiritual condition, the pastoral counselor should be ready to aid the counselee in making a godly decision. The pastoral counselor should write down the decision the counselee is making. The decision should be concrete and tangible. Stone writes, “An initial task in brief pastoral counseling, therefore, is to identify the focal problem clearly and in specific, concrete terms that make it seem solvable.”\(^ {28} \) The pastoral counselor is not looking for actions at this point but rather a change in mental and directional state. For example, a husband who is having marital relational problems, the decision may be “I make the

\(^{27}\) Kollar, *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track*, 234.

\(^{28}\) Stone, *Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling*, 93.
decision to love my wife.” For a person struggling with forgiveness, “I make the decision to forgive others as Christ has forgiven me.” The pastoral counselor must get the counselee to actually verbalize the decision that is being made. The pastoral counselor cannot make the decision for the counselee; he should aid the counselee in making a godly decision by helping him/her see his/her situation or problem from God’s perspective. The pastoral counselor should be directive. He should speak the truth from the Word of God and confront the counselee with it. The Word of God is the place where the pastoral counselor finds the directives for the decisions that need to be made.\textsuperscript{29} The pastoral counselor should never forget that his main task is to move people from where they are to where God wants them to be. As Benner aptly states, “The main goal of pastoral counseling is the facilitation of spiritual growth.”\textsuperscript{30} The pastoral counselor should be directive with the counselee. Furthermore, the decision does not need to be complicated. Perhaps, the simpler the wording of the decision, the clearer it is understood. The clearer it is understood, the more likely it will be implemented and followed.

The counselee may not be ready to make a decision concerning his/her problem or situation. Perhaps he/she came desiring a sympathetic, understanding ear on which to unload the situation or problems. For whatever the reason, if the counselee is not ready and willing to make a decision concerning his/her problem, the pastoral counselor should not press too hard for a decision to be made. The pastoral counselor has two options at this point. The first option is the pastoral counselor thinks progress can be made and a decision reached, then he should reschedule an appointment with the counselee. If the pastoral counselor does not think progress can be made or a point of decision reached in the near future, then he should tell the counselee to

\textsuperscript{29} Oates, \textit{Pastoral Counseling}, 13.

\textsuperscript{30} Benner, \textit{Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model}, 35.
reschedule with him when they are ready and willing to make a decision concerning their situation or problem. In this second option, the pastoral counselor should not forget about the counselee but should give the counselee some time before re-engaging. After a few weeks, a phone call or email could be sent to the counselee to show them the pastor cares about them and desires to help them move from where they are to where God wants them to be.

The step of decision is central to the methodology of decision management counseling. In order to manage a decision, a decision must be made. The pastoral counselor should focus the counselee on one decision at a time. Stone writes, “The more concrete and specific the definition of the problem, the more readily it will lend itself to a solution.”31 Too many decisions to act on and manage will be difficult for the pastoral counselor and the counselee. The burden for the pastoral counselor is to ensure that the decision be in line with God’s nature, character, and revelation. The burden for the counselee is to make a commitment to act upon the decision.

**Step Four: Do**

In the final step of decision management counseling, the pastoral counselor assists the counselee in making a plan of action for working toward accomplishing the decision. The pastoral counselor should design achievable tasks for the counselee to work on in the coming weeks. The concept in this step is managing the decision forward. Making a decision to change is important, but just as important, if not more important, is the implementation of actions and in making the decision a part of daily living. Imagine meetings where many decision are made, but nothing actually gets accomplished outside the meeting. Many counseling session are like inert meetings. The pastoral counselor must assist the counseling in “doing” the decision. The pastoral counselor should consider what things must take place in the life of the counselee in

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31 Stone, *Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling*, 93.
order to move from where he/she is to where God wants them to be. Stone says, “Because the time that counselees are usually willing to devote to a counseling process is limited, action needs to be directed toward specific, identifiable predicaments in their daily lives.”32 Once a decision is made by the counselee, the pastoral counselor can make a game plan or strategy of working toward the decision.

Many counseling strategies have recognized the importance of “homework”. Stone writes, “Homework tasks are vital in pastoral counseling, especially for short-term counseling. They spread the influence of the counseling session to the rest of life; they actively engage counselees in the management of their own problems by helping them learn new skills and more effective ways of functioning; and they distinguish those who really want to change…from those who only pretend to want change.”33 Benner says, “Work done between sessions is an important way of maintaining momentum and providing real-life experiences that can be examined during counseling sessions.”34 With these understandings, one should clearly see the importance of homework to the successful outcome of pastoral counseling.

In developing homework, the pastoral counselor should focus on a limited number of action items. If too many action items are given, the counselee may be overwhelmed. Typically one or two action items should be developed and agreed upon. Getting the counselee to agree to the stated plan of action is vital to the success of the counseling session(s).35 The central desire for the pastoral counselor is to create movement in the life of the counselee. Simply put, the

32 Stone, Brief Pastoral Counseling: Short-term Approaches and Strategies, 47.
33 Ibid., 46.
34 Benner, Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model, 58.
35 Steve de Shazer, Keys to Solution in Brief Therapy (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 104.
counselee has decided what God would have them do about his/her problem or situation, the question now is “how do we implement the decision?”

As important as it is for the pastoral counselor to develop a game plan for the accomplishment of the decision made by the counselee, just as important for the pastoral counselor is to keep the counselee accountable for his/her decision. Accountability is the “management” part of decision management counseling. The pastoral counselor should schedule a time to contact the counselee about his/her progress. The contact need not be face-to-face, but rather could be on the telephone or via email. The point is that the pastoral counselor needs to manage the accomplishment of the decision made by the counselee. An old adage states, “Things that get evaluated get done.” The pastoral counselor needs to provide the evaluation for the counselee to encourage the necessary movement in accomplishing the resolution of the situation or problem. Without accountability, the counselee may have every intention of changing but fail to follow through on his/her decision. Stone writes, “Taking action is essential in problem managements, but, at this point, people often resist moving forward.”

The pastoral counselor must do what he can to disciple the counselee forward.

**Benefits**

The first benefit of decision management as a pastoral counseling approach is the easy methodology. Decision management counseling has four defined stages. The pastoral counselor simply walks the counselee through the stages. The four stages are alliterated for easy memorization and questions are associated with each stage to provide a point of entry to the next stage. The four stages are linear and systematic allowing the pastoral counselor to easily move

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from one stage to the next. The pastoral counselor, utilizing decision management counseling, has an easy and clear methodology with which to work in his/her counseling sessions.

Decision management counseling is not only easy for a pastoral counselor to utilize, but also is streamlined. Decision management counseling encourages the pastoral counselor to keep the session’s progression straight-forward. Decision management counseling elicits the problem from the counselee, imagines life without the problem, decides about what to concerning the problem, and implements the decision. A simplified counseling structure allows even the novice pastoral counselor to have an effective counseling session.

Many pastoral counselors report limited time for conducting counseling sessions. Pastors who utilize decision management counseling will find they are able to have one session with counselees and in that session are able to provide significant help and movement to the counselee. The pastoral counselor will be able to quickly and easily move the counselee from where they are to where God wants them to be. Many counseling sessions can be held in sixty minutes or less. A reduction in counseling session time does not mean a reduction in the effectiveness of the counsel given by the counseling pastor. A reduction in counseling session time is due to the directive path for the session and a clear and easy methodology.

Another benefit of decision management counseling is in the area of preparation time. Pastoral counselors do not have the luxury of always being able to prepare for each counseling session. Decision management counseling reduces the amount of time pastors need to prepare for counseling sessions by providing a simple and easy system for counseling. The same template with minor variation can be applied to most counseling sessions a pastoral counselor will have. Decision management counseling does have limits; however decision management counseling will be able to be utilized in most counseling situations.
Finally, decision management counseling benefits the counselee by moving them quickly back onto the path of spiritual, relational, or personal wellness. Decision management counseling does not take weeks or months to work. Decision management counseling provides an effective strategy for quickly moving people back to where God wants them to be. As previously stated and cited, many counselees cease attending counseling sessions after the very first session. Decision management counseling starts working at the very first contact to move and work in the hearts and lives of people.

Summary

Decision management is counseling which assists a person in making a decision concerning a problem or situation and then providing a plan of action in order to implement the decision and manage it forward toward resolution. Decision management counseling is about finding solutions to help a person get his/her life back on track. This understanding is reflected in current counseling strategies. O’Hanlon and Weiner-Davis write, “There is also a move away from searching for the explanation for the person’s difficulties, for the real problem, to looking for solutions that will work for the particular individual, couple, or family seeking therapy.”

Decision management counseling operates in the theological understandings of progressive sanctification, the idea that God is constantly at work in the lives of believers moving them toward Christ-likeness. As Kollar states, “The counselor’s purpose is to help the counselee get unstuck and back on track with the Lord. All the problems are viewed from within the context of the ongoing work of the Spirit.”

37 O’Hanlon and Weiner-Davis, In Search of Solutions: A New Direction in, 7.

38 Kollar, Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track, 55.
counselor to make use of the limited time he has available for counseling sessions in the most profitable ways possible. Benner points out why such an approach would be attractive to ministers, “For parish pastors who counsel, available time role diversity, and typically background in psychology are often strong reasons for pastors to adopt a brief counseling approach.”39 Benner notes there is a side benefit to keeping pastoral counseling sessions brief, “..one way in which they [pastors] can minimize the role conflicts they often encounter is by keeping counseling relationships short-term.”40 Decision management counseling allows and encourages the pastoral counselor to do just that, keep counseling sessions short and limited.

