





# A Walk with the Wounded

ERIN ENSINGER

*A Walk with the Wounded*

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Contributing Editors: Fran Geiger Joslin, Nicole Geiger

Volunteer Editors: Kris Dain, Carolyn Owens, Sarah-Margaret Barnard

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## Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter One: Understanding Biblical Counseling

Chapter Two: Calming the Crisis

Chapter Three: Nurturing the Counseling  
Relationship

Chapter Four: Setting Goals and Expectations

Chapter Five: Doing the Hard Work

Chapter Six: Healing the Pain

Chapter Seven: Forgiving Wrongs

Chapter Eight: Guarding Your Heart

Conclusion





## Introduction

Walking alongside a struggling person involves sharing their burden while explaining how God's Word can help them face their problems. This could also be called biblical counseling.

Just like people can suffer physical wounds, they can also suffer emotional and spiritual wounds. Abusive relationships, sinful choices, or the death of a loved one can scar the soul just like breaking a leg harms the body. Emotionally wounded people often need more support than a Sunday morning sermon provides. They need teaching and counsel from a friend who can point them toward Jesus with compassion and truth.

The topic of biblical counseling could fill many books. This small book provides a starting place for you to walk with people through their hard times.

Each chapter follows a similar pattern. First, you'll read the story of one wounded couple and their counselor to show counseling in action. Then you'll learn how to apply principles from the story to your own unique counseling situations. Finally, questions and Bible study help

you grow in your own walk with Christ as you counsel others.

Keep in mind that the story portion of each chapter deals with one specific issue – an abusive relationship. But the counseling principles can be applied to many situations. Also, the counselor in the story is a pastor, but this book is not written for pastors only. Church leaders, pastors' wives, and mature church members may all become counselors to wounded people in their congregations.

This book seeks to show you how biblical counseling must be bathed in prayer, led by the Spirit, and rooted in God's Word. May you always seek God's wisdom and glory as you counsel those whom he called you to walk beside.

## Chapter 1: Understanding Biblical Counseling

*“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care,  
watching over them—*

*not because you must, but because you are  
willing, as God wants you to be;  
not pursuing dishonest gain,*

*but eager to serve;  
not lording it over those entrusted to you,  
but being examples to the flock.*

*And when the Chief Shepherd appears,  
you will receive the crown of glory that will never  
fade away.”*

*I Peter 5:2-4*

### **Moses’ Story: Tuesday Morning**

Pastor Moses tossed and turned all night. Finally he gave up trying to sleep. Careful not to wake his wife Anna, he soundlessly slipped from the hut. The sun’s rays shone hopefully over the horizon, but Moses’ stomach flip-flopped with dread. He had no choice but to face Simon today. What could Moses say to help him?

Pacing restlessly, Moses thought back over the

past few months. How eagerly Simon attended church services after he trusted Christ! Joy shone from Simon's face the day of his baptism. He and Moses prayed together often. Simon even shared Jesus with his wife Rhoda and their five children.

But then something changed. Simon stopped asking for prayer. He made excuses for missing church. When Rhoda came looking for Anna yesterday, tears streamed down her bruised face.

Rhoda told Anna how Simon seemed like a new person after his baptism. But life slowly returned to normal. He despaired when he couldn't find work day after day. Some days the family ate beans and rice just once a day; some days they didn't eat at all.

At first Simon grew quiet; then his temper exploded like in the old days. One night the children's whimpering drove him from home. Hours later he stumbled back drunk. When Rhoda refused to sleep with him, he forced her.

"Why didn't I try harder to help Simon?" Moses scolded himself. "How did I get too busy to see what was happening?" He pushed away thoughts of his own hungry family, pregnant wife,

and struggling congregation.

As if to escape his anxious thoughts, Moses fled down the road. One minute he felt angry at himself for failing Simon. The next minute he felt angry at Simon for turning away from Jesus. And then sorrow filled him as he remembered Rhoda's blackened eye and thought how desperate Simon must feel.

The sun rose high in the sky before Moses reached a little church. He himself put his faith in Jesus here at this church just three years ago. Soon after, he started a church in his own village. But now doubts choked his confidence. Could he really help Simon after only knowing Christ for a few years himself?

Moses fell to his knees inside the church and cried out: "Lord Jesus, with my whole heart I want to serve you. I want to help Simon. But I don't know where to begin!"

Suddenly a comforting hand grasped his shoulder.

"You're beginning in the right place – on your knees!" Pastor Edwardi's chuckle filled the church

like morning sunshine.

Relief flooded Moses when he saw the pastor who first told him about Jesus. Moses poured out Simon's struggles and his own worries about how to help.

Edwardi listened without interrupting. He stayed silent for a long time after Moses finished. It seemed he was listening to a voice too quiet for Moses to hear.

“Do you know Psalm 23, Moses? The one where David says the Lord is his shepherd?”

Moses felt impatient. What does this have to do with Simon's problems? he wondered.

Edwardi flipped through his worn Bible. “Here it is. Listen a minute while I read:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil, for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You  
prepare a table before me in the presence of  
my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my  
cup overflows.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the  
house of the Lord forever.

Moses waited silently when Edwardi finished.

“So, what does the shepherd do for the sheep  
in that psalm?” Edwardi asked.

“Well, I guess he finds the sheep safe places to  
eat,” Moses replied.

“Right. What else?”

“He shows them the right way to live. And  
when they’re tired, he gives their souls rest,”  
Moses continued.

“Yes, and what else?” Edwardi persisted.

“He keeps them safe and comforts them. And  
after they die, they go to be with him forever.”

Moses raced through the verses, hoping the exam would end now.

“Pretty good, pretty good,” Edwardi said. “Now, did you know that Jesus called himself the Chief Shepherd? And he told you and me to shepherd the flock he entrusted to our care?”

Moses sank back on his heels. All at once Edwardi’s point became clear.

“Jesus didn’t tell you to be Simon’s savior.” Edwardi’s eyes seemed to pierce Moses’ soul. “You can’t solve his problems. But he did tell you to care for Simon the way Jesus shepherds you. Now do you want to think about that psalm again?”

Moses eagerly snatched the worn Bible Edwardi held out. He flipped through the pages until he reached the psalm he had memorized but never truly understood.

“So, as Simon’s shepherd, I need to feed him God’s Word. And teach him to find rest in God from his troubles,” Moses thought aloud.

“That’s right,” Edwardi encouraged. “What



about the next part, where we're walking through the valley?"

"Simon is in a dark valley," Moses said. "He needs to see how Jesus is with him even there. And how Jesus' goodness and mercy have been with him all his life."

"Yes, understanding Jesus' goodness should encourage him to walk in paths of righteousness," Edwardi agreed. "What about the last verse?"

"I think Simon needs to be reminded of eternity – that this earthly life isn't everything," Moses replied. "Suffering becomes more bearable when we look forward to heaven."

"Sounds like you have a lot to think about on your walk home!" Edwardi's eyes crinkled with his grin.

Moses rose slowly to his feet, feeling lighter inside than he had all day.

"Let's talk about this again," Edwardi urged. "Remember, Jesus doesn't ask us to have all the answers. He's the Wonderful Counselor. Perhaps we can seek his answers for Simon together."

## **Counseling Principle #1: *Understand your role.***

Edwardi and Moses' conversation points out an important truth. For you to shepherd your flock, you must do more than preach and baptize. You must counsel people as they struggle with their sin and life's trials. Biblical counseling means teaching people how to become more like Jesus and walking with them in the midst of their real life, everyday problems. The biblical counselor uses God's Word as the guidebook to lead people on this journey of growing closer to Jesus.

Counseling requires more from you than telling someone what the Bible says. Instead of preaching from the front of a church, counselors walk beside hurting people. Counselors help carry people's burdens in several ways. They spend a great deal of time listening. They express concern and compassion. They offer biblical wisdom as the person thinks through ways to handle his or her problems.

Don't be surprised if you feel overwhelmed when people come to you for counsel. Like Moses, you may fear you don't have the wisdom

to help them. You may blame yourself for not being able to solve their problems.

