

**American Baptist Churches of New York State
Lay Study Program**

INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN COUNSELING

STUDENT GUIDE

Curriculum Committee
of the
ABC/NYS Lay Study Team

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Course Description

There are many times when people seem to have emotional needs that require the presence of another individual to listen to their "hurts" and provide the solace that only comes from a firm belief in Christ. Occasions such as the deaths of loved ones, pain from physical or mental sickness, frustrations involved with marriages, children and life in general are just some of the times in a person's life that may need the consolation of others. This course seeks to equip a Christian lay person in how they may understand a person's need for help and the ways in which they may offer such assistance.

This is a most difficult syllabus to construct. There is considerable controversy that surrounds the counseling process. There are those who feel that only Biblical Counseling is proper. There are those who feel that only psychotherapy and other psychological techniques should be employed. These two opinions are in violent opposition to each other. There is another approach that indicates that both of the former approaches should be combined into what is sometimes referred to as "Christian Counseling." This integrated approach is disparaged by the "Bible only" counselors and the psychological counselors as well. This course will attempt to present each point of view but will probably slant more to the integrated approach. However, two things are patently clear. The Bible gives us a strong imperative that counseling must be done and it must be part of the ministry of a church.

A strong caveat is needed at this point. There are definite limits to the type of service that you may offer to those in need. Unless you are a properly "credentialed" counselor you cannot treat mental illness. Often mental illness is based on physiological problems. You cannot practice this type of medicine without a license. The courts have held that you are not empowered to offer medical or psychological counseling and advice. You can be subject to the law if you go beyond your competence. You must also be careful of the legal statues requiring confidentiality but also must know of the requirements for reporting individuals who may prove to be a threat to themselves or others. All of the requirements and parameters for such ministry to individuals will be covered in this course.

It would be good to actually give the class members actual practical experience in counseling those in such need. The realities however indicate that this hands-on experience will probably be limited to simulations and role- playing sessions due to the limited time and scope of this course.

Dr. Joseph Perry and the Rev. William Harrel of the Curriculum Committee of the ABC/NYS Lay Study Team wrote this syllabus.

LESSON SCHEDULE, OBJECTIVES, ASSIGNMENTS & ACTIVITIES

General Course Objectives

The Biblical imperative to help those in our midst that need help is strong. Those who suffer from anxiety, loneliness, depression and a myriad of other problems need our help. That is what we are instructed to do as Christians. This course will seek to investigate various problems that individuals may be having and how we can best help those

individuals. It may be that we can best help by encouraging them to seek medical advice. It may be we can best help them by encouraging them to seek professional (credentialed) counseling. It may be that there are things that we can personally do with the help of almighty God to aid these individuals. These may be as limited as "listening to their concerns" or showing them compassion or love. This course will explore the problems that people may have and what we can, should or should not do in our attempts to help them to the best level of our training, knowledge and competence.

Student Requirements and Assessment

The students are expected to read the material as assigned. Each student will complete as scheduled two projects/presentations from the list of projects included in the session-by-session schedule. It is important that the student receive feedback (both positive and any constructive suggestions for improvement) from the instructor (and possibly the other students) as close to the end of the presentation as is possible.

At least one of the projects must be in the form of a role-playing demonstration of a mock counseling session before the class. (See No.1, third session under Suggested Action Learning Projects.) The other project should be in the form of a visit to someone in a hospital, nursing home, prison or may be to accompany a pastor in one of his/her regular visitations. A brief paper or report that gives your reflections on the visit should be made after the report. In this report be careful to not identify who it was that was being visited or give any information whereas the class can discern who the subject of the visit was.

The instructor's assessment of the student's work in the class will consist of his/her evaluation of the student's oral presentations, debate/role playing exercises, any written paper and the quality and degree of the student's participation in the class discussions. An instructor may also choose to use "take home" quizzes. The final grade will be either pass or not pass.

Session One

Preliminary

After preliminary bookkeeping activities about the Lay Study Program, course registrations, greetings and introductions, course assignments, procedures and expectations, the instructor may begin the presentation.

Premise

The Bible is quite clear that Christians have a mandate to help those in need. Often those in need require the personal ministry of "counsel." There are three distinctive approaches to offering such aid. There is also considerable disagreements about which of the methods is the most appropriate for use.