Decision management counseling operates with little or no outside preparation, making it a readily available, easily implemented pastoral counseling strategy which is accessible. Decision management counseling can be done in as little as one session. In session one, the pastoral counselor listens to the counselee describe the problem, helps the counselee dream about life without the problem, assists the counselee in making a decision about the problem, and develops a game plan for the counselee to implement as they “do” the decision. After that first session, the pastoral counselor simply follows up with the counselee by phone or email in order to assist the counselee in managing his/her decision and for accountability purposes. During the follow up conversation with the counselee, the pastoral counselor can decide whether a follow up session is necessary or if the counselee is on a path toward resolution. The pastoral counselor can also decide whether further future contact for the purpose of accountability is warranted.

Four central questions encapsulate decision management counseling. The first question is “How can I help you?” The purpose of this question is to elicit a description of the person’s problem or situation. The second question is “Suppose God decided to completely remove this

39 Benner, Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model, 42.

40 Ibid., 43.
problem or situation from your life. What would be different and how would you know?” The purpose of this question is to assist the person in imagining life without the problem or situation. The third question is “What would God want this person to do concerning the situation or problem.” The purpose of this question is to assist the person in making a godly decision. The fourth question is “What things can be done in order to help the counselee accomplish the decision.” The purpose of this question is to game plan implementation of the decision into daily life.

The pastoral counselor should not neglect or disregard the follow-up time with the counselee. The pastor counselor may or may not schedule a follow up session with the counselee, but the pastoral counselor should follow up with the counselee about a week after the session and then again in about three months to check on the progress of the counselee. The need to schedule a face-to-face follow up session should be left up to the counselee. In the case of a counselee who is unable or unwilling to make a decision, the pastoral counselor should set an expectation as to when he will meet with the counselee again. For example, a wife may be expected to bring her husband to the next session. The purpose here is not to meet with a counselee just for the sake of meeting. Sessions need to be a commodity brokered for the purpose of helping people move from where they are to where God wants them to be.

Decision management as a pastoral counseling strategy accomplishes several things that the survey revealed as challenges for the pastoral counselor. First, decision management counseling provides an easily implemented strategy for unplanned counseling sessions. Furthermore, it provides a plan for counseling sessions in which the pastoral counselor does not know what subject matter will be broached. The sense of plan and strategy will give the pastoral counselor confidence in approaching counseling sessions. Second, decision management
counseling gives the inexperience and experienced pastoral counselor a consistent pathway on which to walk for counseling sessions. A consistent strategy allows the pastoral counselor to become more comfortable with counselees and should produce better results than simply “flying by the seat of your pants.” Third, decision management counseling maximizes the time a pastoral counselor has available for counseling sessions. Decision management counseling works to make counseling sessions more productive. Finally, decision management counseling places the pressure of change on the counselee by the power of the Holy Spirit and not on the expertise of the pastoral counselor. In decision management counseling, pastoral counselors provide biblical knowledge and insight to bring a person to a point of decision and then provide accountability concerning the decision’s implementation in the life of the counselee.
CHAPTER THREE
A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DECISION MANAGEMENT

While the Bible does not contain the term “decision management counseling” or “pastoral counseling” for that matter, the Bible does contain the principles of decision management counseling in both the Old Testament and New Testament. The Bible contains several instances where the principles of decision management counseling are applied to various circumstances. These circumstances vary as to the problem approached, the people giving advice, and the person receiving advice. However, in all of the instances discussed in this project the concepts of decision management counseling are applied to the situation.

Old Testament Examples

Exodus contains an example of decision management counseling. In this story, Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, approaches Moses and asks him why he is spending so much time resolving disputes between the people. Moses describes the situation to Jethro. He tells Jethro that the people of Israel are looking to him to make judgments when they have disputes. Jethro confronts the problem he sees in Moses’ behavior. Jethro gives Moses some advice on how to

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1 Exodus 18:1-27, NET
2 Exodus 18:13-14, NET
3 Exodus 18:15-16, NET
handle the situation. Specifically, he tells Moses to set up a management structure for the people. Moses sets up the structure for the nation of Israel.

In this example of Jethro and Moses, Jethro acts in the role of counselor and Moses is the counselee. Moses didn’t set up an appointment to see Jethro, but rather Jethro saw a potential problem forming and confronted Moses concerning it. Moses described the problem to Jethro, the first step of decision management counseling. Then, in a way, the Bible records the dream step when Jethro tells Moses if he listens to the advice, he will endure and the people will be satisfied. Moses decides to follow Jethro’s advice and puts Jethro’s plan into action.

Another example of decision management counseling is found I Kings. In this story, Elijah, a prophet of God, confronts the prophets of Baal. The challenge was for the prophets of Baal to call down fire and consume the sacrifice on the altar. After much theatrics, the prophets of Baal could not perform the action. Then, it was Elijah’s turn to call down fire from God. However, Elijah wanted everyone to know the extent of God’s power, so he had the altar doused with water three times. Then, Elijah prayed and fire fell from heaven consuming the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dirt, and licked up the water in the trench around the altar. When the people of Israel saw this take place, they fell on their faces before God and acknowledge God to be the one true God. Elijah told them to seize the prophets of Baal and execute them.

In this example from the Old Testament, Elijah describes the problem as one of allegiance. The people of Israel were paralyzed by indecision. Elijah told them it was time for

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4 Exodus 18:17-23, NET
5 Exodus 18:23, NET
6 Exodus 18:24-26, NET
7 I Kings 18:1-46, NET
8 I Kings 18:21, NET
them to make a decision concerning who they would serve. Then, he had the people dream about God’s power, when they saw the fire fall from heaven and consume the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, the dirt, and lick up the water in the trench around the altar.\textsuperscript{9} The people made the decision that the LORD is the true God.\textsuperscript{10} To act upon their decision, the people of Israel seized the prophets of Baal and executed them in the Kishon Valley.\textsuperscript{11}

Another example of the principles of decision management counseling in the Old Testament is found in the book of Ezra.\textsuperscript{12} The ruler of Persia, King Cyrus, issued a proclamation allowing the people of Israel to return to their land. Many of the people of Israel return to their land to re-build their lives in the land of their ancestry. In Ezra chapter 9, Ezra realizes the people have a problem. The problem is the people of Israel had inter-married with non-Jews and had begun living according to their customs and practices. Ezra prays for the nation of Israel and confesses their sin. While he is praying and confessing, many people gathered around him. The people recognize the problem. They dream about coming under God’s judgment once again as they listen to Ezra’s prayer.\textsuperscript{13} They make a decision to send away their foreign wives and their children. The people encourage Ezra to “be strong and act decisively”.\textsuperscript{14} They even took an oath to this effect.\textsuperscript{15} Ezra manages this decision by issuing a proclamation to gather all the people together and taking actions to deal with the problem.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9} I Kings 18:38-39, NET
\item \textsuperscript{10} I Kings 18:39, NET
\item \textsuperscript{11} I Kings 18:40, NET
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ezra 9-10, NET
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ezra 9:6-15, NET
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ezra 10:4, NET
\item \textsuperscript{15} Ezra 10:5, NET
\end{itemize}
In this example from the Old Testament, Ezra and other leaders of Israel describe the problem the people of Israel are having. After describing the problem, he causes the people of Israel to dream as they listened to him pray. Their perception of the problem and the results of their actions affected them so greatly they wept loudly. A decision is made on how to deal with the problem. They made a solemn oath to carry out the plan. Finally, they put the plan into action.

New Testament Examples

The New Testament also contains examples of the elements and principles of decision-management counseling. While the term “decision-management counseling” is not used, the elements of decision management counseling are clearly seen. Several New Testament characters employ the principles of decision management counseling on several occasions.

One occasion of the use of the principles of decision management counseling is when Jesus Christ spoke with a rich man. On this occurrence, Jesus was getting ready to travel when a person ran up to him and asked Him “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” After confronting the rich man’s choice of words and reminding him of God’s commandments, he

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16 Ezra 10:7-14, NET
17 Ezra 9:1-2, NET
18 Ezra 10:1, NET
19 Ezra 10:2-5, NET
20 Ezra 10:5, NET
21 Ezra 10:7-17, NET
22 Mark 10:17-22, NET
23 Mark 10:17, NET
points out the rich man’s problem. The rich man’s problem was that he valued his things too highly. The rich man leaves Jesus sorrowful unwilling to do what it took to solve his problem.

In this example, Jesus describes the rich man’s problem.\textsuperscript{24} The rich man’s problem was that his wealth prevented him from what he wanted, namely eternal life. The rich man dreamed about what life would be like without his wealth.\textsuperscript{25} The rich man’s countenance speaks to his mental state, as he is described as “looking sad”. The rich man made a decision to continue on the path he was on as he was not willing to do what it took to change. This biblical example is a reminder that it is up to the counselee to make the decision and “do” what it takes to implement his/her decision. Not everyone makes a proper, godly, biblical decision that will help him/her become what God intends him/her to be. Some people will make a decision not to change and will continue to be afflicted with the problem they previously wanted to resolve. The burden to change a person’s behavior is not on the counselor. The Holy Spirit works to change an individual. The counselor is simply an agent of the Holy Spirit. The counselor assists the counselee by speaking the truth which can help him/her change and suggests a course of action to implement in order to act upon the counselee’s decision. As Stone says, “They [pastoral counselors] do not presume to know what changes would be best for parishioners, but rather address what the counselees want to change.”\textsuperscript{26} In this example, Jesus spoke the truth and suggested a course of action to implement to assist the rich man in doing what he previously had wanted to do. However, the counselee, the rich man in this case, rejected the truth and course of action.