When doubts attack you, remember your role. God placed you as a shepherd in people's lives. You can offer compassion and guidance. But only God can change their hearts and lives.

Second, remember you are not alone. Jesus is your "Wonderful Counselor" (Is. 9:6). He promises, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you" (Ps. 32:8). Just as you counsel hurting people, Jesus counsels you!

No counselor has all the answers. As you seek God's wisdom, He promises to guide you. Instead of relying on yourself, turn to Jesus. In him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3).

### **Questions:**

1. Read Psalm 23. Write down all the ways the Good Shepherd cares for his sheep. Then write down all the ways you must care for the people you counsel.

2. Write down any fears you face as you consider your role of shepherd-counselor.
3. Reflect on Isaiah 9:6. How does it encourage you to know you have a Wonderful Counselor?

## Chapter 2: Calming the Crisis

*“The Lord comforts his people  
and will have compassion  
on his afflicted ones.”*

*Isaiah 49:13*

### **Rhoda’s Story: One Day Earlier**

“You were really brave to come here today.” Anna wrapped her arm around Rhoda’s trembling shoulders. Rhoda silently stared at the baby in her lap.

“Thank you for telling me about what happened,” Anna continued. “I can’t imagine how hard it was for you to share that. But talking about it is the first step in finding help.”

Rhoda wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. Her children drew pictures in the sand outside Anna’s hut.

“Has Simon hurt you before?” Anna asked gently.

Rhoda drew a shuddering sigh. “He used to hurt me all the time. But not at all since Pastor Moses baptized him. I guess I fooled myself into believing Simon really changed. I used to just put up with him hitting me, but this time was different. He got so angry when the children whined about being hungry. I was scared he’d hurt them too.”

“How do you think we can help you?”

Rhoda shrugged despairingly. “I don’t know. I thought maybe if Pastor Moses talked to him, maybe he’d change again — at least for awhile. But now he’ll be so angry that I came here. Maybe things will be worse for us all.”

“I think you may be right,” Anna agreed. “At least at first, until he and Pastor Moses talk, he might be very angry. It’s not your fault. You didn’t deserve being hit or raped. And you did the right thing coming here to talk. But until Simon’s able to work through his struggles, he might blame you because you’re the closest person to him. Or he might feel ashamed of what he did and angry that Pastor Moses knows.”

“I know you said I did the right thing, but I

almost wish I hadn't come," Rhoda said. "I think I made everything worse."

"What would you like to see happen now?" Anna asked.

"I don't know," Rhoda mumbled. "Talking made me feel a little better. It's hard keeping our problems to myself. But maybe now I should go home and act normal. I could pretend I came just to visit you. He'll calm down again. If he can just find work, everything will be okay."

"What do you think will happen if you go home now?" Anna asked.

When Rhoda didn't answer, Anna asked, "Is there a place you could go for a short while? Someplace safe, where Simon can't hurt you?"

"Oh no, I couldn't leave him!" Rhoda leaped to her feet. "Not while he's having such a hard time. And he'd get so angry. I can't imagine what he would do to me."

"I don't mean abandon him," Anna explained. "But the most important thing right now is making sure you are safe. While you're away,

Pastor Moses will talk with him.”

Rhoda’s jaw set in a stubborn line. She began gathering up the baby as if to leave.

“Remember how afraid you were last night that he would hurt the children? What will you do to protect them?” Anna challenged.

Rhoda slumped back down in the doorway.

“We could go to my mother’s for a few days,” she whispered, tears running down her face again.

“All right,” Anna said. “Let’s gather the children and go now.”

## **Counseling Principle #2: Calm the crisis.**

Hurting people struggle to think logically about their problems. Fear, anger, or grief overwhelm them until they have difficulty making good decisions. Your first job as counselor is to calm the crisis.

Calming the crisis involves **two steps**:

1. Ensure the person’s safety.



## 2. Help the person think wisely about the problem.

First, make sure the person and anyone else involved are safe. Someone like Rhoda who suffered physical or sexual abuse must go where her abuser cannot harm her again. Like Rhoda, she may protest, but safety is the most important first step—especially when children are involved.

Some people need protection from themselves. People suffering with depression may try to harm or even kill themselves. Depression means a deep sadness that doesn't go away over time. Depressed people often stop wanting to do the things they normally love to do. They may not want to be around people. Some depressed people want to sleep more than usual. Depressed people may become so sad they believe the only escape is taking their own life.

If you suspect someone is depressed, find out if he or she has any thoughts of self-harm. Help depressed people come up with a plan for how they will stay safe. This plan may include identifying someone they can call or visit when they feel tempted to harm themselves. They should also give up any objects they might use to

harm themselves.

Second, calming the crisis means helping people quiet their emotions enough to think clearly. This second step may require several visits. The counselor should listen and encourage the person to talk as much as possible. Talking allows the person to express and begin understanding his or her emotions. Once the person has calmed down, the counselor can help identify healthy ways to handle the situation.

Let's look at how Anna worked to stabilize Rhoda's crisis. Along with finding Rhoda a safe place to stay, she listened quietly while Rhoda told her entire story. Then Anna repeatedly told Rhoda she did the right thing in seeking help. Like Rhoda, people who come for counseling often feel guilty, ashamed, or fearful talking about their problems. You can encourage them, like Anna did, that talking is the first step toward helping themselves and their loved ones.

Notice how Anna avoided telling Rhoda what to do. Instead, she asked a series of open-ended questions. An open-ended question is one that can't be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." If Anna asked Rhoda "Are you scared to go home?"

or “Do you think Simon will hurt you again?” Rhoda could mumble a one-word answer and end the conversation.

Instead Anna asked:

“How do you think I can help you?” and  
“What would you like to see happen now?”

These questions forced Rhoda to think of ways to deal with her problems. Instead of relying on Anna for answers, she gained a sense of responsibility for her own life. She replaced feelings of helplessness with hope that she could take steps toward change. See Chapter 3 for more open-ended questions you can use in counseling.

### **Questions:**

1. Read the Scripture verses below and write down how God responds when we come to him with our troubles. What do these verses reveal about how you should treat hurting people?
  - “The lowly he sets on high, and those who mourn are lifted to safety.” (Job 5:11)

- “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” (Psalm 46:1)
- “May your unfailing love be my comfort, according to your promise to your servant.” (Psalm 119:76)
- “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.” (2 Corinthians 1:3)
- “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim freedom for the captives and  
release from darkness for the prisoners,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor  
and the day of vengeance of our God,  
to comfort all who mourn,  
and provide for those who grieve in Zion—  
to bestow on them  
a crown of beauty instead of ashes,  
the oil of joy instead of mourning and  
a garment of praise  
instead of a spirit of despair.

They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord for the display of  
his splendor.”

(Isaiah 61:1-3)

2. What specific problems do you think people in your church or community face? What can you do to show Christ-like compassion for these people?



## Chapter 3: Nurturing the Counseling Relationship

*“...God has surely listened  
and has heard my prayer.  
Praise be to God,  
who has not rejected my prayer  
or withheld his love from me!”*

*Psalm 66:19-20*

### **Simon’s Story: Tuesday Afternoon**

“Where is she?! What did you do with my kids?”  
Simon tore through Moses’ yard. He burst into  
the hut, shaking with anger.

“Father, give me wisdom,” Moses’ heart  
pleaded silently.

Aloud he said, “They’re not here. They’ve  
gone somewhere safe to give you both time to sort  
things out. I planned to visit you this afternoon,  
but you beat me to it.”

“There’s nothing to sort out!” Simon yelled.  
“She belongs at home. What’s she thinking,  
running away like this?”

“Simon, I see how upset you are. What’s going on?” Moses asked.

Simon rubbed his forehead wearily. “I don’t know where to start. Feels like everything fell apart.”

“Tell me more,” Moses encouraged. “What’s one thing that fell apart?”

“It’s my whole life,” Simon sighed. “I hang around all day in town hoping to find work, but lately I come home empty-handed. And then Rhoda and the kids start in. They don’t know how hard I’m trying all day. The kids whine and cry until I feel like I’m losing my mind. And Rhoda’s about as bad as the kids. She screamed at me the other night, asking what she was supposed to feed them.”

