

Professor's Notes

Week Three: Characteristics and Skills of an Effective Crisis Worker

Before we begin our consideration of the characteristics of a crisis worker, it may be beneficial to first consider the characteristics of a crisis prone person.

Identifying a Crisis Prone Person

Not everyone who experiences stress in life will succumb to a crisis state. No one is completely sure why certain people seem to cope with stress easily whereas others deteriorate into disequilibrium when faced with stress or trauma. The following are indicator of a person who may be prone to crisis.

Indicators That Characterize a Crisis Prone Person¹

- Alienation from lasting and meaningful personal relationships
- Inability to use support systems such as family, church community, and friends.
- Difficulty in learning from experience; continually making the same mistakes.
- A history of previously experienced crisis that have not been effectively resolved.
- A history of mental disorder or severe emotional imbalance.
- Feelings of low self-esteem or excessive guilt
- Provocative, impulsive behavior resulting from unresolved inner conflict.
- A history of poor marital relationships.
- Excessive use of drugs, including alcohol abuse.
- Marginal income.
- Lack of regular fulfilling work.
- Unusual or frequent physical injuries, or poor physical condition
- Frequent changes; employment, relationships, residence.
- Frequent encounters with the law.
- Overwhelmed or burned out with continual high performance
- Unwillingness to take responsibility; Blamers
- Excessive Dependence or Independence
- Unrealistic Approach to Time, often reflective of a type-A personality

Type-A Behavior: Type A persons have major issues in three key areas: time, money and dirt.

1. **Time:** Type A's need to be on time, they need to avoid running out of time, they need to have a watch or clock handy so they can measure time, they invest time, measure the value of time spent and time left available. These individuals have issues with deadlines, as they are restricting, yet they feel they must have them and they must be met.
2. **Money:** Type A people often have esteem issues, as they do not base their value on realistic circumstances but rather on meeting lofty standards. As such, rather than by their inherent value as people, they value themselves and what they do by money. What is it worth, what did it cost, how much do they earn, have and spend? They spend or give money as a way of showing love or affection. It is their empowerment and security.
3. **Dirt:** As the type A individual is a perfectionist, they do not desire to have any association with dirt. Getting dirty makes them feel cheap and worthless. They need neat surroundings.

¹ Portions of this listing are drawn from: Greenstone & Leviton. *Elements of Crisis Intervention*. 2nd ed. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks & Cole. 2002. Pg 3,4.

While not every person who identifies with a Type A personality will exhibit all of these descriptors. These are general characteristics of Type A behavior:

- **Lack of Self-Esteem:** These persons have doubts about themselves. Based upon what they think of themselves. Achievements cannot keep up with their unrealistic expectations.
- **Excessive Aggressiveness:** This involves a strong competitive desire to win, and also a desire to dominate without the rights and feelings of others. These individuals view everything as a challenge. Passive aggressiveness is a reasonable alternative for Type A's.
- **Sense of Urgency:** They sense the need to speed up activities. They tend to speak faster and force others to do the same. It is difficult to relax around them. They may try to eat faster, drive faster, read faster. Any delays create frustrations. They are prone to interrupt others to show them better and faster ways to do things. Even though they know better, they punch the elevator several times to speed it up.
- **Polyphasic thinking:** They have developed the skill of performing many tasks at the same time. Women are even better at this than men.
- **Self-Destructive:** They can make major mistakes, and some even mention that they will succumb to the stress they are bringing upon themselves.
- **Health Threat:** They are five times more likely to have a heart attack, than Type-B persons.

Life alternates between times of calm and stress. One Chinese proverb asserts, *"Look not for trouble. Be patient. In time, it will find you."* For some more than others, it seems as though life is a continual movement from a crisis to calmness right back into a crisis again. Moderate degrees of stress are necessary to motivate us to move through life and to accomplish things.