\textsuperscript{24} Mark 10:21, NET
\textsuperscript{25} Mark 10:22, NET
\textsuperscript{26} Howard W. Stone, Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 25.
Another example of decision management counseling in the New Testament is found in the book of Philemon. Paul, writing from prison, discusses the problem of what to do with a run-away slave. Onesimus fled from his master Philemon and ended up in prison. Paul led Onesimus to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and wanted his friend Philemon to make a good decision concerning the handling of Onesimus. Paul writes to Philemon counseling him to accept Onesimus back and to forgive him of anything Onesimus may have defrauded him.

In this example of decision management counseling, limited information is known as to the results and decision because only one-side of the conversation is recorded. However, the concepts and ideas of decision management counseling are present in this letter to Philemon. First, Paul describes the problem. The problem is that Onesimus ran from his master and possibly stole from him. These actions are most likely what landed him in jail with Paul. After describing the problem, Paul encourages Philemon to dream in two areas. The first area for Philemon to dream and think about is the usefulness of Onesimus now that Onesimus had become a believer. The second area for Philemon to dream about is concerning the deep relationship Philemon enjoyed with Paul. Paul encourages Philemon to make the decision of accepting Onesimus back and to forgive Onesimus of anything he had defrauded him of when he ran away. Paul indicates Philemon owes him greatly and that Philemon should be as generous with Onesimus as he would be with Paul. Although unknown whether or not Philemon made the

27 Philemon 1:1-24, NET
28 Philemon 1:10-12; 18, NET
29 Philemon 1:11, NET
30 Philemon 1:19-21, NET
31 Philemon 1:17-18, NET
decisions that Paul recommended he make, but Paul is confident he would. Furthermore, Paul is making plans to follow up with Philemon concerning the situation. 

Another example of decision management counseling in found in III John. The letter of III John is written to an elder is the church named Gaius. John indicates he had led Gaius to a relationship with Jesus. John speaks of a problem the church is having with a person named Diotrephes. John says that Diotrephes is slandering him, refusing to welcome missionaries, and throwing people out of the local church who are aiding missionaries. Outraged by this behavior, John does not want other people in the church to imitate Diotrephes behavior.

The problem under consideration is described by John. The problem Gaius was having is that a principle member of the local church was acting badly. The problem is specifically described as bringing unjustified charges against John and other missionaries, refusing to welcome missionaries, hindering others who try to aid missionaries, and throwing people out of the church who try to support and aid the missionaries. John encourages Gaius to dream and to see the perspective of God in the matter. John indicates that a man who is behaving as Diotrephes is behaving cannot possibly have genuine saving faith. John urges Gaius to continue in the path of the decision that he made to support the missionaries coming to them. Gaius may or may not have done what John counseled him to do; however, in the manner of the

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32 Philemon 1:21, NET  
33 Philemon 1:22, NET  
34 III John 1:1-15, NET  
35 III John 1:9-11, NET  
36 III John 1:11, NET  
37 Ibid.  
38 III John 1:5-8, NET
principles of decision management counseling, John plans to follow up with Gaius by traveling to his location and speaking with him further about this matter.

Summary

While the Scripture does not contain the term “decision management counseling,” the Bible does contain the principles termed “decision management counseling”. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament contain characters and stories that employ the concepts termed “decision management counseling”. In some cases the outcome of the counseling is known; in other cases the outcome is not clear. However, in all the mentioned examples, the problem is described.

The second step of decision management counseling, the dream stage, is not always easily recognizable. However, the concept is present in each situation. Normally, the dream stage in the Scripture is recorded between the lines or emotions of the counselee. Between the lines should be understood to mean the Scriptures imply a certain line of thinking. An example of emotion in the dream stage is the case of the rich man, where the Scriptures record “he went away sad.”\footnote{Mark 10:22, NET} The cause for the rich man’s sadness would be the thoughts of what it meant to sell all he owned and to give all the money away. In other examples, the dreaming stage is happening while the person functioning as the counselor is praying or speaking.\footnote{1 Kings 18:21, NET; Ezra 9:6-15, NET} For example in the case discussed from 1 Kings 18, Elijah is praying and the people see the power of God. The display of God’s power in the form of a consuming fire causes the people to respond by throwing themselves face down on the ground. The action indicates the dreaming or the thinking of the people of the immense power of God.
The decision step of decision management counseling is clearly seen in each example, but the results and management of the decision are mixed. For example in the case of Moses, the results are good, and the management of the decision by Moses is obvious as he puts the plan into motion.\textsuperscript{41} In the case of Elijah, the decision the people make is to follow the true God and as a result the people put their decision into motion by slaughtering the false prophets.\textsuperscript{42} In the case of Ezra, the decision the people make is to send away their foreign wives, and the people manage their decision by sending away their wives and pay a guilt offering of a ram from their flocks.\textsuperscript{43} In the case of the rich man, the decision is to not become Jesus’ follower, and he leaves the counseling session sad because he was unwilling to change.\textsuperscript{44} In the examples of Onesimus and Gaius, the Scriptures do not record the specific outcome of the counseling. However, in both of these examples, the person functioning as the counselor describes the plans being made to manage the decision by physically going to meet with the counselee as seeing the status of the problem.

The principles of decision management counseling are biblically sound concepts. Other examples and case studies from Scripture could have been utilized to further strengthen the understanding of decision management counseling from a biblical perspective. Even though the term “decision management counseling” is not used in Scripture, the principles of decision management counseling are outlined within the stories and letters found in Scripture.

\textsuperscript{41} Exodus 18:24-27, NET
\textsuperscript{42} 1 Kings 18:40, NET
\textsuperscript{43} Ezra 10:14-17, NET
\textsuperscript{44} Mark 10:22, NET
CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDIES

In an effort to demonstrate application of decision management counseling in normal pastoral counseling situations and settings, the following case studies are provided. These case studies are based upon actual counseling situations; however, the name and details have been changed in order to protect the identification and confidentiality of the discussed individuals. The purpose of these case studies is to demonstrate the application of decision management for use in a pastoral counseling setting.

The case studies contained in this chapter are snapshots, not transcripts. Some of the techniques and lines of conversation do not appear in these case studies. For example, this project has not discussed the necessity of establishing a positive bond with the counselee. One of the ideas central to any pastoral counseling is for the counselor to establish a relationship with the counselee. As Stone notes in his article:

The crucial first step in counseling, doubling important in brief pastoral counseling, is to rapidly establish a solid base of rapport and acceptance with the troubled individual. From the onset of the first session the minister’s aim is to help counselees become motivated and cooperate with change. This involves accurate physical attending, careful listening, temporarily suspending judgment, and offering appropriate warmth and respect.¹

Building rapport and relationship is just one area necessary to the success of decision management counseling. A pastoral counselor should also practice techniques such as rephrasing and reflective listening. These case studies are not to discuss all the

techniques which are necessary to perform pastoral counseling, but rather these case
studies demonstrate the approach of decision management counseling.

“My Wife Is Going to Leave Me!”

In this first case study, the pastor is in his office doing his normal studies, when the church
secretary buzzes his office and informs him that Steve is at the church and needs to see him.

Pastor: “Steve, how are you doing? How can I help you today?”

Steve: “I don’t know what to do; my wife told me last night that she is going leaving
me.”

Immediately in this conversation, the problem has presented itself. However, the pastor does not
have very much information to go on. The “describe” phase of counseling is not complete even
though a problem has presented itself. The pastor needs to aid the conversation by asking the
counselee to expound on the problem. Stone states, “The focus of assessment in brief pastoral
counseling is looking for cues (stimuli) that trigger the onset of the problem and the reinforcers
(rewards) that maintain it.”² The same is true in decision management counseling. During the
“describe” phase of the counseling, the pastor needs to find what the specific problem is so that it
may be solved. O’Hanlon and Wiener-Davis make the solution the focus of the counseling
session when they say, “Now therapy is evolving beyond this “here and now” orientation to a
future orientation that is unconcerned with how problems arose or even how they are maintained,
but instead is concerned with how they will be solved.”³ The pastor finds the focal point of the
problem through asking questions.


³ Bill O’Hanlon and Michele Weiner-Davis, In Search of Solutions: A New Direction in Psychotherapy (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 12.
Pastor: “Steve, I am sorry to hear that. How long have you been having difficulties in your marriage?”

Steve: “Oh, we fight all the time over just about everything it seems.”

At this point, the pastor has an idea of the reason for the counseling session. The marital problems stem from a failure to be able to resolve conflicts. Once the pastor has a grasp on the problem, he can then move onto the “dream” stage of the counseling.

In the “dream” stage of decision management counseling, the pastor desires to help the counselee think about life without the problem. Kollar describes the point of the dream stage when he says, “Although counselors have used the miracle question since the 1980s, it was never meant to be a simple question. Rather, it was a way to shift the conversation as quickly as possible to a possible future where the counselee’s problems do not dominate.”4 The pastoral counselor uses a “miracle question” for the same purpose.

Pastor: “Steve, I want you to imagine with me. I want you to imagine God in His infinite power and authority removed all of the conflict between you and your wife. Tonight as you slept, God performed a miracle in your life and in the life of your wife. What would life be like? Tell me what you think your marriage would be like.”

The point of getting the counselee to dream is to get him to a new mental state. Many people have trouble imagining life without their particular problem. They have lived with the problem so long that getting out of it seems impossible to get out of it. However, the pastoral counselor must recognize God as currently working in the life of the counselee.