“Six mouths to feed puts a lot of pressure on you. What did you do when Rhoda yelled?”

“I yelled back,” Simon admitted. “She thinks I’m the only one who should work hard. Ever since the baby was born, she mopes around. She doesn’t clean the house. She barely takes care of the kids. And she doesn’t want anything to do



with me. It's like I don't have a wife anymore.”

“So on top of trying to find work, you have to worry about whether the kids are all right,” Moses said. “And it feels like you've lost Rhoda.”

“Yeah, and I don't see what she has to mope about. I'm the one standing around in the heat every day. Even if I can't feed the kids, at least I didn't leave them. I'm not like my father.”

“What was your father like?” Moses asked.

“I don't even know,” Simon said angrily. “He got my mom pregnant and left before I was born.”

“I can't imagine what that was like, growing up without your father. Especially knowing he abandoned you and your mother,” Moses said softly.

“Yeah, my grandmother raised me while my mother worked in the city. I always promised myself I would never be like him.”

“Simon, how do you feel about your heavenly Father as you go through all these struggles?”

Simon shrugged his shoulders. “Honestly, I don’t know if I even believe in him anymore. When I first trusted Christ, I felt like a whole new person. I thought everything in my life would change. But I still can’t find work. The kids are still hungry. And Rhoda and I are still fighting.”

Simon looked straight at Moses and demanded, “What’s the point of going to church and praying if nothing changes? What’s the point of believing in God if he can’t solve your problems?”

**Counseling Principle #3: Use listening skills to learn about the person and build trust.**

- **Listening Skill #1: Ask open-ended questions.**

When you first meet with a hurting person, keep two goals in mind:

- Learn all you can about the person’s situation so you can offer wise guidance.

- Work to gain the person’s trust so he or she will talk openly and listen to your counsel.

Moses spent more time listening than talking in this chapter. When he did talk, he mostly asked questions. Notice that his questions were open-ended – the kind Simon couldn’t answer with a simple “yes” or “no.” By asking questions and listening carefully, Moses made Simon comfortable enough to keep talking. He also learned a great deal about Simon’s life, arming himself with knowledge to counsel Simon wisely.

Moses might have felt tempted to say, “Well, if you just treated Rhoda better, maybe she wouldn’t yell at you,” or, “You need to come back to church if you really want your life to change.” Moses knew the time would come for them to discuss Simon’s sinful choices. First he must show Simon that he is worthy of love because Christ died for him.

We looked at a few examples of open-ended questions in Chapter 2. Here are

more you can use to encourage hurting people to share their story:

- How do you think I can help you?
- What do you feel is missing from your life right now?
- Which parts of your life frustrate you?
- If you could change anything about your life, what would tomorrow look like?
- What do you feel proud of when you think about your life?
- How have you involved God in your situation?

Questions beginning with “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” and “how” work powerfully as well:

- What was that like for you?
- What challenges/consequences did you face?

- What action steps do you think you can take?
- When did that happen?
- When have you experienced that or felt this way previously?
- Where were you when that happened?
- How did you/he/she respond?
- How has this impacted you?
- I wonder if...what do you think?

And these comments function like questions to help a person talk more about his or her situation:

- Tell me more about...
  - Describe what happened...
  - Help me better understand...
- **Listening Skill #2: Repeat what the person says.**

Sometimes as counselors we are so worried about what to say next that we forget to listen well. After Moses asked a question, he kept silent until Simon finished answering. If Simon didn't answer for a while, Moses didn't panic. He simply waited.

After listening quietly, Moses repeated what Simon told him. For example, after Simon shared his frustrations, Moses said: "So on top of trying to find work, you have to worry about whether the kids are all right...And it feels like you've lost Rhoda."

Moses accomplished several things by repeating Simon's statements. He made sure he truly heard what Simon said. He offered Simon an opportunity to clarify if Moses didn't understand correctly. Finally, he made Simon feel valued by proving how closely he listened to what Simon said.

- **Listening Skill #3: Pay attention to the person's emotions.**

While learning the facts of Simon's situation, Moses also made sure he found

out Simon's feelings. When Moses repeated Simon's statements, he didn't simply say the same words Simon said. He also pointed out the emotions Simon might feel about his situation. For example, when Simon talked about his hungry children, Moses said, "Six mouths to feed puts a lot of pressure on you," acknowledging Simon's heavy burden.

Moses also asked Simon directly about his emotions when he said, "Simon, how do you feel about your heavenly Father?" Simon opened up even more about his struggles when he felt Moses wanted to understand how he felt.

Helping someone understand his/her emotions requires more of you than simply feeling sorry for them. Instead, you must actually feel what that person is feeling right along with them. Jesus is the ultimate example – he experienced our feelings so deeply that he actually carried our burden to the Cross!

### **Questions:**

1. Think of a time when you felt like someone

truly listened and understood you. What did that person do specifically to make you feel they listened and understood?

2. Do you struggle to listen to others? If so, what gets in your way?
3. Study the Scripture verses below and write down what you learn about how God listens to us.
  - “I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer.” (Psalm 17:6)
  - “In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came before him, into his ears.” (Psalm 18:6)
  - “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.” (Psalm 34:17)
  - “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.” (Isaiah 65:24)



- “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”(Jeremiah 33:3)
- “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” (I Peter 5:7)
- “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)



## Chapter 4: Setting Goals and Expectations

*“You were taught, with regard to your former way of life,  
to put off your old self,  
which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;  
to be made new  
in the attitude of your minds; and  
to put on the new self,  
created to be like God in true righteousness and  
holiness.”*

*Ephesians 4:22-24*

### **Simon’s Story: Tuesday Afternoon, Continued**

“What’s the point of believing in God if he can’t solve your problems?”

Simon angrily repeated his question.

“Simon, earlier you told me your whole life is falling apart. We can’t solve that in a day. But I’d like to walk with you through these hard times. Maybe we could find out together how God wants to work in your life. Would that be okay with you?”

Simon shrugged. “I guess so.”

“What if we meet once a week?” Moses suggested. “We could talk more and ask God to use your struggles to bring you closer to him.”

“I wouldn’t mind talking more. Actually, just talking today made me feel a little better,” Simon admitted. “I just wish I knew if it will do any good.”

“Well, it will take time. And you’ll have to do hard things like admitting what you’ve done wrong. Forgiveness is a huge part of growth – forgiving others, asking others to forgive you, accepting God’s forgiveness. And then we’ll need to work on something the Bible calls ‘renewing your mind.’”

Moses picked up his Bible. “I always think a good place to start is Isaiah 9:6. Do you mind if I share that Scripture verse with you? It helps me when I feel like God abandoned me. Maybe it will help you too.”

“Okay,” Simon agreed, “although I had no idea you ever felt that way.”

“More often than you’d guess,” Moses chuckled. He opened his Bible and read, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Moses paused a moment to let Simon think about the verse. Then he said, “Let’s start with the first name – Wonderful Counselor. First, I want to point out that it’s Jesus who’s the Wonderful Counselor, not me. I’m just a tool for him to use as he chooses. What do you think it means that Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor?”

“Well,” Simon said, shuffling his feet nervously. “I guess it means Jesus can give me all the wisdom I need to face my problems.”

“Yes,” Moses said. “Jesus never promises we won’t have problems. In fact, he said in this world we will have many problems. But he does promise to stay with us always and to lead us in the way we should go. I know it’s really hard to think about now, in the midst of such a tough situation. But can you think of a time, even one time, when Jesus showed himself as the Wonderful Counselor

in your life?”

“Well, when I first accepted Jesus I felt like a whole new person,” Simon replied. “He showed me all the ways I needed to change, like giving up drinking and being a better father. At first, it really worked. I didn’t even want to drink. I saw how good it was to walk on his path. But then everything got so hard I slipped back into my old ways. I wish I could go back to the way things were at the beginning.”

“I think that’s where the next name comes in: Mighty God. What does hearing that name bring to your mind?”

Simon pondered a moment. “Strength, power, ability.”