Many people attain their greatest accomplishments when they are under stress, but it is the level of stress that they can handle. They use it and keep it within bounds. According to Norman Wright, *"Stress is any type of action or situation that places conflicting or heavy demands upon a person. It is any situation that chronically irritates or upsets a person."*²

People vary in their reaction to life's pressures. What is stressful to one person may not be to another. If too many sudden events occur at one time it may be difficult to handle the pressures. Remember what was said earlier in this course. Stress is different from a crisis, though they are often confused. If people can cope with the precipitating event, they will likely experience stress but not a crisis. A person's background, personality, spiritual maturity, neurological structure, and previous experience with pressure affect how they will respond.

² Wright, Norman H. *Complete Guide to Crisis & Trauma Counseling*. Expanded ed. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publ. 2011.

Characteristics of a Pastoral Care Giver in Times of Crisis

Crisis care is simply love in action. The Lord tells us that people will know we are Christians by our love. And as loving, humble servants, we help others in crisis by willingly entering into their grief and sorrow. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul charges his readers to weep with those who weep, feeling their pain with them. In his letter to the Philippians, he also tells Christ-followers to consider other's needs as more important than their own.

Meeting soul-care needs requires the sacrifice of our time, emotions, and sometimes even out physical resources. We are to follow the example of the foot-washing Christ, identifying needs and then doing what we can to meet them.

Ministry in Christ Requires PRESENCE –

Recognizing the value of one person entering into the pain of another.

Prior to his ascension, Jesus promised his followers that he would never leave them, nor forsake them. The greatest fulfillment of this promise was realized on the day of Pentecost, when the promise of the Father was given through the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. However, a secondary component of this promise from Jesus was through the working of his Body, the church. When Jesus calls us to serve, He calls us to come alongside others and become a part of their lives. He uses us to hold each other up and to help others grow in their walk with Christ.

Similarly, the first negative description we hear in the scriptures was when God described an incomplete creation as "not good" "It is not good that man should be alone." Humans were made (after God's image) to be relational. In our deepest and most painful moments in life, we realize this need even more so.

At some of the more dramatic moments in life, simply being with another person is extremely important. In fact, most people do not remember what was said to them during these times, but they do remember who was present.

Helping people during their crisis moments demands a certain intentionality and intensity of presence.

Attending, or the way you orient yourself physically, psychological and spiritually to those to whom we are ministering, adds to this presence.

To the person going through the dark valleys of the shadow of death, the minister represents God's presence in their situation. It is for this reason providing a quick response to someone's crisis is important. It reassures them that they are not alone. Even more so, God himself is present through his Body. This presence communicates in a powerful way that God cares.

CHRIST CHARACTERISTICS:

"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

-John 13:35

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."

-Romans 12:15

"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."

-Philippians 2:3

"Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."

-Galatians 6:2

When we empathically join the wounded person in their wound, we are truly suffering with those who suffer. We are bearing one another's burdens.

When a minister arrives on the scene, many will take comfort in the fact that the "Pastor" has shown up. Never underestimate the power of "presence". Here is what it means to be present: *Being fully with another person, exhibiting a non-anxious, comfortable presence while demonstrating "God with us" through the interconnectedness of the human interaction.* When people are in crisis and hurting, they usually crave the safe, comforting presence of others.

An effective ministry of presence provides;

- A comforting and non-anxious presence
- An environment of safety
- Being emotionally and spiritually present in the moment
- Demonstrating "I will be with you"
- Good active listening
- Being other-focused not self-focused
- Acceptance and a lack of judgment
- Being a servant and meeting basic needs
- Good thinking skills to help individuals sort through the tasks at hand.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE:

"Being fully with another person, exhibiting a non-anxious, comfortable presence while demonstrating "God with us" through the interconnectedness of the human interaction."

This list may not seem that difficult. However, these basic helping concepts are not always accomplished, even by well-meaning care givers. That is because this ministry of presence is primarily about *being* rather than *doing*. It is more about the way in which good care givers do what they do. It is about the *art of being*.

In examining the life of Jesus we can see that he was masterful in the art of being. The task of ministry was not his focus. Rather it was about the recipient of that ministry.