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Of course, this case study presupposes Steve to be a believer in Jesus because he is a member of the church. It presupposes that God is at work through the power of the Holy Spirit in the counselee’s life. Kollar says, “It is essential to keep in mind that God has been, and continues to be, thoroughly involved in the counselee’s life before we, as counselors, try to help.” Pastoral counselors are a tool God uses to assist counselees in moving from where they are to where they need to be on the journey of sanctification.

After helping Steve imagine life without marital problems and talking to him about what life might hold for him and his wife if they do not resolve their problems, the pastoral counselor assists the counselee in making decisions concerning what to do.

Pastor: “Steve, you just told me what life could be like without marital conflict and you can see why it is important that you learn to solve these problems because of what unresolved conflict leads to. Let me ask you a question, do you believe God wants you and your wife to work out your problems and live together in harmony?”

Steve: “Yes.”

Pastor: “What are you going to do in order to be able to live with your wife in marital harmony?”

The pastoral counselor brings the counselee to a point of decision. The counselee has affirmed the desire to move forward toward a positive relationship with his wife. The decision question should be a “yes” or “no” question. The decision stage is essential to progress. Without a clear decision, the next stage becomes difficult or unworkable.

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3 Kollar, Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track, 62.
After making a decision, the pastoral counselor begins to help the counselee manage his decision through clearly attainable goals and accountability. Through making goals, the counselee is making a commitment to working on change. The point of this stage is for the pastoral counselor to put together a game-plan for the counselee to assist them in changing his/her behavior through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor: “Steve, living together in marital harmony with your wife is not something that is just going to happen on its own. We need to put together some things you can do to achieve this goal. Let’s write some things down that you can do to work toward this goal.”

A clear plan with achievable goals is important in the strategy of decision management counseling. Stone writes concerning the importance of goals, “With a clear and attainable plan, and a commitment to acting upon it, even their difficulties can become opportunities for change, growth and adventure.”

Pastor: “Steve, let’s put together some things you can do in order to live in harmony with your wife and learn to resolve marital conflict.”

Steve: “Okay.”

Pastor: “Number one, this week, memorize Ephesians 5:25. Number two, sometime over the next two weeks, set a dinner date with your wife. During, that date, confess three things you have done to contribute to conflict in your marriage and ask your wife’s forgiveness. Before you leave, we will write down those three things. Number three, for the next thirty days, every morning, pray for your wife and then pray with her before leaving for work.”

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This case study provides for just one course of action to assist the counselee in repairing the relationship with his wife. Stone writes:

Developing a plan is primarily the responsibility of the pastor, though it is done in concert with counselees. Goals are translated into specific tasks that parishioners can understand and perform. Two things are important to the success of this plan. First, individuals must comprehend the specific steps that must be taken to address their difficulties. And secondly, the steps they take must be achievable in a short period of time. Counselees need to recognize and believe that the tasks facing them are “do-able.”

The pastoral counselor should resist the pitfall of putting together a plan of action that the counselee cannot achieve. As Kollar rightly states, “Complex problems do not demand complex solutions.” The goal is to get the counselee unstuck and be an agent of the Holy Spirit in His work within the life of the counselee.

A final step within the “do” stage of decision management counseling is to provide follow up for the purpose of accountability. The follow up is essential and can be performed through follow-up counseling sessions, phone calls or email. The point is to hold the counselee accountable for his decision. For example, in this case study, the pastor uses a combination of a phone call and a follow up counseling session.

Pastor: “Now, that you have a plan of action, I am going to give you a call in about a week to see how things are going. I would expect you to have memorized the verse and have a date night planned with your wife. I will also ask you about whether or not you having been praying for and with your wife. Okay?”

Steve: “Okay.”

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8 Kollar, Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track, 85.
Pastor: “Also, I would like for us to sit down and talk again in about a month. Of course, I am available if you need to talk before that time, but when we talk next, let’s decide on a time to sit down and talk some more. Okay?”

Steve: “Sounds good.”

The follow up with the counselee is an essential part of the management phase of decision management counseling. The counselee needs to realize he will be held accountable for his actions or lack thereof. The follow up should be strategic and purposeful. The pastoral counselor acts as a co-labor in the life of the counselee helping him bear the burden.⁹

“My Teenager is Uncontrollable”

In this case study, a parent sets an appointment to talk with the pastor about her teenager’s behavior. The pastoral counselor begins the session with prayer. Then, he asks the parent to describe the problem.

Pastor: “Thank you Kelly for coming to see me. You told me on the phone you are having some trouble with your daughter and she is how old?”

Kelly: “She is 14 now.”

Pastor: “Okay, as you know we have limited time, so what problem are you having with her that caused you to make an appointment with me today?”

Kelly: “Okay, well, I found her on the internet talking in video chat rooms to men.”

Pastor: “What did you do when you found her doing this?”

Kelly: “I revoked all her privileges and grounded her.”

⁹ Galatians 6:2, NET
After some listening and reflective questioning, the pastor understands the problem is not really about the daughter’s misuse of the Internet, but rather it is really about setting up boundaries and consequences. He moves the counselee onto the “dream” stage.

Pastor: “Kelly, I want you to imagine with me. I want you to imagine God in His infinite power and authority gave you a new relationship with your daughter.

Tonight as you slept, God performed a miracle in your life and in the life of your daughter. What would your relationship with your daughter be like?”

Again, the counselee in this stage is trying to imagine life without the problem. After dreaming about life without the problem and helping the counselee see what might happen if this relationship is dysfunctional, the pastor moves onto the “decide” stage of decision management counseling. In this particular situation, the pastoral counselor and the counselee find it difficult to make a decision concerning what to do about the problem. The pastor realizes he needs to assist the counselee in making a decision, which will help form a constructive relationship between mother and daughter. Clinton says, in these situations, a pastoral counselor needs to focus on relationship.¹⁰

Pastor: “Kelly, even though it might seem as if the problem is a misuse of the Internet, the problem is really a need to set up proper boundaries with your teenage daughter. Would you agree with to work toward setting up proper boundaries with your teenage daughter?”

Kelly: “Yes, I would agree on that.”

Once a concrete decision has been made, the pastoral counselor begins to help the counselee put together a plan of action in the “do” stage of decision management counseling.

Pastor: “Kelly, let’s write down some things that can help you in this area. Let’s start by writing down some things you can do with your daughter to grow closer to her.”

Kelly: “Okay.”

Pastor: “Then, let’s write down some rules and consequences for breaking those rules.”

Kelly: “Okay.”

The pastoral counselor should avoid the temptation of doing too many things at one time. The importance is to get movement going in a positive direction. de Shazer writes concerning solutions from a secular viewpoint:

Since solutions are not predictable in any detail and since there is more than one potential way of behaving in the future without the complaint, the new set of expectations can be constructed out of any satisfactory or beneficial changes. Any change stands a chance of starting a ripple effect which will lead to a more satisfactory future. Therefore, the brief therapist reacts to any change as an indication that things are starting to go right for the clients. It does not seem to matter is a particular change is new or different behavior, or if it is an exception to the rules of the complaint. Any change is a difference that could well prove to be different enough to be part of the solution. In any case, any change can become part of the construction of a new set of expectations that will be part of creating the solution.

For the pastoral counselor, simply any change is not necessarily a good thing. However, the point is that godly instruction in line with biblical teaching points the way to changes by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes the heart, mind, and behavior when the counselee desires to allow Him to have control of his/her life. Jan James writes, “The task of brief pastoral counseling, then is to help people discern how best to value their strength and abilities, using them in cooperation with this transforming process.”

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11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Steve de Shazer, Keys to Solution in Brief Therapy (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 77.

been made and action items have been written, the pastoral counselor continues the “do” stage of decision management counseling by providing follow up for accountability.

Pastor: “Kelly, in about two weeks I am going to call you to see how things are going. I will pray for you that things will improve relationally between you and your daughter. One of the keys to improving this relationship is going to be consistency. If you need to talk before then, give me a call and we can set up a time to talk. One of the things I may suggest in the future is for you to bring your daughter with you if things do not improve. In the meantime, work on spending some quality time with your daughter and communicate the rules and consequences with her. Let her have some input into them and mutually commit to following them.”

Kelly: “Sounds good.”

When the pastor makes the phone call to Kelly to check on the progress, he can make the decision at that point whether or not to bring Kelly and her daughter in for a follow up session or if things are progressing at a good pace. Stone reminds the pastoral counselor, “When evaluation reveals progress, the counselee will be encouraged to continue. When the review discloses lack of progress, the goals or alternative may need fresh scrutiny or change.”

“I’m Worried About My Job.”

In the following case study, Bob does not make an appointment to see his pastor. He simply shows up Thursday afternoon at the pastor’s office. The pastor invites him back to his office and asks him a question to discover the reason for Bob’s visit.

Pastor: “So, Bob, how can I help you today?”

15 Stone, Brief Pastoral Counseling: Short-term Approaches and Strategies, 52.
Bob: “I don’t know if you can, but I just needed to talk to somebody.”

Pastor: “Alright, so what is troubling you?”

Bob: “I am so worried.”

Pastor: “What are you worried about?”

Bob: “Well, as you know, I work at the shipyard. They have been talking about having to lay off a lot of people because of budget cuts. My wife and kids depend on my job to support us. I’m worried that I’m going to lose my job and won’t be able to support my wife and kids.”

The use of questions to aid the counselee in talking about his/her problem is an important key in decision management counseling. Also, the pastoral counselor should work on this step of counseling until the problem becomes specific, rather than general. As Benner points out, “The pastor’s job is, however, to ensure that the central concern is identified and that it is framed in a relatively specific manner.”16 The pastoral counselor should help focus the conversation around a specific problem.