Specific Goals for the First Session

The student will learn of various Biblical imperatives that indicate the necessity for Christians to be involved in helping individuals in need. The student will also gain

knowledge and understanding of the three basic modes of offering counseling to these needy individuals. The student will learn of the differences among these methods and if it is possible to combine elements of these methods into an "integrated" approach to counseling. The student will also know some of the leaders and their beliefs in each of these varying approaches.

(During the discussion questions in each session the instructor can ascertain the student's knowledge, understanding and articulation skills by drawing out individual student participation.)

Assignments for First Session

The student should complete the first reading assignments prior to the first class. The Scriptural assignments are Romans 15:14, Hebrews 3:13, I Thessalonians 4:18, I Thessalonians 5:11 and James 5:16

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think that Spiritual Counseling is all the counseling a person will ever need? Why?
2. Do you think that Spiritual Counseling would be effective in use with a non-believer? Why?
3. How do you personally feel about the more secular approaches to counseling?
4. In what ways could it be said that God may also inspire these secular techniques?
5. Do you feel that it is possible to integrate the techniques of the secular counselor (psychology) with that of the spiritual or Biblical counselor?

Session Two

Premise

The two basic methods introduced in session one can be called "spiritual counseling" and "secular counseling." The second session will deal with attempts to integrate aspects of both methods into a new combined approach. This approach should draw on the best aspects of secular and spiritual counseling. This integrated technique is often called "Christian Counseling."

Specific Goals for the Second Session

The student will gain knowledge and understanding of the attempts to integrate secular and spiritual counseling into what is known as "Christian Counseling." The student will also learn of the legal parameters under which any counseling that they offer will be subject to. The student will gain clear insight as to what their level of competence in this area will and will not allow them to do. They will learn of the legal consequences of going beyond what the law allows them to do. The student will also gain knowledge and understanding about the laws of confidentiality and also the circumstances where these laws are modified to include responsible reporting to various agencies.

Assignment for Second Session

Prior to the class read the material in the recommended text or in any collateral reading that covers this period of time.

Discussion Questions

1. Should the integrated approach be called "Christian" counseling?
2. How do you feel about Christian Counseling as a method?
3. If the Bible is all we will ever truly need because it is inspired by God, why do we need to use any of the secular approaches to counseling?
4. Is it possible to measure the success of our counseling by scientific methods?
5. Under the most extreme circumstances would you ever go beyond your level of counseling expertise to help an individual in need? What could possibly be these circumstances?
6. Do the laws of confidentiality conflict with the Biblical admonition in Matthew 18:16-17? In which way?
7. Describe any circumstances that you may have been placed in, when you may have been discouraged by someone (possibly your employer) to refrain from making a report to local authorities about a "confidential" issue?

Session Three

Premise

Among the major problems individuals might encounter during their lives are what are called "Personal Issues." These include guilt, anger, anxiety, loneliness and depression. This session deals with the characteristics of these problems, who is most likely to suffer them, the possible symptoms that indicate such a problem is present in the life of a person and possible methods of helping those individuals.

Specific Goals for the Third Session

The student will gain knowledge and understanding of guilt, anxiety, loneliness, anger and depression. They will also gain insight into possible methods that can be used to help an individual who displays these problems in their lives.

Assignment for Third Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Discussion Questions & Activities

1. After each item in the list of instructor presentations, the instructor will supply a short case study that illustrates each of the major personality issues that were presented in the instructor's presentation. The students will thoroughly discuss the issues raised in the study with a primary objective being placed on what can be done to help the individual that displays such an issue.

2. The instructor may elect to have a student role play the position of counselee and the instructor the counselor in a mock counseling session related to one of the issues in the instructor presentation. The instructor may also at times reverse the roles and portray the role of counselee to a student's role- play of the counselor. The instructor may also choose, where appropriate, to initiate a group counseling session.

Numbers 1 and 2 under Discussion Questions & Activities will be the format of this area of instruction in each of the following sessions.

(There are numerous sources for such case studies. Several of the recommended texts contain several of these. *Christian Counseling, A Comprehensive Guide* by Gary R. Collins contains a case study for each of the items included in the instructor's presentation throughout the course.)