“Yes, the Lord fights like a mighty warrior for you. You have a real, powerful enemy—Satan—but he can’t stand against Jesus.” Moses set down his Bible and looked Simon in the eye. “But Jesus isn’t just mighty; he’s God. You must submit to his ways of working in your life. This means changing old patterns of sinful behavior and walking on his righteous path.”

Simon nodded. “I thought I had changed. I didn’t realize how easily I could go right back to my old ways. And now I don’t see any way out of this mess.”

“I think we’ll have to spend a lot of time on the next name then: Everlasting Father,” Moses said. “What kind of a Father do you think God is?”

“I know the Bible says he’s loving and always with us, but I never really feel his love or presence. It feels like he’s mad at me for failing or he’s just not there at all,” Simon said sadly.

“I wonder if the way your father abandoned you has anything to do with these feelings?” Moses said.

“I never really thought about that, but I guess so.”

“I think talking about God as father makes a good starting point for us. I suspect you’ll find yourself changing from the inside out when you come to know God as your faithful father who loves you no matter what.”

“Kind of sounds too good to be true, but at this point I’m so low I have nothing to lose.” Simon almost grinned. “Okay, what was that last name of God?”

“Ah, Prince of Peace,” Moses smiled in return. “As we learn to walk in God’s ways, we’ll have peace even when trouble comes. Notice I’m not saying God will take our problems away. But he’ll free us from Satan’s lies so we can live at peace with ourselves and others.”

Moses kept quiet while Simon thought over all they talked about.

“Why don’t you come back next Monday and we’ll really get to work,” Moses advised. “In the meantime, I have two tasks for you to tackle. First, come back to church on Sunday. Second, I’m going to write down some Scripture passages that talk about God as our father.”

Moses quickly wrote Psalm 103:13, Deuteronomy 1:31, Luke 15:20, and 1 John 3:1 on a piece of paper. He handed the paper to Simon.

“I’d like you to read them every day and write



down what kind of father God is. We'll talk about the verses when we meet. Now, can I pray with you before you go?"

### **Counseling Principle #4: Define Expectations**

Moses talked much more in Chapter 4 than in Chapter 3, didn't he? Take a moment to skim back through the conversation. What specific tasks did Moses accomplish?

After gaining Simon's trust (see Chapter 3), Moses focused on his next important task: telling Simon what to expect from their counseling relationship. First, Moses told Simon what he was willing to do. He would meet with him weekly to help Simon seek the Lord and take steps toward change.

At the same time, Moses told Simon what he could not do. He couldn't solve Simon's problems, find all the answers, or do the hard work for him. Moses explained that growth happens through a series of steps taken over time. Then he pointed out Simon's first step: getting to know God as his loving, faithful father.

Moses also focused on sharing both reality and hope. Reality means humans continually experience trials and temptations. But we have hope because God never forsakes us. Because God is with us, we can endure all things with peace and even joy.

Finally, Moses gave Simon work to do until they met again. He chose Scripture passages for Simon to study, just as he wove Scripture throughout their entire conversation. The tasks Moses set encouraged Simon to seek God outside of counseling sessions. They also provided spiritual support throughout the week and helped him prepare for their next conversation.

### **Questions:**

1. Study the Bible verses Moses gave Simon to study. How is God like a father to us?
  - “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.” (Psalm 103:13)
  - “...There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you

reached this place.” (Deuteronomy 1:31)

- “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.” (Luke 15:20)
- “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” (1 John 3:1)

2. Meditate on the following Scripture passages. What do these passages teach about how a person changes and grows?

- “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

- “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18)
  - “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1-2)
  - “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” (Romans 13:14)
3. Look back over Moses’ conversations with Simon so far. How do you think counseling is different from preaching?

## Chapter 5: Doing the Hard Work

*“Though I sit in darkness,  
the Lord will be my light...  
He will bring me out into the light;  
I will see his righteousness.”*

*Micah 7:8-9*

### **Simon’s Story: Two Months Later**

Moses leaned against the weathered boards of his dwelling as he watched for Simon to come up the path. His mind wandered back over their many conversations the last two months. Simon continued to struggle, but Moses believed he saw glimmers of hope.

Simon talked openly and asked thoughtful questions during their weekly meetings. Moses asked George, an older man in his congregation, to meet with Simon weekly for Bible study and prayer. Moses prayed these meetings would help Simon walk more closely with the Lord.

Rhoda also met regularly with Moses’ wife, Anna. Rhoda continued to stay with her mother

who cared for the children while Rhoda cleaned houses in the city. As the tourist season started, Simon found odd jobs. Their combined earnings relieved some of the stress of feeding the children.

“Still,” Moses thought, “I feel like we haven’t fully tackled Simon’s marital problems yet. Heavenly Father, is it time to help Simon take the next step forward?”

As if in answer, Simon appeared through the trees and wordlessly sank down next to Moses. They chatted briefly about Simon’s search for work. Then Moses asked a now-familiar question: “Simon, how have you been pursuing God this week?”

“Well, I’m praying more. I don’t always feel he hears me, but I’m not letting myself quit. George is reading through the book of John with me. He explains it to help me understand better. And he helps me think of other things to do when I want to drink. I’ve been sober two weeks now – that’s why my woodpile is sky high,” Simon grinned.

“I’m proud of you, man!” Moses exclaimed.

“You’re staying faithful even when you don’t see exactly how God is working. Now, what have you struggled with most this week?”

Simon scrubbed his hand across his eyes wearily. “I really felt down this week. It’s been two whole months since Rhoda took the kids away. What if she never comes back? Then sometimes I worry she will come back. I mean, I don’t think I can stand all the fighting again. We’ll be right back where we started, screaming at each other because we can’t feed the kids.”

“Simon, will you tell me about the day Rhoda left? What happened?” Moses questioned.

“I already told you,” Simon growled. “I couldn’t find work so Rhoda hollered because the kids were hungry.”

“You’d fought before. What made this fight so bad that Rhoda left?”

Simon sat still as a stone, looking down the road, while Moses prayed silently. A sudden tear coursed down Simon’s face. He didn’t bother wiping it away. Heaving a ragged sigh, he began brokenly, “I couldn’t take all of them screaming

at me anymore. So I hit her. Then I ran out and got drunk. But I came back later, after the kids were asleep.”

Simon shifted uncomfortably. “I got so tired of her running me down, saying I’m a bad father. She doesn’t care about my needs. Ever since the baby was born, she won’t, you know, really be my wife. Sometimes I don’t blame her. I mean, I can’t provide for her and the kids. But other times I just feel so angry that she won’t respect me or at least see how hard I’m trying. I guess I wanted to feel like a man again, so I made her sleep with me.”

Moses worked to keep his voice kind and calm. “You’ve both said and done things to hurt each other. Neither of you is fully to blame in this situation. And you’re right: you do have needs and they’re important. One of a man’s greatest longings is to feel respected by his wife.”

Simon’s hunched shoulders relaxed a bit. Moses drew a deep breath before continuing. “But Simon, no matter what Rhoda says or does, hitting or raping her is never okay. It’s abuse. I’m not saying this to condemn you or take sides, but because I want the best for you and your family.



Abusive behavior doesn't just hurt your family; it hurts you and it damages your relationship with God."

"So what do I do?" Simon cried out. "I know I messed up. And I'm afraid of myself now, afraid of what I'll do if Rhoda comes back. It's like I see myself becoming my father."

"You know, Simon," Moses responded, "Scripture calls Satan the father of lies. Satan says you're doomed to be like your father. But you have a powerful weapon to fight Satan's lies: the truth of God's Word. Your heavenly Father says you can change and have new life in Christ."

"It feels like there's no way out," Simon said.

"You're already taking the first step," Moses encouraged. "A minute ago you admitted you messed up. First John 1:9 says, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'"

Moses let Simon ponder the verse before continuing. "God stands waiting to forgive you. And not just to forgive you, but to cleanse you too. That means when he looks at you, he doesn't

see all the bad things you've done. Instead, he sees Christ's righteousness."