Once a central specific problem has been identified, the pastoral counselor moves onto the “dream” stage of the counseling.

Pastor: “Bob, I want you to imagine with me. I want you to imagine God in His infinite power and authority gave you job security. Tonight as you slept, God performed a miracle in your life, and you would never have to worry about your job again.

What would it be like?”

The point and purpose of the dream stage has already been previously discussed, however, the pastoral counselor should use the dream stage to setup the decision stage. With this particular

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16 David Benner, Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 52.
topic of worry, the setup is clear. The pastoral counselor should not neglect to help the
counselee understand the pathway he is on should he decide not to change.

After speaking with Bob about what life would be like if he continues to worry, the
pastor aids Bob in making a decision by bringing the Bible to bear on the problem.

Pastor: “Bob, do you realize that God wants you to be free from worry. Let me read a
passage of Scripture to you. The passage is from Matthew 7…”

After the Bible has been read and discussed, Bob can now make a decision concerning what God
would have him do with his worry.

Pastor: “Bob, now that you know what the Bible says about worry, what does God want
you to do with your worries?”

Bob: “Well, God doesn’t want me to worry. He wants me to trust in Him.”

Pastor: “Absolutely. Let’s put together a plan to help you begin to trust God more and
turn your worry over to him. Agreed?”

Bob: “Agreed.”

An important stage in the approach of decision management counseling is to have the counselee
agree to the decision. The pastor can suggest a decision, but he cannot move on from this stage
of counseling until the counselee agrees with the decision. As Clinebell states, “Getting persons
to act constructively, even if decisions and actions are on minor matters, helps break the
paralysis of chronic indecision.”17 In decision management counseling, the pastoral counselor
aids the counselee in making a decision, even if it is a small decision, to further the work of the
Holy Spirit in the life of the individual.

17 Howard Clinebell, Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources For The Ministry of Healing & Growth (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 199.
Having made a decision, the pastoral counselor assists the counselee in putting together a plan of action in the “do” phase of decision management counseling. The homework types or plans of action vary depending on the counselee; however, the plan of action is vital to the success of the counseling session. Without a way to measure progress, calculation of the counselee’s forward movement is impossible. de Shazer speaks concerning goals, “Without goals, therapists and clients tend to wander around in much the same circles the clients followed alone in the unsuccessful effort to solve their complaints.”18 The counselee must be committed to change and demonstrate this commitment by completing the action plan. The completion of the homework tasks is essential. Stone writes, “Commitment to the homework task is critical to its accomplishment and to the success of the counseling effort as a whole.”19

Pastor: “Bob, now that we have talking about and written down some things to help you trust God and release your worry to Him, I need to know that you will do what we have talked about.”

Bob: “I will work on it.”

Pastor: “Okay, well in about a week, I am going to give you a call to see how you are doing. Sound good?”

Bob: “Yes, that sounds good. Thank you.”

In this “do” stage of decision management counseling, the pastoral counselor tells the counselee he will be following up with him by phone call.

Concerning follow-up, Kollar writes,

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18 de Shazer, *Keys to Solution in Brief Therapy*, 93.

Follow-up is essential to continue the process of consolidating gains. Follow-up could include such things as church attendance, Christian education classes, supportive fellowship, men’s or women’s groups, and mentoring. It should also include one or two follow-up phone calls from the counselor over the next three months. Keep in mind the importance of confidentiality. Speak only to the counselee. I would not recommend leaving a message.  

After making a phone call, the pastoral counselor can decide whether or not to have the counselee back for another session.

“I Just Don’t See What’s Wrong With It”

The dream of every pastoral counselor is that every session in which he or she engages would be a success. However, anyone who has counseled for any length of time knows that not every counseling session results in success. Sometimes pastoral counselors have a “rich ruler” experience, like Jesus did in the Gospel according to Mark. Sometimes a proper counseling methodology sends the person away because they are not ready to make a godly decision. In cases like the one mentioned below, the pastoral counselor has to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to work in the life of an individual rather than in the strength of his own wisdom.

In this particular case study, John makes an appointment with the pastoral counselor. On the phone, John mentions that his wife thought the appointment would be good for him. On the day of the appointment, the pastor begins the conversation with a variation of the standard question for decision management counseling, “So, why did you make an appointment to see me today?”

John: “Well, frankly, I wouldn’t have come to see you, but my wife thinks I have a problem. She suggested I should talk to you about it.”

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20 Kollar, Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach for Getting People Back on Track, 159.

21 Mark 10:17-27, NET
Pastor: “Okay, well I’m glad you made an appointment to see me. What problem does your wife think you have?”

John: “Well, I don’t really want to say because of what you might think of me.”

Pastor: “John, you should know that what you say will be kept in confidence. I want to help you make a good decision which will move from where you are to where God wants you to be.”

John: “Okay, well, my wife caught me looking at porn the other night. Then, she looked on my laptop and found all the videos and pictures I have. She is pretty upset with me. I told her it wasn’t about her, but that I just like looking at it. She doesn’t understand why I would want to and thinks I’m disgusting.”

In this conversation the pastoral counselor must help the counselee become comfortable in sharing with him the information he will need to assist him. The pastoral counselor achieves the necessary rapport by affirming the confidentiality of the counseling session. Also, the pastoral counselor does not pass judgment or look on the counselee with distain. Rather, the pastoral counselor, in the describe stage, simply works to reveal the reason for the counselee’s visit.

After eliciting the reason for the appointment and hearing the problem from the perspective of the counselee, the pastoral counselor recognizes that the counselee does not view his behavior as a problem. Therefore, the pastoral counselor works to confront the counselee with the potential consequence of his behavior by bringing reality to bear on the situation. There are many possible ways to give a counselee a “reality check”. The pastoral counselor, in this case, uses the feelings of shame.

Pastor: “John, do you have children?”
John: “Yes, I have a son and a daughter.”

Pastor: “Okay, I am going to help you understand why it is a problem to be involved in viewing pornographic material. Some of what I am going to say may be hard to hear, but it is necessary that you get a picture of reality. First, would you want your son or daughter to view pornographic material or catch you viewing pornographic material?”

John: “No, of course not, that is why I am really careful.”

Pastor: “No matter how careful you are, everyone makes mistakes and slips up. Second, would you want your daughter to be one of the women that other men watch having sex with strangers?”

John: “No, of course not. I think that would be every father’s worst nightmare.”

Pastor: “Right and you realize that every woman in those pictures is somebody’s daughter, correct?”

John: “I guess I never really think about that.”

The point of this part of the conversation is to get the counselee thinking about the behavior in which they are involved, rather than allowing them to have a fictional place where sin is no big deal. As previously stated, not every situation will warrant such a blunt technique, but it can be a helpful tool in other cases. Next, the pastoral counselor uses the “miracle question”. After the miracle question, the pastoral counselor should use the Scripture to show how God views this particular behavior. Then, the pastoral counselor moves the counselee onto the stage of decision.

Pastor: “John, what do you think God would want you to do about your habit of watching pornography?”
John: “Well, I don’t know. I do not think he would have created me to have these
desires if he didn’t want me to engage them.”

Pastor: “John, some people have the impulses to murder, does that mean they should kill
someone if they have the impulse?”

John: “No, but it is not really the same thing.”

Pastor: “Well, John, in God’s eyes sin is sin. Anything God has told us not to do and we
do it anyway is wrong and against God. God has told us in his word that we
should not engage in lustful behaviors. Are you willing to confess your sin of lust
and work to put it out of your life?”

John: “Honestly, I just don’t see what is wrong with it.”

Not every counseling session is successful and not every counselee is ready to make a
decision. The pastoral counselor could spend a lot of time trying to convince a counselee of his
wrong behavior, but unless the Holy Spirit convinces the person of his/her sin, no amount of
persuasiveness will be effective.22 Stone accurately states:

A sufficient desire for help and change is needed, or little happens. So, when motivation
is lacking in counselees, be patient enough to wait for the kairos, that critical moment
when openness occurs and a new beginning can unfold. In such cases, releasing
counselees so that they can experience the natural consequences of their decisions is
better, in the hope that those consequences will create enough pain to make change and
growth possible. Every individual is precious, yet with limited time and resources, hard
ethical decisions must be made. One possible decision, perhaps the most loving one in
the end, is to discharge those who are not working, to stop trying to help them.23

Discharging a counselee may be difficult for the pastoral counselor, but in some cases is
necessary. The pastoral counselor may desire to do everything he can to prevent the behavior of
the counselee from producing the impending consequences. In some cases, however, suffering

22 For more on the work of the Holy Spirit see John 16:5-15.

and pain are used by the things the Holy Spirit to bring around the change in the life of the individual.

**Summary**

These examples demonstrate decision management counseling in action. In each of these cases studies, the four steps of decision management counseling are put into practice. The four steps of decision management counseling provide a solid counseling foundation from which the pastoral counselor can work. Of course, the pastoral counselor must maximize prayer and the Bible during his counseling sessions. A good counseling structure is no substitute for the power and working of the Holy Spirit. As Kollar states, “Therefore, Christian counseling enters into this work of the Spirit as He is forming the unique identity of the counselee. Preaching, Christian education, and supportive fellowship all contribute to this same intention. Counseling has no unique agenda. It is simply a continuation of the work of the Spirit.”

Without the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, no Christian counseling structure has hope of creating appropriate and necessary change in the life of a counselee.