Think of the way in which he addressed the following individuals

- **Woman caught in adultery:** "Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." -John 8:10,11 ESV
- **Woman at the well:** "A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus spoke to her..." -John 4:7
- **Paralytic man:** "He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'" -Mark 2:5 ESV
- **Widow and her dead son:** "A man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow... And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.'" - Luke 7:12-13 ESV
- **Centurion and his dying servant:** "A centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, 'Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.' And he said to him, 'I will come and heal him.'" -Matthew 8:5-7 ESV
- **Woman with the issue of blood:** "He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." -Mark 5:34 ESV

Jesus moved with purpose, compassion, and understanding. He was not simply viewing the outward circumstance, but he saw the back-story, the spiritual, emotional need in the midst of the physical crisis.

While presence is powerful, it is not automatic. Simply showing up on the scene does not equate to ministry of presence. It is important to understand that one's physical presence does not necessarily mean ministry presence. Consider the following examples;

- Being physically present, but emotionally absent. Emotional intelligence is essential for presence.
- Arriving when you are not wanted. If people do not know the minister, they may be uncomfortable with a stranger's presence during a very intimate time in their life. Such a presence may have a negative impact on the spirit of ministry.
- Being physically absent but emotionally present. There are various levels of presence. There may be times that face-to-face presence is not possible. However, praying for a person on the phone, sending cards and letters at the right time can be a miraculous answer to their own prayers.

Ministry in Christ Requires CONSISTENT PRAYER-

Before, during and after each ministry visit.

Ministry can never be perceived as a task, duty or career. It is a partnership with the divine creator in proclaiming and displaying the power of the Gospel. Thus, it demands a reliance upon the Spirit of God. If this is true, prayer cannot to be seen as a religious ritual.

"Some people feel prayer is a form of magic. They feel that by praying they will influence God to lift the problem and reverse the process. As one person said, 'I don't know about prayer and God. When I was sick last time, I prayed and got better, but this time I prayed and I'm not any better. Where is God?' This is a limited view of prayer and God. Prayer is not just a way to reverse difficulty but a means of giving meaning to what is occurring in our lives."³

Prayer is the preparation, the connection, and the sustenance that will enable the minister to be effectively used to God's glory. Prayer should occur before, during and after each visit. Pray for yourself for wisdom and insight. Pray for them, but also pray with them, providing an opportunity for them to speak to God as well.

Ministry in Christ Requires PATIENTLY LISTENING AND MEASURED WORDS-

Even as the pain and concerns are voiced, the Spirit of God can minister his grace to the broken heart.

Crisis visits should be seen as divine appointments in which the Lord can extend his grace through the minister to the person in pain. What a privilege that is. In times of crisis your words will carry much less weight than the love demonstrated by your presence. Your ability to listen will be much more impactful than your ability to speak. Be slow to speak, so that you do not carelessly injure, but, in the proper time let the Spirit bring words of truth to the situation. Often times an insecure minister will resort to rambling off an impromptu three-point sermon, not because it was needed for the individual's wellbeing as much as it helped the insecure minister fill in the silence and anxiety.

³ Wright, Norman H. *Complete Guide to Crisis & Trauma Counseling*. Expanded ed. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publ. 2011. Pg. 419.

This one may seem like a no-brainer, but effective listening is a distinct skill. **A crisis care giver needs not only to listen to what is being said, but how it is said, why it is being said, and what it means in the context of that particular person in crisis.**

Think content, delivery, and context.

A care giver also needs to be able to listen “between the lines,” so to speak, for those things that are not being said. What a person omits from a conversation can speak just as clearly as what is communicated out loud. For example, a survivor of sexual assault who never talks about his or her traumatizing experience might be telling you something through silence.

Perhaps most importantly, a care giver should know how to listen without judgment.

These wounded individuals are going to come to you with difficult and complicated issues, and they will need to feel as though they have the space to say everything they feel they need to, without fear of shame or feeling as though their minister has jumped to a conclusion. Regard, respect, unconditional acceptance and caring are all critical characteristics the minister must convey.

If you are easily bored by conversation or have a hard time allowing others to contribute to a conversation, being an effective crisis care giver may be challenging for you.