Simon looked thoughtful. "It almost seems too easy. Like I just tell him I'm sorry and he erases my sin? That seems wrong somehow."

"Grace comes free to us but it cost the Father everything. He sent Jesus to die a terrible death in order to forgive our sins. I think the Old Testament prophet Micah felt like you. In Micah 7:9, he says, 'Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath.'

"Micah knew he deserved the Lord's anger. He came humbly to God willing to take his punishment. But the Lord showed compassion and forgave his sin," Moses explained.

"I already asked his forgiveness when I put my faith in Jesus. I thought I wouldn't mess up like this again. So am I not really a Christian?" Simon questioned.

"The Bible says when we put our faith in Jesus, we become new creations. But we don't always act like it because we're still here on earth. Until we arrive in heaven, we'll continue struggling

with ‘the old man’—our sinful desires and wrong behaviors.

“Scripture says we need to ‘put off’ our sins and ‘put on’ Christ’s ways—kind of like changing our clothes. In our day-to-day life we must continually confess when we mess up. We must ask daily for his strength. Then, slowly, we grow to be more like Christ,” Moses said.

“So I just have to ask his forgiveness again and I’ll be back on the path?” Simon asked.

“Yes, but the other part of growth is faith – you have to believe God sticks to his word and forgives you. And here is where the father of lies tries to get you again. He whispers in your ear that God didn’t forgive you. He tries to keep you chained in guilt.”

“He’s done a good job of that,” Simon said regretfully.

“So you must cling to the truth. This is what the Bible calls renewing your mind. Every time Satan tries to defeat you with lies, ‘take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.’

That's not a suggestion; it's a command from 2 Corinthians 10:5. In other words, replace Satan's lies with truth from God's word."

"Like the Scripture passages you have me memorize each week?" Simon asked.

"Yes, and speaking of that," Moses grinned, "your memory work this week is Micah 7:18-19. I'll read it now:

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Moses stayed quiet a few moments while Simon thought about the Scripture verses.

Then he asked, "Are you ready to tell the Father you've sinned? We can pray together right now."

"I'd like that," Simon declared.

## **Counseling Principle #6: Speak the Truth in Love**

In previous chapters, we saw how Moses gained Simon's trust by being a good listener. In this chapter, Moses sensed the time had come to dig deeper into Simon's problems.

Counseling is like climbing a long flight of stairs. The counselor and the hurting person climb up the stairs together through the mess. They sit on a stair to sort out the first layer of wounds, sin, and darkness. Then they take a deep breath, climb again, and sort some more.

Moses and Simon first landed on the “stair” of repentance. Moses knew Simon could never thrive until he became right with God. He could never be right with God until he recognized his behavior for what it was – sin. Simon needed to ask sincerely for God's forgiveness.

Moses always spoke compassionately to Simon. But he did not excuse Simon's behavior. He boldly called Simon's abuse sin. He followed Scripture's command to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). While confronting the sin, he expressed concern for Simon and his family's

wellbeing.

After confession, Simon's next step involved renewing his mind. Moses helped Simon identify Satan's lies and replace them with Scripture. New thoughts lead to new behavior.

This process of becoming like Christ happens one step at a time. Sometimes after a steady upward climb, hurting people step backwards into old beliefs and behaviors. Although discouraging, these backward steps are a natural part of the growth process.

Instead of acting disappointed, counselors should remind hurting people of the progress they already made. Help them continue renewing their minds by studying Scripture together. Keep giving them tasks during the week to keep them on track. These tasks can include Bible study, Scripture memory, meeting with a strong believer, and practicing new habits. Encourage them to ask God's forgiveness and get right back up again!

### **Questions:**

1. Think of a specific sin you struggle with. What would help you change? How do this

chapter's teachings about renewing your mind, putting off old behaviors, and putting on Christ help you?

2. Think of a time someone spoke the truth of Scripture to you in love. Now think of a time they spoke the truth with judgment. How did these different ways of hearing the truth impact you?
3. Memorize Micah 7:18-19. How can you use this passage to help people with their struggles?





## Chapter 6: Healing the Pain

*“You, Lord,  
hear the desire of the afflicted;  
you encourage them,  
and you listen to their cry,  
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,  
so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.”*

*Psalm 10:17-18*

### **Rhoda’s Story: Later That Evening**

Rhoda strained her ears to hear the quiet footsteps creeping toward her. Thick darkness hid her sleeping children. She must find them, keep them safe. Fear gripped her. She couldn’t move. The footsteps sounded closer now. She opened her mouth to scream, but no sound came.

Suddenly, she bolted upright on her sleeping mat. Sweat poured over her. She listened, but no footsteps approached. It was just the same dream that kept awaking her in terror night after night.

The sun’s first rays found Rhoda trudging wearily to Anna’s home.

“You look exhausted,” Anna greeted her. She took the baby from Rhoda’s tired arms and sank down beside her in the doorway. “Can you tell me about it?”

“I keep dreaming that Simon’s coming after us,” Rhoda said. “I hardly dare to fall asleep. It seems so real.”

“Unfortunately, abuse victims often suffer nightmares,” Anna said sympathetically. “Our bodies react in ways we can’t always control. I think it’s God’s way of showing us we need to seek his healing for the wounds in our souls.”

“I just don’t understand,” Rhoda snapped. “You talk all the time about God’s love. But if he’s so loving, why did he let Simon abuse me? Maybe I don’t matter so much, but how about the kids? How can he let little children suffer the way mine do?”

“I don’t know,” Anna replied quietly. “I don’t know why God allowed Simon to abuse you and terrify the children. God doesn’t always give us the answer to those questions, at least not right away. I do know your sufferings grieve his heart terribly. I know he cherishes you like a precious

daughter.”

“It sure doesn’t look that way to me,” Rhoda retorted. “If he’s so powerful, why didn’t he do something to stop it?”

“I don’t like this answer any better than you will. But God allows people to choose whether or not to follow him. Without free will, we’re no better than the animals. He wants us to walk in his ways because we love him, not because he forces us to.”

Anna continued, “The first two people God created, Adam and Eve, chose to disobey him. Ever since then, all people are born in sin. This means our hearts choose Satan’s way rather than God’s way.”

“So then we really don’t have a choice?” Rhoda asked.

“We still do have a choice, thanks to Jesus! Our sin separates us from God. God must punish sin. That’s why we’re doomed to hell when we die. But Jesus – God’s perfect Son – became a man. He took our punishment by dying on a cross.

“Long ago, people punished criminals by nailing them to a cross. They made the cross from two tree trunks fastened together. The criminals hung there until they died. Jesus died this horrible death even though he never sinned. He took the punishment we deserved. We simply need to believe in him,” Anna explained.

“Part of me wants to believe. But there’s still so much I don’t understand. Like why does he let the world go on like this? Why doesn’t he end all our misery?” Rhoda asked.

“Because he doesn’t want anyone to spend eternity in hell. He’s patient enough to give everyone a chance to turn to him. One day, it will be too late,” Anna warned. “The Psalms talk a lot about God’s justice. He hates wickedness more than we do. One day he will judge the wicked and destroy this world. Then he’ll create a new world, where everyone follows God’s ways.”

“But that doesn’t help me right now,” Rhoda complained.

“No, it doesn’t make our earthly life easier. But we can find hope in knowing he sees your suffering. He won’t leave the abuser unpunished.”

Anna shifted to look straight at Rhoda.  
“You said something a minute ago that I keep thinking about. You said, ‘Maybe I don’t matter so much.’ Do you feel that way—that you’re not important?”

Rhoda stared at the ground, unable to answer.

“Oftentimes people who suffer abuse end up feeling like they’re not worth much. They might even believe they deserved the abuse,” Anna went on. “But God says many things about that.”

“Yeah, like what?” Rhoda mumbled.

“We talked about how we’re born sinners, right? But that’s only part of the story. When God created us, he made us in his image. That means that in some way each of us reflect what God is like. You show the world who God is in a way no one else can. That makes you pretty valuable, don’t you think?”

A small smile flickered across Rhoda’s face.  
“That seems pretty hard to imagine, but go on.”