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25 Philippians 2:13, NET
CHAPTER FIVE
PASTORAL COUNSELING WEBSITE

The following chapter contains screen shots from the website, created wholly by the author of this project for the purpose of aiding the pastoral counselor who is involved in decision management counseling. Initially seven common counseling topics for which the pastoral counselor can expect to deal appear on the website; however, more content will be added in the future. The purpose of this website is to provide an “at the fingertips” resource and help for the pastoral counselor and a practical output for this project.

Home Page

The home page is the root page on which a counselor will find himself/herself when going to the website. The purpose of the home page is to provide a mission statement for the website (Figure 2.1).
Counseling Topics Page

From the home page, the pastoral counselor can select “counseling topics”. The counseling topics page provides the basic outline and structure for decision management counseling (Figure 2.2).
The Counseling Pastor employs a decision management focus. Decision Management is best understood as assisting the counselee in making a decision and then guiding them in moving the decision forward toward a mutually acceptable goal. Decision Management Counseling (DMC) uses a four step approach in dealing with counselees:

1. **Describe**
   In this stage, the counselor uses questions and reflective listening to help the counselee describe his/her situation or problem. The question is "why did you come to see me today?"

2. **Dream**
   In this stage, the counselor uses a "dream" question as a tool to help the counselee envision his/her situation without the problem or situation. Many other methods of counseling employ this same technique. The DMC "dream" question is "Suppose God in His infinite power and ability came tonight while you slept and removed [it] from your life. What would your life be like?"

3. **Decide**
   In this stage, the counselor assists the counselee in making a godly decision concerning his/her situation or problem. The counselor brings biblical wisdom and advise and urges the counselee to make a decision which will begin to move them from where they are to where God wants them to be.

4. **Do**
   In this final stage, the counselor develops a plan of action to put the decision into motion. This stage's output can be varied according to the person, situation, or problem. This "do" stage also involves the critical stage of follow-up with the counselee. In the plan, the counselor indicates when he/she will follow-up with the counselee to make sure they are doing their decision.

Click on the topics below to view applications of the decision management counseling strategy in different situations:
Specific Counseling Subject Pages

From this page, or from the menu selection, the pastoral counselor is able to select several counseling topics. These counseling topics appear in alphabetical order. The first of which is “addiction” (Figure 2.3).
Addiction

Describe:
Ask some variation of the question: “How can I help you today?”

Dream:
Ask some variation of the question: “Suppose if God, in His infinite wisdom and ability, came to you tonight and remove [it] from your life, what would your life be like?”

Decide:
Ask some variation of the question: "What would God want you to do about [it]?"
Provide some biblical insight into what God would want them to do:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proverbs 20:1</th>
<th>Proverbs 23:20</th>
<th>Galatians 5:21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 5:18</td>
<td>1 Corinthians 6:12</td>
<td>1 Peter 5:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romans 13:1-5</td>
<td>1 Corinthians 6:15-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From these passages, the obvious conclusion is that God does not intend for us to abuse our bodies or come under the control of any substance. The addict needs to confess his/her addiction and make a decision to repent from it.

Do:
In putting together a plan of action for a person addicted to substances, the pastoral counselor should take into consideration the following:

1. The expectation should not be that the addict recover on his own. The addict will need a support network in order to move from where he is to where God wants Him to be.

2. In this case, the pastoral counselor needs to assist the addict in moving onto the road to recovery, but will most likely need to refer to a trusted Christian substance abuse center.

3. The addict will need to make some tough life choices, if he/she makes the decision they really want to be free from addiction. They will need to love, support, and patience of their church.

The second counseling subject is divorce (Figure 2.4).

**Divorce**

**DESCRIBE:**

Ask some variation of the question: "How can I help you today?"

**DREAM:**

Ask some variation of the question: "Suppose if God, in His infinite wisdom and ability, came to you tonight and restored your relationship with your spouse, what would your life be like?"

Help them understand the reality if they continue down the path they are traveling.

**DECIDE:**

Ask some variation of the question: "What would God want you to do about it?"

Provide some biblical insight into what God would want them to do:

- Matthew 19:7-8
- Deuteronomy 24:1
- John 4:17-18
- 1 Corinthians 7:12-16
- Isaiah 40:27-28
- 1 Peter 3:7-8

If they have already decided to divorce, work to get them to decide to put the divorce on hold while they are in counseling.

If they are contemplating divorce, work to get them to decide to work toward reconciliation with their spouse.

**DO:**

In putting together a plan of action, the pastoral counselor should take into consideration the following:

1. Help them find a marriage mentor in the church
2. Have them pray daily for their spouse
3. Work on conflict resolution

The third topic on the website is grief (Figure 2.5).

**Figure 2.5**

---

### Grief

#### DESCRIBE:

Ask some variation of the question: "How can I help you today?"

#### DREAM:

Ask some variation of the question: "Suppose if God, in His infinite wisdom and ability, came to you tonight and remove [it] from your life, what would your life be like?"

#### DECIDE:

Ask some variation of the question: "What would God want you to do about [it]?"

Provide some biblical insight into what God would want them to do:

- 2 Samuel 11:17
- Isaiah 53:3-4
- John 11:25-26
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14
- Revelation 21:4
- Proverbs 14:13
- Proverbs 18:13
- Ephesians 4:30

Grief is a normal feeling when life changes due to a number of circumstance. A person is not expected to simply "get over it". However, God does expect a person to learn to adjust and live in a new reality.

#### DO:

In putting together a plan of action for a grieving person, the pastoral counselor should take into consideration the following:

1. While there may be stages of grief, a pastoral counselor should not be concerning with walking through each stage with the counselor. The pastoral counselor should provide this support through follow-up. The stages of grief should not be seen as a sequence.

2. A pastoral counselor needs to be aware if a person is trying to avoid appropriate grief.

3. A pastoral counselor should be able to provide comfort and peace for the grieving individual.

The fourth topic on the website is the topic of marital conflict (Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6

The Counseling Pastor

**Marital Conflict**

**DescribE:**

Ask some variation of the question: "How can I help you today?"

**Dream:**

Ask some variation of the question: "Suppose if God, in His infinite wisdom and ability, came to you tonight and restored your relationship with your spouse, what would your life be like?"

Help them understand the reality if they continue down the path they are traveling.

**Decide:**

Ask some variation of the question: "What would God want you to do about [it]?"

Provide some biblical insight into what God would want them to do:

- 1 Peter 3:7
- Deuteronomy 24:1
- Proverbs 6:2-3
- 1 Corinthians 13
- Ephesians 4:26
- Isaiah 40:27-28
- Proverbs 17:27
- 1 Corinthians 7:12-16
- Matthew 19:7-8
- 1 Peter 3:7-9
- Proverbs 16:7
- 1 Corinthians 7:12-16

**Do:**

In putting together a plan of action, the pastoral counselor should take into consideration the following:

1. Help them find a marriage mentor in the church
2. Have them pray daily for their spouse
3. Work on conflict resolution
4. The pastoral counselor should have the couple work on apologizing, forgiveness, and reconciliation

The fifth topic appearing on the website is the topic of money (Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7

*The Counseling Pastor*

Money

**DESCRIBE:**

Ask some variation of the question: "How can I help you today?"

**DREAM:**

Ask some variation of the question: "Suppose if God, in His infinite wisdom and ability, came to you tonight and solved all your money problems, what would your life be like?"

Help them understand the reality if they continue down the path they are traveling.

**DECIDE:**

Ask some variation of the question: "What would God want you to do about it?"

Provide some biblical insight into what God would want them to do.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ecclesiastes 5:12</td>
<td>Phillipians 4:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malachi 3:10</td>
<td>Phillipians 4:6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 6:21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DO:**

In putting together a plan of action, the pastoral counselor should take into consideration the following:

1. If the counselee(s) do not have a budgeting plan, they should be challenged to create one and live by it.

2. There are many Christian debt counseling services. The pastoral counselor should help the counselee(s) select one to help them get their financial house in order.

3. The pastoral counselor should work to help the counselee(s) find their priorities. Many financial problem are caused due to a lack of understanding of priority and living according to want and desires.

The sixth topic on the website is the topic of parenting (Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8

DREAM:
Ask some variation of the question: "Suppose if God, in His infinite wisdom and ability, came to you tonight and gave you all the wisdom you needed to be the best parent the world has ever seen, what would your life be like?"

Help them understand the reality if they continue down the path they are traveling.

DECIDE:
Ask some variation of the question: "What would God want you to do about it?"

Provide some biblical insight into what God would want them to do:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Samuel 1:27-28</th>
<th>1 Samuel 3:13</th>
<th>1 King 1:5-6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 103 17-18</td>
<td>2 Timothy 3:14-15</td>
<td>Ephesian 6:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proverbs 29:15</td>
<td>Proverbs 29:17</td>
<td>Matthew 15:4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DO:
In putting together a plan of action for a grieving person, the pastoral counselor should take into consideration the following:

1. Parenting needs to be consistent, loving, and planned.
2. Parents need to spend time with their children playing, laughing, exploring, and developing. Absentism is not an acceptable form of parenting.
3. Parents need to instill in their children godly habits and disciplines such as memorizing Scripture, praying, and reading the Bible.

The seventh and final topic appearing on the website is the topic of pornography (Figure 2.9).
Pornography

DESCRIBE:

Ask some variation of the question: "How can I help you today?"

DREAM:

Ask some variation of the question: "Suppose if God, in his infinite wisdom and ability, came to you tonight and conquered this struggle for you, what would your life be like?"

HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THE REALITY IF THEY CONTINUE DOWN THE PATH THEY ARE TRAVELING.