Suggested Action Learning Projects

1. In sessions three through ten a special learning project could be instituted. The class will work in pairs and one will assume the role of counselor and the other the role of counselee. The pair is to pick one of the problem issues from the instructor's presentation in one of the sessions. The counselee will develop a brief quasi case study that outlines the background of the individual and what the problem may be. The counselor will read the background information and develop a counseling strategy. The previous two activities should be done prior to class. At a later session they will demonstrate via role- playing a possible counseling session during the class. A brief discussion by the members of the class and instructor should follow the role- playing exercise.

2. Visit an acquaintance of yours (could be family or a person from your church) who is in a nursing home, a prison, and a hospital or accompany your pastor on one of his/her visitations. Briefly give your reflections on your visit with the person and detail if any of the problems or issues that were discussed in either session one or two were evident. What did you, could you or should have done to help this person with the problems that they are now facing?

These two Action Learning Project formats will be available for use in each of the remaining sessions.

Session Four

Premise

Frequently certain individuals experience problems that may be called "developmental" in nature. These would include: the raising of children and guiding the parents, the years of adolescence, young adulthood, a person's middle ages and the older person.

Specific Goals for the Fourth Session

The student will gain knowledge and insight about the developmental issues that face all of us at various times of our lives. They will learn individual "coping" methods and possible ways in which to aid those who are having problems dealing with these issues.

Assignment for Fourth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Session Five

Premise

Many problems that individuals have result from their difficulties relating to other people. These problems are frequently categorized as issues with "Interpersonal relationships." The issues for discussion in this session include: general interpersonal relationships, sexual relations outside of marriage, sexual relationships within a marriage, homosexuality, violence and abuse.

Specific Goals for the Fifth Session

The student will gain knowledge and understanding of the various issues that deal with interpersonal relationship problems that are frequent in individuals. They will also gain insight as to how people who are having such problems may be helped.

Assignment for Fifth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Session Six

Premise

Many times individuals seem to have problems with issues classed as "Identity Issues." These issues include low self esteem, too high a self esteem, problems with physical illness, problems coping with grief, self concept dealing with being unmarried and choosing a spouse.

Specific Goals for the Sixth Session

The student will gain knowledge and understanding of the various "Identity Issues." They will be given insight how they may be able to help persons who display these problems.

Assignment for Sixth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Session Seven

Premise

Often we are called upon to help those individuals with “family or spousal issues.” These could include counseling a couple who are considering marriage, counseling a couple with marital difficulties and counseling those involved in pregnancy.

Specific Goals for the Seventh Session

The students will gain knowledge and understanding of these “family or spousal issues” and gain insights as to how people with problems in these areas may be helped.

Assignment for Seventh Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Session Eight

Premise

Session eight continues with other “family and spousal” issues. In this session we will delve into: problems within a family, divorce and re-marriage. We are always to be conscious of the Biblical teaching on these concerns.

Specific Goals for the Eighth Session

The student will gain knowledge and understanding about issues such as: family problems, divorce and re-marriage. They will learn of the Biblical perspective on such issues and how they might be able to help those who have needs in these areas.

Assignment for Eighth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Session Nine

Premise

Session nine will cover some very specific issues that are causing persons considerable difficulty in the age in which we live in. These issues include: mental disorders, drugs and substance abuse, alcoholism, financial problems and problems relating to jobs and careers.

Specific Goals for the Ninth Session

The student will gain knowledge and understanding about issues such as mental disorders, drugs and substance abuse, alcoholism, financial problems and problems relating to jobs

and careers. They will be given insight as to how individuals who display such problems may be helped.

Assignment for Ninth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Session Ten

Action Learning Projects

Begin session ten with any oral presentations and that might be pending.

Premise

At times the counselor must deal with counselees who are troubled by other issues. These issues could include: physical handicaps, mentally handicaps, people in unique occupations such as the military, being in prison, suffering from AIDs and even premenstrual stress. What can a counselor do when working with people with issues in the above areas? The counselor also is frequently called on to offer spiritual counseling and a Christian Counselor is uniquely equipped to do this level of service. There are times when the counselors might need counseling themselves.

Specific Goals for the Tenth Session

The student will gain knowledge and insight into the areas of spiritual counseling, counseling issues such as physical and mental handicaps, persons and their families in the military, people and the families of prison inmates and people suffering from AIDs. The counselor will also learn to indicate signs that they may benefit from the counseling of another.

Assignment for Tenth Session

Students are to have read the assigned material from the text or collateral readings.

Capsule review of Course and Course Concluding Needs