“When we put our faith in Jesus, many

wonderful changes happen. Let's say you admit to God you're a sinner. Then you choose to believe Jesus is his Son. You trust he took the punishment for your sin. You ask him to rescue you from hell. When you do all that, God forgives your sin and washes you clean, just like you never sinned. Like you spent your whole life following him."

Rhoda waited quietly for Anna to continue.

"Then he adopts you into his family. He calls you his daughter. And he says Jesus will share his inheritance with you in heaven. So in other words, if he's the king and you're his daughter, then you're a princess."

"That hardly seems to describe me!" Rhoda murmured shyly.

"We struggle to believe in Jesus' love when people treat us cruelly. Simon hurt you, and you began doubting your worth. But when Jesus lived on earth, he treated women with compassion and respect.

"He spent a long time one day talking with a sinful woman who others avoided. He stayed

often in the home of his special friends, Mary and Martha, and spent hours teaching them. Women traveled with his band of disciples. And when he died, he made sure his friend John took good care of his mother. People in Jesus' day didn't think women were very important, but Jesus surely did," Anna concluded.

"This is different from anything I've heard about Jesus before," Rhoda admitted.

"I think we should spend time studying Jesus' life together," Anna said. "Let's look at what the Bible says about how Jesus sees you. When we get to know Jesus this way, we start to love him more and more. And when we love him, something else happens. Romans 8:28 says, 'we know that for those who love God all things work together for good.'"

"What does that mean?" Rhoda asked.

"It doesn't mean only good things happen to you. Simon's abuse was not good. But our powerful God brings good out of the bad. We still hurt, but we also find hope because God's purposes triumph over the evil in this world. Who knows, maybe God plans to bring you closer to

Jesus through your hard times?”

**Counseling Principle #7: Teach people about who they are in Christ.**

Suffering people often wonder why a good God allows bad things to happen. They may be angry at God or afraid of him. Abuse victims especially struggle to believe God loves them. Because people treated them badly, they may believe they are not valuable in God’s sight.

Counselors must handle these questions carefully. God is not shocked or offended at such questions. Many of the Psalms record David asking these same kinds of questions. Yet the Bible calls David a man after God’s own heart (I Samuel 13:14)! God is big enough, gracious enough, and loving enough to handle our hardest questions. Counselors must avoid acting shocked or angry when hurting people ask such questions. Simply listen without scolding the person for how they feel. Ask the person questions about what happened in his or her life to raise these doubts.

Gently share Scripture with the person. Study how Jesus treated people during his life on earth. Share the verses below to help the person



understand how God sees them.

- “...you are precious and honored in my sight, and...I love you.” (Isaiah 43:4)
- “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9)
- “Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.” (Psalm 36:5)
- “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” (I John 3:1)
- “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.” (I John 3:1)

- “For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” (Ephesians 1:4)
- “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17-18)
- “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:10)
- “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7)
- “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” (John 15:15)
- “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)
- “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord

Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:20)

Work together with the person to make a chart. At the top of the chart, write “Who God Says I Am.” Copy the verses underneath. After each verse, write several words describing who God says we are. Here’s an example:

### **Who God Says I Am**

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (I John 1:9)

**I am forgiven.**

“Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.” (Psalm 36:5)

**I am loved.**

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” (I John 3:1)

## **I am a child of God.**

Continue this way through all the verses above. Encourage the person to memorize them over the next few months. Have the person keep his or her chart where it can be seen throughout the day. Encourage the person to fight feelings of worthlessness with the truth of God's Word.

### **Questions:**

1. Make your own chart like the one described above. Memorize the verses over the next few weeks. How do you see yourself differently after studying these verses?
2. What do you struggle to believe about God? Why? Which of the verses from Question 1 is hardest for you to believe during hard times? Why?
3. How can you remind yourself of God's goodness when you struggle?

## Chapter 7: Forgiving Wrongs

*“If your brother or sister sins against you,  
rebuke them;  
and if they repent,  
forgive them.”*

*Luke 17:3*

### **Simon’s Story: One Month Later**

“Simon asked me to forgive him,” Rhoda said dully. Shoulders hunched forward, she traced an aimless design in the dust at the bottom of her mother’s doorstep.

“When did you see Simon? That must have been difficult for you,” Anna said sympathetically.

“He met me on the road on my way home from work. I felt sick when I saw him. And I couldn’t stop shaking,” Rhoda said.

“What happened then?”

“He admitted that he sinned against me.

He already asked God's forgiveness and now he wants me to forgive him, too. He said he's not asking me to move back home; he just wants me to know how sorry he is."

"How do you feel about what Simon said?" Anna asked.

"When I first left home, I felt guilty for leaving Simon by himself and taking the kids away. But life feels so much more peaceful here at my mother's. I can't imagine putting myself through all that again."

Rhoda sighed deeply and continued. "On one hand, Simon says he's changing, but how can I trust him? On the other hand, I know I can't stay at my mother's forever. We're crowding her, and she's starting to complain about the kids making so much noise."

"It sounds like you feel trapped. It seems like your only choices are to burden your mother or go back to the way things were at home. Can you think of any other options you might have?" Anna asked.

"I feel like I'm just going to have to forget

all this ever happened and go back home eventually. It's what I've done in the past when he hit me."

"Rhoda, if you truly believe you and the children won't be safe at home, then we will work together to find you a safe place elsewhere."

Rhoda gulped and nodded.

"But I'm concerned about something besides your physical safety. I'm concerned about the fear and pain tearing you up inside. When Simon asked if you would forgive him, what do you think he meant?" Anna questioned.

"I think he probably wanted me to act like nothing happened. Just go home and pretend things are fine."

"That often is what people mean when they talk about forgiveness," Anna said. "But can I tell you how God's idea of forgiveness is different?"

"Sure, I guess," Rhoda nodded.

“When God forgives us, he doesn’t act like we did nothing wrong. He takes sin so seriously that he sent Jesus to bear the punishment we deserved. It’s only because Jesus died for us that God can forgive our sin.”

“What does all that have to do with Simon and me?” Rhoda asked.

“Since God doesn’t ignore Simon’s sin, neither should you. Forgiving Simon doesn’t mean pretending he never hurt you. And it’s kind of impossible for humans to completely forget what someone did to them.”

Anna continued, “And it’s kind of impossible for humans to forget what someone did to them. It means giving up thoughts of revenge and trusting God to deal with Simon in his way and time. When angry, bitter thoughts come into your mind, pray that God will turn Simon’s heart toward him. Does it feel impossible that you could ever think about Simon that way?”

“I don’t know if I even want to,” Rhoda admitted. “I can’t seem to help feeling angry at him. He really doesn’t deserve to be forgiven.”



“Of course not,” Anna agreed. “None of us do. But healing comes only when we forgive. Bitterness poisons us. It destroys us from the inside out. And as long as we’re bitter, the other person still holds control over us. Forgiveness brings freedom.”

“Freedom,” Rhoda repeated doubtfully. “I can’t even imagine what freedom would feel like. It seems an impossible dream.”

“There’s certainly no quick and easy path to freedom,” Anna warned. “We might think that forgiveness is something we do once and then it’s done forever. But oftentimes it’s a process. We have to grieve over each hurt, feel the pain, and cry it out to God.”

“If I forgive Simon, does that mean I have to move back home? What if he never changes?”

“Just because you forgive someone doesn’t automatically mean you enter a close relationship with that person again. Forgiveness takes one person, but repairing the relationship takes two people. You can choose to let go of bitterness, but your relationship can be mended only if Simon truly changes. And even if he changes, you may

decide you've been through too much to ever be close to him again," Anna explained.

"How can I know if he changes?"

"True repentance begins with a real confession. When Simon asked you to forgive him, what exactly did he say he had done wrong?"

"Well, he kind of just said he treated me badly."

"He needs to specifically name what he did, including beating and raping you. Then you need to tell him how his abuse hurt you and the children."

"I don't know if I could ever do that."

"We could meet together with Simon and Moses. Or if you don't feel comfortable talking to Simon in person, I could give him a message from you. Remember, forgiveness is necessary for your own healing. But having a relationship again may not be possible. You have the freedom to choose whether or not you can be close to Simon again."