DECIDE:

Ask some variation of the question: "What would God want you to do about it?"

Provide some biblical insight into what God would want them to do:

- Numbers 25:1
- Proverbs 5:3-4
- Proverbs 5:5-6
- Luke 15:30
- 1 Corinthians 6:15
- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- Proverbs 5:18-19
- Galatians 5:16
- James 5:16
- 1 John 1:9
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3
- Colossians 2:8-15

DO:

In putting together a plan of action, the pastoral counselor should take into consideration the following:

1. Realize that pornography is not just an issue for men. Women are engaging in this behavior at increasing rates.
2. Look for how they are viewing and try to prevent access to the device or form. It has been said an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
3. Look for things that trigger the behavior and replace them.
4. Have the person confess their sin and make a commitment to forsake it.
5. Encourage the person to find an accountability group.


Summary

In addition to the standard website, this project also provides the output of a mobile site. This additional development provides an at the fingertips resource for pastoral counselors to utilize when engaging counselees. This online tool should not be seen as a substitute for training and preparation, but rather is an aid for the busy pastoral counselor who needs to have a trusted resource available. The form and function of the website allows the pastoral counselor to utilize the counseling structure, methodology, and approach of decision management counseling while providing counsel. The simple and effective layout of the website organizing pertinent counseling information and provides an effective tool for the counseling pastor.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

The research, development, biblical basis, and case studies pertaining to decision management counseling as an easy and effective pastoral counseling strategy have led to several conclusions. These conclusions draw upon the concepts, philosophy, and application of decision management counseling. The approach, development, and simplicity of decision management counseling are the main outcomes of this project.

The first conclusion of this project is the idea that decision management counseling can fulfill a need pastoral counselors have in the area of preparation. As has been previously noted, a pastor’s time for counseling is limited; however, pastors can expect to spend several hours each month performing counseling with parishioners and non-parishioners. Pastors may or may not have time to prepare for these counseling encounters. Regardless of preparation time, pastoral counselors can apply the principles of decision management counseling to their counseling sessions. Decision management counseling provides a template for pastoral counselors to apply to their counseling sessions. If a pastoral counselor utilizes decision management counseling as his/her approach, then preparation time is minimal or eliminated completely. Decision management counseling draws on the power of the Holy Spirit to change the individual rather than on the expertise of the pastoral counselor. Decision management counseling places the burden on the counselee to make the decision to change by the power of the Holy Spirit, rather than on the persuasiveness of the pastoral counselor. Decision management counseling allows
for discipleship and accountability to happen within the context of the local church, which is the entity Jesus originally intended for discipleship to take place. All of these outcomes are possible in the structure and approach of decision management counseling with little or no preparation by the pastoral counselor. The pastoral counselor does not have to delve deeper into the past of the counselee in order to solve the problem. The pastoral counselor does not have to be an expert in problem solving, family dynamics, or relationship repair. The pastoral counselor can meet a counselee’s situation without having to spend time researching solutions for the problem.

The second conclusion of this project is the concept that the approach of decision management counseling can shorten the time pastoral counselors spend doing counseling. Research has previously shown, in general, people coming for counseling do not want to spend endless hours receiving counseling. Many counselees do not even return for a follow-up session when it is scheduled. In addition to this impediment to long-term counseling, most pastors do not have the time to dedicate to long-term counseling. Clinebell conveys this idea when he says, “Most persons in general ministries do not have the time, even if they have the required training, to do long-term, reconstructive pastoral psychotherapy.”1 Decision management counseling allows a pastoral counselor to do effective and helpful counseling in one session. In decision management counseling, the entirety of the stages of decision management counseling can be and should be able to be accomplished in one session. Follow-up can be performed via email or phone call. In rare cases, multiple sessions may be necessary; however, these cases should be rare and only used when the pastoral counselor sees the benefit of face-to-face session. Generally speaking, one counseling session will be all that is necessary.

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Just because decision management counseling is short-term brief pastoral counseling, one should not think it is inferior to long-term counseling.

Clinebell states:

Most of the counseling a pastor does is short-term, often one or two, and seldom more than four or five sessions. For this reason, a minister needs to develop the sensitivity and skills required to give significant help in relatively brief contact. Sizing up a problem quickly and recognizing the key issues requires a considerable degree of counseling expertise. It is erroneous to assume that because most of a pastor’s counseling is short-term, he or she needs relatively little training. It often takes considerable skill to move quickly and effectively in brief counseling. The short-term nature of most counseling by pastors does not mean that its results are necessarily superficial. If judged by its own goals and not those of long-term counseling and psychotherapy, it is clear that significant help can be given in many cases.

Decision management counseling allows the pastoral counselor to engage in short-term, effective, and efficient counseling. Pastoral counselor’s time is a premium because counseling is only one of the things that vie for a pastor’s time. Decision management counseling encourages the pastoral counselor to quickly size up the problem and look to assist the counselee in making a decision in-line with biblical principles and godly wisdom.

Decision management counseling also reduces the amount of sessions necessary to move a counselee onto a pathway of godly living. The reason for the reduction of counseling sessions is due to the focused approach found in decision management counseling. A focused methodology will lead to more focused outcomes. Decision management counseling provides the focused methodology necessary for focused outcomes. In decision management counseling, uncovering the counselee’s past or understanding every dynamic or situation in the life of the counselee is not necessary. In decision management counseling, the drive is to help the

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2 Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources For The Ministry of Healing & Growth*, 195.
counselee move from where he/she is to where God wants him/her to be. As Stone writes, “The important thing is to start the change process so that the success of change in one area will spread to others.” Most counseling methodologies and strategies have the desire to move the counselee onto a path of wellness. In decision-management counseling, the road map or pathway is clarified and streamlined thereby providing the pastoral counselor with a clear counseling approach, philosophy, and methodology. The presence of a focused approach provides the pastoral counselor with the opportunity to shorten the hours spent performing counseling.

A third conclusion for this project is that decision management counseling gives the pastoral counselor the opportunity to become a person who fulfills the biblical command of making disciples. The Bible says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” The biblical command to make disciples is not to be ignored or seen as anything less than the primary directive. Decision management counseling as a pastoral counseling approach strives to accomplish Jesus’ command to “make disciples.”

Disciples are not going to be made by simply preaching a message once or even twice a week. Disciples are not going to be made through any one counseling session. Disciples are made by the working of the Holy Spirit through the lives of called leaders as those leaders impact the lives of others around them. Pastoral counselors have the opportunity, through decision management counseling, to help people choose the right direction and then provide them with accountability and follow-up to make sure they are staying on course. Sometimes during a follow-up contact, a pastoral counselor finds the counselee not doing the agreed upon

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4 Matthew 28:19-20, NIV
plan of action. The pastoral counselor has a duty and calling to bring the counselee to account and to re-engage his/her decision. This accountability functions as the management aspect in decision management counseling. The pastoral counselor has the opportunity in these moments to teach and disciple the counselee further. Decision management counseling is work on the part of the pastoral counselor and the counselee. However, the work of discipleship achieves the fulfillment of Jesus’ last command to his disciples. In this way, through decision management counseling, the pastoral counselor fulfills the imperative to “make disciples”.

Decision management counseling is not a “magic bullet” which a pastoral counselor applies and expects the counselee’s ready acceptance of the provided counsel. The first rule of counseling is that a counselor cannot help those who do not want the help. This rule needs to be understood as especially applicable to decision management counseling. Some people simply like to hear the sound of their own voice and do not really want to make a decision concerning their problem. Some counselees have another agenda for the counseling session. A wise pastoral counselor takes notice when progress is not being made in the counseling session. He can either encourage the person to come back later when he/she is ready to actually work on making a decision concerning the situation or dismiss the counselee. Unfortunately, not every counselee is ready and willing to become the disciple God intends him/her to be.

Another conclusion from this project is that pastoral counselors will refer counselees. The survey indicated that pastoral counselors tend to refer after having at least one session with the counselee. Decision management counseling allows the pastoral counselor to make the most of whatever session(s) and time he is able to give to the counselee. Decision management counseling should actually reduce the need for a pastoral counselor to refer a counselee. Decision management counseling allows the pastoral counselor to have the maximum amount of

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5 This quote may be viewed as an adaptation of Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:6.
impact of the time available. If the pastoral counselor needs to refer a counselee due to the nature of the problem, he/she should find a trusted person who can provide the counselee with the help he/she is unable or not qualified to give to the counselee. Although more professional help is sometimes necessary, the approach of decision management counseling provides the pastoral counselor with what he needs to counsel most cases with which he/she is confronted. He simply needs to have a focused structure by which he can confidently conduct a productive counseling session.

One should not take this conclusion to mean that decision management counseling discourages referring counselees; decision management counseling simply discourages the premature referring of counselees. In the decision management counseling philosophy and approach, problems are opportunities for the pastoral counselor to minister as an agent of the Holy Spirit to tear down strongholds and thoughts which exalt themselves above God. A premature referral removes the opportunity for discipleship from the auspices of the church and the pastoral counselor. In certain cases referrals are necessary, but should be the exception rather than the norm.

Decision management recognizes what pastors are already doing for all practical purposes. Stone remarks concerning the counseling style already in practice by ministers, “The fact is, congregational ministers, priests, and rabbis traditionally have practiced brief counseling for many generations in the parishes they serve. As a variety of other helping professionals ‘discover’ brief counseling with its many advantages – it is effective, enduring, economical, and humane – the time has come for parish pastors to reclaim it as the preferred strategy for helping

\[2\text{ Corinthians 10:5, NET}\]
troubled parishioners who come to them for guidance in resolving their difficulties.”

