

How to Say “No”: Managing Counselee Expectations

Tom Maxham

Introduction

- I. What do you do when . . .
- II. May be saying “yes” or “no” based on what others think of us (Prv 29:25).
- III. Commitment/sacrifice/long-suffering in counseling, but with wisdom.
- IV. Biblical counseling is typically a few weeks or a few months, and not years.

Personal priorities

- I. Example of Jesus.
 - Relationship with the Father was His priority (Lk 5:16).
 - The Apostles were His priority (Mt 10:1-4; Jn 14:25-26).
 - Moving to different regions was His priority (Mk 1:36-38).
- II. Our priorities (Gen 2:24; Ex 20:3; Mt 22:36-38; Lk 10:41-42; Eph 5:22-33; Col 3:18-22; 1 Tim 3:4-5, 12).
 - God and our own life and our family.
 - Stewardship of time.
 - Focus on counseling within your local church (Rom 12:10-13).
 - Positive ministry involvement most of the time.

Differing counseling results

- I. There are reasons for differing counseling results.
 - Sovereignty of God (Job 37:13; Prv 20:24; Rom 11:36; Eph 1:11).
 - Counselees must have motivation: 1) the right motivation (Jn 14:15; 1 Jn 4:19; 5:3) or 2) motivation from necessity (Prv 16:26).
 - Counselees must be willing (Mt 23:37; Jn 7:17).
 1. To change their agenda—which should be to glorify God (Isa 43:7; Jn 7:18; 1 Cor 10:31).
 2. To change their focus—which should be on God and others (Mt 7:3-5; 22:36-40).

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- Don’t counsel indefinitely if the counselee is not willing to . . .
. . . really listen to God’s word and stop sinning.
. . . do the homework required for change.
- Teaches the counselor.
- It can be a mystery (Deut 29:29).

II. Not all counsees are true believers (Mt 13:24-30; Mk 10:17-22; Jn 8:31).

Reasonable interactions outside of counseling

I. Teaches counselee other priorities are important (realism about availability).

II. Limit contact when indicated.

- Long-standing problems are not emergencies.
- Repeated, inconvenient contacts should be addressed (Jer 17:5-8; Phil 4:6-7).
- Allow time before responding to text messages, emails, voice mails.

III. Text messages are not for counseling.

Set up a care team

I. Many counseling cases are too demanding for one counselor alone.

II. A team of people to provide care can be agreed upon.

- Seek out existing natural relationships.
- Provides for a combination of counselor support, quality counselee support (without gossip), additional insights/influence, and more prayer.

Seek your own counsel

I. Receive counsel about stopping counseling or transferring care of the counselee.

- Counsel can counteract the counselee’s pressure to continue down a futile path.
- Counsel can counteract the counselor’s heart issues—pride of life (1 Jn 2:16).

II. Follow counsel going forward when under pressure.

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Transfer counselee care graciously

I. To another counselor.

II. To the counselee.

- Counseling homework should become part of new lifestyle.
- Categories of homework.
 1. Read/Study the Bible.
 2. Memorize Scripture.
 3. Read/Study biblical material.
 4. Effective, focused prayer.
 5. Connect to the body of Christ.

II. To the body of Christ (Mt 28:19-20).

- Care, accountability, and prayer of multiple shepherds (Acts 6:4; 20:28; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:1-5).
- Under preaching and teaching of God’s word (Acts 20:20; Eph 4:11-12).
- Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 10:16-17).
- One-on-one discipleship (Col 1:28; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 2:3-5).
- Fellowship (redemptive relationships), e.g., one-anothering, quality friends, small group.
- Benevolence—financial and practical needs (Acts 6:3; Jam 2:14-17).
- Church discipline (Mt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5).

Conclusion

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of time, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:15-17).