Anna paused, then bowed her head. “First we need to pray. We can’t move forward without asking God to show us the next right step.”

### **Counseling Principle # 8: Work Toward Forgiveness**

Anna and Rhoda’s conversation highlights an important point. Nearly every person who seeks counseling needs to forgive someone to find healing for themselves. Again, forgiveness means choosing not to hold someone’s sin against them, but letting God deal with it. We may not be able to change our angry feelings. But we can trust God to deal with the person instead of seeking revenge ourselves. We can pray that the person will see how much he or she needs God.

Forgiveness cannot be forced or rushed. It is a long, slow process. Hard times in life can remind us of how the person hurt us. When we feel sad again, we must forgive the offender again.

Forgiveness does not mean that we become friends with the person who hurt us. A healed relationship is only possible when the offender truly repents. Repentance begins with sincerely asking forgiveness. But a truly repentant person

also chooses not to repeat the hurtful behavior. The offender must prove over a long period of time that he or she has truly changed.

So what next steps should Simon and Rhoda take? First, Anna should help Rhoda identify her options. Often an abuse victim feels trapped. Her church, family, or friends may tell her she's right to stay with her husband even if he hurts her. Or she may not have enough money to support her children if she leaves.

Anna should let Rhoda make her own decision about leaving or staying. But she could help Rhoda think about people to help her if she does need to leave. These people include family members, mature women in the church, and community supports.

If Rhoda decides to return home, she must proceed slowly. She also must always feel free to choose not to return to the man who hurt her. Abusers sometimes say whatever is necessary to get their victims back home only to harm them again. Abusing others can make a person feel powerful and in control. Moses should help Simon understand and deal with these underlying desires for power and control.

On the other hand, Simon might genuinely want to change but feel trapped in old behaviors. Remember we discussed in the last chapter that growth sometimes takes a step backwards. Circumstances that push a person back into old behaviors are called *triggers*.

For example, when Simon couldn't find work, he started drinking again. When his family complained, he hit Rhoda. Unemployment and complaints triggered his behavior. Moses should help Simon list all his triggers. Then they could find healthy ways to deal with each trigger. Doing hard physical work when he felt angry might be one healthy way to deal with his triggers.

Over a long period of time, Moses and Anna could begin meeting with the couple together. Perhaps they could study Ephesians 5 together. This passage describes a thriving marriage:

And walk in the way of love, **just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us...** (vs. 2).

**Submit to one another** out of reverence for Christ (vs.21).

Wives, **submit yourselves to your own husbands** as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything (vs. 22-24).

Husbands, **love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her** to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (vs. 26-33).

This passage explains how husbands must love their wives and wives must respect their husbands. Note that the passage begins by commanding all believers, including husbands and wives, to walk in love (v. 2) and submit to **each other** (v. 21) This is very different from an abusive husband forcing his wife to submit to him. The husband's behavior toward his wife must always flow from Christ-like love, the kind of love that lays down one's life for another person.

Moses could help Simon find specific ways to show Christ-like love to Rhoda. He could show Simon how abuse damaged Rhoda's respect for him. Anna could help Rhoda see how her complaints felt disrespectful to Simon. Anna could help Rhoda find ways to help the marriage grow. She must be careful, however, not to make Rhoda feel like the abuse was her fault.

At the same time, Anna would continue meeting separately with Rhoda to make sure she truly felt safe to move home. They would create a safety plan of how to leave and where to go if Simon hurt her again.

Simon and Rhoda's story involves an abusive

relationship, but the principles in this chapter work in many counseling situations. Hurting people almost always need to forgive someone to experience true healing. The decision to restore the relationship must be approached slowly and prayerfully.

### **Questions:**

1. Think of a time you needed to forgive someone or of someone you still need to forgive. What does forgiveness mean to you? What makes forgiveness difficult in your specific situation? What steps did you—or can you—take toward forgiveness?
2. Study Romans 5:1-8:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance [produces]



character; and character [produces] hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

What does this passage teach you about God's forgiveness? What does it teach you about how he restores relationships? How do you think these ideas apply to human relationships?

3. Consider using I Corinthians 13:4-7 to help restore broken relationships. Read the passage:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not

self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Now, think of someone you have difficulty getting along with. Read the passage again, but replace “Love is...” with your own name.

Can you honestly say you are patient, kind, unselfish, etc.? If not, consider why not. Pray about whatever God reveals to you through this exercise.

## Chapter 8: Guarding Your Heart

*“As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;  
for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.”*

*Psalm 103:13-14*

### **Simon’s Story: Three Weeks Later**

“I’ve never been so exhausted in my life,” Moses groaned. “Exhausted, discouraged, and downright angry!”

“Well, it’s about time!” Edwardi chuckled, lowering himself on the church bench beside Moses. Moses had once again run to his former pastor for help.

“Last time we talked things couldn’t have been better,” Edwardi continued. “Simon and Rhoda were talking again. Rhoda seemed almost ready to accept Christ. Simon thought he might have found a steady job. Things couldn’t keep going that well forever! What happened?”

“Everything fell apart again.” Moses sighed. “Simon didn’t get the job. He drank for the first time in months. Rhoda’s having doubts about God. It’s like all our hard work meant absolutely nothing.”

“You said you’re exhausted, discouraged, and angry. That’s a pretty serious list. What are you doing to keep your own soul refreshed?” Edwardi asked.

“Keep *my* soul refreshed?” Moses scoffed. “I’ll be fine. I’m just worried about how to get Simon and Rhoda back on track.”

“How often have you been meeting with Simon?” Edwardi asked.

“We dropped back to every two weeks because he seemed so much better. But then things started going terribly again. Now this week he wants to talk to me every day,” Moses explained.

“Plus you have the rest of your church to care for. Not to mention your wife and children. No wonder you’re tired and discouraged. Didn’t you find an older man in your church to help Simon when you’re busy?” Edwardi asked.

“Yes, but when Simon’s really struggling, he feels more comfortable talking to me. I just thought if I could help him through this rough time, maybe he wouldn’t turn back to drinking again,” Moses finished miserably.

“And now you’re learning how tiring it is trying to be God. I’ve been there too. It’s rough!”

“What do you mean, trying to be God?”  
Moses snapped.

“Look, Moses, Simon’s decisions are not your fault. Want to repeat that with me? C’mon, you can say it.”

Edwardi chuckled again and waited until Moses mumbled, “It’s not my fault.”

“You are just a tool God uses in Simon’s life. It’s not up to the hammer whether the carpenter decides to build a cabinet or a house. You’re with Simon for a short season to take him as far as he can go. It’s discouraging if he doesn’t want to go further right now. But often the seeds we plant sprout much later after someone else waters them.”

Edwardi continued, “On the other hand, sometimes people take a few steps backward just before they leap ahead to make a big change. Whatever Simon does, the outcome of your counseling relationship is God’s responsibility, not yours. That way you can’t shoulder the blame, but you also can’t give yourself the credit when things go well. All the glory goes to God.”

“So you’re nicely telling me to humble myself and stop trying to be Simon’s savior?” Moses grinned for the first time.

“Absolutely,” Edwardi agreed. “And I know Simon likes talking to you best. But God might want to use other people in his life, too. Perhaps God wants to grow those people just as he grows you through your experiences with Simon. Don’t stand in the way of what God wants to accomplish by trying to do everything yourself.”

Moses heaved a deep sigh. “That takes a little pressure off.”

“My best advice? Help Simon stick to the times you agreed upon to talk. We tend to want to get into the middle of people’s lives and fix things. But leaving space between us is healthy.

It gives God room to lead. If you've given Simon other people to turn to, then you don't have to feel guilty about not doing enough."

"If I don't feel guilty about Simon, I feel guilty about not doing enough for everyone else at church," Moses admitted.

"You must rest, too. Remember the compassionate Father 'knows we are dust.' Spend time letting God's Word refresh you in the same way you refresh other people with the Word. Nourishing yourself will strengthen you to nourish others."

