

sufficient for us. 1 John 5:14,15 (NKJV) says, “Now this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of him.”

God is not only the healer of diseases but also the healer of our sins. For sin entered into the world when Adam, the first man, disobeyed God; because of which every human is born in sin. But God Himself being a compassionate One, because of His everlasting love He has for us, sent His only begotten Son, Lord Jesus Christ, to die for us. “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19 NKJV). Jesus Christ was born from a virgin and had no sin in Him, but He bore our sins in his own body – by whose stripes we are healed. Healing from sin is definitely free to all! What you only need to do is confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Lord Jesus died for you and was risen on the third day.

Be it anything – sickness, sufferings, brokenness or sorrow, there exists a Physician without limits who is ready to answer you at any time. The living God stretches out His healing hands to work miraculously in your lives! Are you willing to turn to Him?

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Using Christian Counseling Techniques for Student and Peer Advising

By P. Brittany Vickery and Stephen B. Vickery

“You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts.” Psalm 119:98-100 (NKJV)

Historically, student advising predominately focused on academic performance. However, in a time and culture of increasing uncertainty, advising has broadened over the years to include more personal issues that student pharmacists, or even colleagues, may feel unprepared to handle. Incorporating Christian counseling techniques can aid in offering both compassion and sound advice and can help prepare an advisor to assist in non-academic situations. Since most of us are not trained as counselors, this article highlights some practical methods that might be helpful when a student or colleague approaches you regarding a personal issue.

In Romans 15:1(NKJV), Paul wrote “*We then who are strong ought to bear the scruples of the weak, and not just please ourselves.*” Scripture also tells us to comfort, encourage, admonish, and serve each other (1 Thessalonians 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Romans 15:14; 1 Peter 4:10).¹ These are helpful, foundational principles to embrace and build upon when serving as an advisor. It is also important for us as Christians to ensure that the advice we are giving – and the way we are giving it – aligns with a Biblical worldview.

Ultimately, this means that what we believe to be true is based upon what scripture proclaims as truth. In Matthew 12:34b-35 (NKJV), Jesus states, “*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things.*”¹

First, when someone approaches you with a question regarding a personal issue and you have time restrictions, communicate that right away. Tell them how much time you have available and ask if that is an appropriate amount. If more time is needed, offer them other available times that would better accommodate their needs. Also, it is vital to make the person you are speaking with feel important and valued. This can be accomplished with the use of optimal nonverbal communication. A few things to consider are to give the person your undivided attention (e.g., no cell phones or computers), maintain eye contact (in a comfortable but not overbearing manner), and maintain an open and relaxed posture.¹ These methods are important and applicable for virtual meetings as well. It may also be helpful to remove barriers in order to appear more inviting, such as moving out from behind your desk and sitting beside the person you are speaking. This can help them feel more comfortable speaking with you, especially if they are a subordinate.

Second, let them know you will maintain confidentiality

unless they or someone else could be in harm's way. Assure them that you take their problem seriously, you trust them, you have confidence in them, and you are ready to listen.² Try to ask questions and do more listening than talking, in order to remain engaged and sincere. Similar to counseling a patient on their medications, it's best to ask open-ended questions. Avoid starting questions with "Are" and "Do", which generally lead to yes or no responses. It is important to note that asking a question such as, "Are you okay?" already has an answer embedded within it. Generally, when people ask this, they are hoping for or expecting a "yes" answer. Advisors need to feel comfortable hearing uncomfortable information. Alternatively, try to ask questions that start with "How," "What" and "Why."¹ Instead of asking, "Are you okay?", ask them, "How are you feeling?" If an advisee tells you they are not okay, they feel unsafe, or they are having bad thoughts, it is important to have a plan to handle those situations and offer support. It would be helpful to brainstorm some difficult situations and develop a plan of action should that situation occur. Your employer's may need to provide guidance on policies related to these potential issues.

Third, it is also helpful to remind the advisee that emotions, expressed rightly, can be a good thing. Emotions are like the "check engine light" in a vehicle – they signal a potential problem. It is normal and acceptable for students to feel upset or become tearful; so having tissues nearby may make them feel more at ease while expressing uncomfortable emotions. Be honest about your authority and your ability to help them.¹ Tell them your qualifications, your limitations, and your own weaknesses related to their situation.¹

You can also build rapport by briefly sharing when you faced a similar situation or had similar struggles in either your professional or personal life. It is helpful to let them know that you are there to help them. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Paul says that God comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort others in their troubles. In that way, God uses our struggles or difficulties so that we can help others. Knowing that someone else has been in their shoes can be very encouraging. However, it is important to avoid telling them that you "know exactly what they are going through" because even if you think you do, you may be unaware of other components of their situation that are unlike yours. Better statements might be: "This sounds really difficult" and "I am sorry you are going through this." Also, do not share untrue or exaggerated stories in an attempt to relate to their situation, and avoid sharing a story about another advisee without their permission, even if you believe you are able to maintain confidentiality. Lastly, if you're sharing your own story in order to relate to them, keep it brief. Be careful not to make the meeting time all about you.

Remember, it is better to listen and ask questions than to offer advice. Even if you know what is best, ask questions

that will lead the advisee down the right path to determine what is best for them. If the advisee comes to an unwise solution, ask questions such as: "Why do you think that is the best response?" or "What could be some downfalls with that plan?" or "What other solutions can you think of?" Those questions will hopefully redirect them to a more beneficial course of action. This is valuable because it helps advisees develop and utilize problem-solving skills in order to be more prepared for difficult situations in the future. It is also helpful toward the end of the conversation to ask, "What else is on your mind?"² This opens a door for the advisee to get anything else "off their chest" and also gives them a feeling that you sincerely care for them and they aren't inconveniencing you. I can't count the number of times when a student genuinely needed assistance, yet they included, "I am sorry to bother you." It's important to reassure them that they are not bothering you, and that you want to help – though it might require an appointment that meets both of your schedules.

It is appropriate to ask the advisee if you can share scripture with them. Tell them you think might be helpful for the particular situation they are experiencing. Practical application includes having passages of scripture memorized to provide to students. For example:

- Psalm 94:19 NIV, "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul."
- Psalm 73:26 NIV, "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."
- Romans 15:13 NIV, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
- Isaiah 41:10 ESV, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."
- 1 Peter 5:7 NIV, "Cast all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you."
- Philippians 4:6,7 ESV, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

It is invaluable to memorize these and other helpful Bible verses so that you can use them to encourage and help advisees in their times of difficulty. Depending on the policies at your place of employment, it may also be appropriate to ask advisees if you can pray for them or with them. It is a good practice to email them after advising sessions as a follow up to encourage them and inquire into other needs they may have. Additionally, it is reasonable to let individuals you have helped know that you have been praying for them and send additional encouraging scriptures. If they are not receptive to the scriptures, you may still pray for them and ask God to change their hearts.

Most importantly, we need to recognize that we spend a lot of time building relationships with students, peers, patients, and others in our everyday roles. The most important thing we can do for those around us is to share the gospel, accurately and boldly (Acts 4:29, 31). A resource I recommend is John MacArthur's excellent book titled, *Evangelism*, which clearly explains the true gospel. We must remember we are here on earth to glorify God and point others to Him and the works of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:31, Romans 11:36). Both believers and non-believers need to hear the gospel and we need to love others enough to share it faithfully.

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