Active listening is the practice of listening to a speaker while providing feedback indicating that the listener both hears and understands what the speaker is saying.

Ministers and mental health professionals should regularly practice active listening, but active listening is not exclusive to crisis counseling. Business professionals, medical doctors, and other people who frequently interact with the public may use active listening as a tool to ensure good customer service and stronger communication.

Components of Active Listening

There are three primary aspects of active listening:

1. **Comprehending** – In the comprehension stage of listening, the listener actively analyzes and listens to what the speaker is saying without distraction or unrelated thoughts.
2. **Retaining** – Retaining requires the listener to remember what the speaker has said so that the speaker’s full message can be conveyed. Some people may opt to take notes or use memory tricks when practicing active listening.
3. **Responding** – Responding is the act of providing both verbal and nonverbal feedback to the speaker that indicates the listener is both hearing and understanding what the speaker has said.

Ministry in Christ Requires GENUINE CARE-

Caring involves the having in a very sensitive and personal approach.

Caring is a personal form of outreach. The term denotes a form of love in action.

- **Filial love**, which is a relational type love. Not just professional but relational. This is based on an admiration or approval.
- **Agape love**, which is a gracious love. Based on the fact that perhaps the individual deserves no love.

**This form of caring requires three important skills and qualities for crisis care givers:
Authenticity | Respect | Empathy**

Authenticity

For crisis care giver to be effective, it must be based on authentic human relationships. The American way of life often reflects the distorted practice of maintaining façades and withholding ourselves from relationships with others.

If you are going to be effective as a minister or a counselor, you need to identify those facades in your life that keep you from being genuine.

Being authentic means being open. That is not to say that authenticity is “full revelation”. Rather, it is a genuine accuracy of what is being revealed. In other words, **authenticity is not so much the degree of revelation but the purity of that revelation.** It means being honest. In ministry or in counseling. It will not matter how refined your methods or techniques are. If you are not genuine and authentic, then you will have hindered the work of God in ministry.

This self-awareness is critical. It is a fundamental component to emotional intelligence. It is a sign of immaturity, if ministers deceive themselves by not addressing areas of inauthenticity.

Respect

Respect is the **behavior** that the minister engages in toward the person. The challenge for the minister is to maintain unconditional respect for the person at all times. It is not a matter of extending respect because they **deserve** respect, rather because they **need** respect. Without some degree of respect, they will not value themselves enough to move toward maturity, recovery, and wholeness.

However, this may be one of the most challenging facets within the crisis intervention relationship. Often time the behavior of the individual does not foster respect. This is the key. **The pastor or minister must separate the person from the behavior.** We may not respect the actions or attitude of the client, but the counselor must be diligent in maintaining respect for the person. Unconditional respect helps to see the person as a human who is worthy of respect and dignity just because they are made in the image of God.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and identify with another person's experiences, even if they do not describe their thoughts or feelings explicitly to the counselor.

I see empathy as **incarnational theology**:

Though we are created in God's image, we are unlike God in so many ways. God chose to bridge that distance between His total otherness and our humanity. He did so by putting himself, not only in our shoes, but in our humanity (flesh & blood).

Hebrews 4:15 (NASB) *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.*

Empathy is unique because it is both a character trait as well as a skill to be utilized in interpersonal relationships. It is one person's understanding the other's thoughts and feelings as if they were this other person, as if they were attaining an **inner-view**, not merely an **interview**. It means to free oneself to see, understand, and experience life through another's inner being.

A good crisis caregiver can empathize with a wide variety of people, understanding their choices and feelings even if, as a minister, they do not fully agree with them or have not experienced their experience. You will need to be emotionally attuned to individuals' needs, and will also have to be able to help them identify and articulate their feelings.

An angry person, for example, might be struggling with feelings of inadequacy over their chaotic situation. A highly empathetic minister will be better equipped to detect this, and go beyond the level of anger and deal with the inadequacy and insecurity.

EMPATHY AS INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY

"One person's understanding the other's thoughts and feelings as if they were this other person, as if they were attaining an inner-view, not merely an interview. It means to free oneself to see, understand, and experience life through another's inner being."