Edwardi continued, "And then enjoy some of the things you love, like spending time with your family and friends. Take a walk in God's beautiful creation. Be as faithful about these times as you are about making time for Simon."

"All that makes sense even though I didn't feel free to act upon it before. But there's something else weighing on me," Moses said.

"Tell me more," Edwardi encouraged.

"Well, I talked with one of the church elders

about Simon's situation. I hoped he'd give me wisdom about how to help Simon and Rhoda. But this elder didn't seem worried about Simon's behavior. He thought Simon was right to make Rhoda do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted. He kept saying the Bible commands wives to submit to their husbands," Moses said.

"First, be very careful who you talk to about Simon," Edwardi advised. "When you counsel someone, you must get that person's permission to share their story. Remember you told him you meet regularly with me and he agreed that's okay."

"I was just so desperate for help, but I know you're right," Moses admitted.

"Now, how do you feel about what the elder said?" Edwardi asked.

"It worries me. The more I think about it, the more I realize that he probably isn't the only one in my church who thinks that way. I wonder how many men hurt their wives like Simon hurt Rhoda."

"What do you think the Bible means by



‘submission’?” Edwardi asked.

“Well, that’s the other thing that troubles me,” Moses replied slowly. “You know how Anna helps Rhoda while I help Simon? For the first time we’re working together like partners. I really need her help because I can’t deal with Rhoda’s issues. Sharing our worries about Simon and Rhoda has brought us much closer. But before this, I thought Anna should simply care for me and the kids while I served God.”

“What do you think now?” Edwardi asked.

“It’s hard to think differently. I’ve thought this way so long without seeing it. Now I realize my father treated my mother the same way Simon treats Rhoda. I thought my marriage was fine because I never beat Anna. But I didn’t truly love her like Christ does.”

Moses sighed before he continued. “I was reading my Bible one day, trying to prepare my sermon. All of a sudden the last verses in the book of Romans stood out like someone shouted them to me. The apostle Paul called Phoebe a deaconess, or servant, of the church. And he called Priscilla his coworker in Christ. He saw

women as completely equal partners in the Lord.”

“And we often overlook the fact that Paul told both husbands and wives to love and submit to each other,” Edwardi pointed out. “Before he discussed wives submitting, he talked about husbands loving their wives the same way Christ loved the church when he died for us.”

“That’s definitely not happening in my church. And I’m overwhelmed wondering how to help the couples who struggle. I know we’re not living as God intended us to.”

“First you must wrestle with Scripture yourself,” Edwardi advised. “Figure out where you’ve been following your own opinions or what people say is right instead of God’s truth. When you counsel people, God uses their problems to help you face your own sin. Dealing with your sin while helping others can feel exhausting. But you must if you’re truly going to help them.”

“Where do I start?” Moses asked.

“I think you’re already starting in the right place,” Edwardi encouraged. “Find those

passages of Scripture that talk about God's expectations for marriage. Meditate on those passages. Ask how your beliefs line up with God's truths. Pray that God will reveal the attitudes and behaviors you need to change. And then pray for the strength to change. Once you travel that journey far enough yourself, you'll be able to bring others with you."

"That's my next question. How do I begin to help mend the relationships in my church?"

"Since your entire church is affected, maybe your entire church should work on it together," Edwardi pondered. "It's too big a problem for you to deal with alone. But what if you and Anna choose a few men and women to train as leaders? You could study the Scripture with them and pray through these issues together."

"Hmmm, sounds good so far," Moses responded. "What then?"

"What if these leaders organized separate groups for the men and women to talk about their struggles? They could study Scripture and pray for each other. They could discuss better ways of relating to their spouses. They could

encourage each other throughout the week.”

Edwardi continued, “Eventually, the leaders could help the men identify what triggers them toward abusive behavior. They could help the women come up with support systems when they’re in danger. These are all the same kinds of things you’ve been working on with Simon and Rhoda.”

“Wow,” Moses exclaimed. “I never thought God might help my whole church by helping Simon and Rhoda. This is exciting and overwhelming all at once. Looks like I have even more praying to do than I thought!”

“After all, he is the God ‘who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine!’” Edwardi said with a smile.

## **Counseling Principle #9: Set Healthy Boundaries**

Sooner or later if you counsel people, you will feel exactly like Moses: exhausted, discouraged, and guilty over not helping more. One of the most dangerous times comes right after a person makes significant progress. If you expect the

person to stumble again, you'll find yourself less disappointed. If you expect Satan to discourage the person from growing in Christ, you won't throw up your hands in despair. Instead, you'll calmly dust the person off and set his/her feet in the right direction again.

To review, first manage your own expectations. Second, maintain proper boundaries. A boundary represents a limit you place on yourself and the person you are helping. Setting a boundary means you say "I will go this far" or "I will do this much - but no more. Here is where I stop." Boundaries are like fences that protect both you and the person you are trying to help.

One of the most important boundaries to set is confidentiality. Only share someone's story if they give permission for you to do so. (Make sure you get their permission in writing). Another important boundary involves sticking to the day and time you agreed to meet with the person. If you meet more often, you may become exhausted. Different boundaries apply to different situations. For example, a male pastor who counsels a woman may need another woman present. This is especially true when the issues are of a sexual nature.

## **Counseling Principle #10: Examine Your Heart Regularly**

Often we forget to keep our boundaries. Like Moses, we feel responsible for other people's decisions. Our desire to see people change may come from pure motives of wanting the best for them. Or pride and insecurity may drive our need to feel successful. Constantly examine your heart. Pray and ask God to keep you humbly dependent on him and desiring his glory only.

Moses discovered God wanted to change him as much as Simon through their counseling relationship. As you counsel others, you may find their issues mirror your own struggles from the past. Perhaps you dealt with these issues in the past, only to find them plaguing you afresh. Perhaps God wants to lead you on the next steps of your own healing journey. Finding a trusted person to help you work through your own struggles enables you to effectively help others.

Moses also learned he needed to keep the bigger picture in mind. Simon's problems weren't just an isolated issue. Instead, they represented an entire pattern of struggles which strangled the life of his church. Wise counselors constantly search

the Word and their own hearts to determine if their beliefs line up with Scripture. They must also ask themselves if they have merely accepted their society's values. Bringing the entire church together to work on a problem gives the counselor support and helps the church flourish.

### **Questions:**

1. Study the following Scripture passages. What do these passages teach you about your role as a counselor?
  - He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.” (Mark 4:26-29)
  - What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the

seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. (I Corinthians 3:5-10)

2. Make a list of activities that bring joy and refreshment to your soul. Then schedule them into your days.
3. Write down some of your society's major values. For example, some societies value personal independence, some value family relationships, others value hard work. Consider ways these values might agree or conflict with biblical values. How could your society's values impact your work as a counselor?



## Conclusion

Moses traveled quite a journey with Simon! He spent hours listening to Simon. He guided him through Scripture. He walked with him through repentance, forgiveness, and growth. He helped Simon up when he stumbled.

Next Moses faced another challenge: ending the counseling relationship. A counselor works with a hurting person for a season. As the hurting person heals, he or she needs less support. Like someone healing from a broken leg, he or she can begin walking independently.

Moses should end the counseling relationship gradually. He and Simon must evaluate whether they met the goals set during their first meetings. If so, Moses can meet with Simon less often. Ending the counseling relationship does not mean Moses will have no relationship with Simon. Moses continues to relate to Simon as a member of his church. And he remains available should Simon need counsel in the future.

Moses ensured that Simon need not feel alone when counseling ends. He encouraged Simon to return to church. He connected Simon with an

older church member to provide encouragement. Moses' wife Anna met regularly with Rhoda. The supports Moses established during the counseling relationship can remain for Simon as long as necessary.

Remember Moses also found support for himself by meeting regularly with his former pastor, Edwardi. Make sure you don't try to support others without receiving support yourself. You especially need encouragement as you reflect on the successes and challenges of counseling a hurting person.

Christ intended his body, the church, to work together to help each member. As Ephesians 4:16 says, "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." Biblical counseling forms a beautiful picture of how the church supports its members. As a result, they grow together into the fullness of Christ.