Decision management counseling fits all the criteria to assist the pastoral counselor in become more effective and efficient in his/her counseling sessions. The approach of decision management counseling allows pastoral counselors to have the maximum impact in a minimum amount of time. As has been previously noted and expounded upon, pastors do not have time to waste when they are involved in counseling. Therefore, an efficient use of their time is imperative. Decision management counseling encourages a brief counseling approach and may even be considered a sub-set of this particular genre of counseling. Decision management counseling does not need multiple sessions in order to work or to reveal the problems. Decision management counseling operates with the understanding that complex problems do not require copious amounts of time to solve, nor do they require complex solutions.

Finally, decision management counseling is a counseling approach which combines the best elements of several counseling approaches into one coherent strategy for pastoral counseling. This eclectic approach gleans the best of other counseling strategies and incorporates them into an easily accessible and implementable pastoral counseling structure. Decision management is straight-forward, by providing a directive path for the pastoral counselor to walk. Decision management counseling operates in this perspective because of the nature of the problems pastoral counselors face. Clinebell writes, “Many people come to a pastor for help with specific decisions or concrete problems. When these are solved, or are discovered to be insolvable, such persons often have no further desire for counseling.”

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7 Howard W. Stone, *Strategies for Brief Pastoral Counseling* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 4

8 Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources For The Ministry of Healing & Growth*, 197.
A pastoral counselor’s time is limited, yet counseling can be time consuming. A pastor can expect to do several hours of counseling each month. Most pastors who counsel have limited training, yet they are expected to provide timely and helpful counsel to those under their care. Due to the nature of a pastor’s counseling schedule, most pastoral counselors have little time to prepare for counseling sessions if they even know when to expect to do counseling. Pastoral counselors need an effective and efficient approach to perform their counseling duties and responsibilities. Decision management counseling seeks to remedy these challenges and provide a clear method which the pastoral counselor can utilize to move people from where they are to where God wants them to be.
APPENDIX ONE

Survey Questions

1. How many years have you been in the ministry?

2. Do you perform counseling as part of your regular pastoral duties?

3. Of those counseled, would you say that most of your counseling sessions are formal or informal? (Formal – planned, scheduled encounters with people [appointments]; Informal – unplanned, unscheduled encounters with people [walk-ins])

4. Approximately how many hours a month do you spend doing both formal and informal counseling?

5. Do you have a standard counseling methodology? If so, please list steps.

6. Do you refer counselees to a professional counseling service or center?

7. Generally, what is the maximum number of sessions you will have with a counselee before you will refer him/her to a professional counselor?

8. Do you feel as if you are able to adequately handle most counseling situations?

9. Would you think you would benefit from a free, biblically based, web-hosted counseling tool with mobile device access?
APPENDIX TWO

Survey Data

Would you think you would benefit from a free, biblically based, web-hosted counseling tool with mobile device access?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

101 answered question

Do you perform counseling as part of your regular pastoral duties?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
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</table>

102 answered question

Of those counseled, would you say that most of your counseling sessions are formal or informal? (Formal - planned, scheduled encounters with people [appointments]; Informal - unplanned, unscheduled encounters with people [walk-ins])

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Informal</td>
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</table>

102 answered question
Approximately how many hours a month do you spend doing both formal and informal counseling?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
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<td>5-10</td>
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<td>11-15</td>
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<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 20</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Do you have a standard counseling methodology? If so, please list steps.

<table>
<thead>
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Do you refer counselees to a professional counseling service or center?

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<tr>
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<td>6.9%</td>
<td>7</td>
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</table>

Generally, what is the maximum number of sessions you will have with a counselee before you will refer him/her to a professional counselor?

<table>
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<th>Answer Options</th>
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<tr>
<td>more than 8</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Do you feel as if you are able to adequately handle most counseling situations?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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<td>23.8%</td>
<td>24</td>
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answered question 101

Would you think you would benefit from a free, biblically based, web-hosted counseling tool with mobile device access?

<table>
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<th>Answer Options</th>
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<td>41</td>
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answered question 101
APPENDIX THREE

Power Point Presentation

DEVELOPING A PASTORAL COUNSELING PROGRAM WITH A DECISION MANAGEMENT FOCUS

Submitted by Benjamin Karner
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
The Problem

* Pastors have limited time to engage counselees.
The Problem

- Pastors have limited time to engage counselees.
- Many pastoral counseling sessions are unplanned, unscheduled encounters.
The Problem

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- Many pastoral counseling sessions are unplanned, unscheduled encounters.
- Pastors are not adequately trained in counseling techniques and approaches.
The Problem

- Pastors have limited time to engage counselees.
- Many pastoral counseling sessions are unplanned, unscheduled encounters.
- Pastors are not adequately trained in counseling techniques and approaches.
- Many pastors are unable to conduct effective counseling sessions in a minimal amount of time with a consistent strategy.
The Central Concept

* Pastoral counselors need an efficient and effective counseling approach to maximize counseling sessions.
The Central Concept

* Pastoral counselors need an efficient and effective counseling approach to maximize counseling sessions.
* The counseling strategy must be easily accessible and memorable.
The Central Concept

- Pastoral counselors need an efficient and effective counseling approach to maximize counseling sessions.
- The counseling strategy must be easily accessible and memorable.
- The counseling strategy needs to be able to move a person from where they are to where God wants them to be.
Survey Data

How many years have you been in the ministry?

- 0-5: 48.0%
- 6-10: 17.6%
- 10-20: 28.4%
- More than 20: 5.9%
Do you perform counseling as part of your regular pastoral duties?

- Yes: 2.9%
- No: 97.1%
Of those counseled, would you say that most of your counseling sessions are formal or informal?
Survey Data

Approximately how many hours a month do you spend doing both formal and informal counseling?

- 1:5: 19.8%
- 5:10: 20.7%
- 11:15: 18.8%
- 16:20: 13.9%
- More than 20: 7.8%
Do you have a standard counseling methodology? If so, please list steps.
Survey Data

Do you refer counselees to a professional counseling service or center?

- Yes: 93.1%
- No: 6.9%
Survey Data

Generally, what is the maximum number of sessions you will have with a counselee before you will refer him/her to a professional counselor?

- Do Not Refer: 66.0%
- 1-3: 20.0%
- 3-6: 8.0%
- 6-8: 4.0%
- More than 8: 4.0%
Do you feel as if you are able to adequately handle most counseling situations?

- Yes: 23.8%
- No: 76.2%
Survey Data

Would you think you would benefit from a free, biblically based, web-hosted counseling tool with mobile device access?

40.6% Yes
59.4% No
Decision management counseling is understood as counseling which assists a person in making a decision concerning a problem or situation and then providing a plan of action in order to implement the decision and manage it forward toward resolution.
Decision Management Counseling

* Step One: Describe
  * Question
    * “How Can I Help You?”
    * “Why did you come to see me today?”
**Step One: Describe**
- Question
  - “How Can I Help You?”
  - “Why did you come to see me today?”

**Step Two: Dream**
- Question
  - “Suppose God decided to completely remove this problem or situation from your life. What would be different and how would you know?”
**Decision Management Counseling**

* Step Three: Decide
  * “What does God want you to do about this problem or situation?”
Decision Management Counseling

- **Step Three: Decide**
  - “What does God want you to do about this problem or situation?”

- **Step Four: Do**
  - “How can you implement the decision”
  - Provide plan for accountability and follow-up
Biblical Basis for Decision Management Counseling

* Old Testament Examples
  * Exodus 18 – Jethro & Moses
  * 1 Kings 18 – Elijah & the people of Israel
  * Ezra 9-10 – Ezra & the people of Israel
Biblical Basis for Decision Management Counseling

- New Testament Examples
  - Mark 10 – Jesus & the rich man
  - Philemon – Paul & Philemon
  - III John – John & Gaius
www.thecounselingpastor.com

- Full Site
- Mobile Enabled
- Provides the concepts of decision management counseling at the fingertips of pastoral counselors
- Provides counseling assistance for specific problems and situations
- Provides resources for the pastoral counselor with tools and resources to effectively and efficiently counsel
Conclusions

* Decision management counseling solves the problem pastoral counselors face concerning lack of preparation time.
Conclusions

- Decision management counseling solves the problem pastoral counselors face concerning lack of preparation time.
- Decision management counseling shortens the amount of time a pastoral counselor will spend counseling.
Conclusions

- Decision management counseling solves the problem pastoral counselors face concerning lack of preparation time.
- Decision management counseling shortens the amount of time a pastoral counselor will spend counseling.
- Decision management counseling allows the pastoral counselor to fulfill the biblical mandate to make disciples.
Since pastoral counselors will refer counselees if they are not helped after a few sessions, decision management counseling assists the pastoral counselor in maximizing whatever time he spends with the counselee.
Conclusions

* Since pastoral counselors will refer counselees if they are not helped after a few sessions, decision management counseling assists the pastoral counselor in maximizing whatever time he spends with the counselee.
* Decision management counseling assists pastoral counselors in moving people from where they are to where God wants them to be.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


VITA

Benjamin Andrew Karner

PERSONAL
  Born: January 3, 1980
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  Associate Pastor of Discipleship & Worship, Temple Baptist Church, 2010 - present

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  MS / HS Teacher, Wake Christian Academy, 2001-2003
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September 27, 2012

Benjamin Andrew Karner
IRB Exemption 1387.092712: Developing a Pastoral Counseling Program with a Decision Management Focus

Dear Benjamin,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2) which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
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