

A Community of Counselors: The Fruit of Good Preaching¹

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I love Sundays. Even when I am out of town, I often fly home on Saturday nights just to be with my family, to worship, and to be taught the Word.

I love the moment when our preacher stands to deliver God's Word to God's people. I love the stunning wisdom of God's Word and the remarkable depth and practicality of what God says. No matter how deep you dig, the Word always runs deeper. No matter how familiar the road, the Word always surprises you from around the next corner. I love how the Word understands both the infinitely detailed textures of human experience and the labyrinthine motives of the human heart. The Word is a light, a rainstorm, a mine, a mirror, a garden, a hammer, a fire. I love God's Word.

Most of all I love the fact that the Truth revealed in the Word is more than a theology or a set of principles, but a Person: Jesus Christ. Truth is Emmanuel, God with Us. Truth is the Shepherd, the Lamb, the Wonderful Counselor, the Way and the Life, our Redeemer King. He is the one I need to see and hear and love. He gives me reasons to get up in the morning that far transcend any purpose that I might cobble together in some moment of great insight or inspiration.

I go to worship with God's people with hunger and expectancy. I am a man in desperate need of help, and the preacher is one of God's primary helpers. Sunday after Sunday, I am made to see what I had not seen before. My convictions are strengthened—and reversed. My heart is exposed,

and my behavior is challenged. I am led to gaze on the glory-laden beauty of the Redeemer. Sunday after Sunday, the invisible Kingdom is made visible for me, and my selfish agendas shrink against God's wise and wonderful plan.

Yet, with all the glory and power of the public preaching of the Word, I am convinced that, too often, something is missing. A significant part of God's plan for the proclamation of the Word lacks the prominence that it should have in the public moment of exposition. This remarkable weekly moment of truth declaration must be shaped by a recognition of the church's call to both a public and private ministry of the Word. Good preaching should create a community of counselors. Consider for a moment the kinds of people who have gathered to listen.

Sue sits in the fourth row next to her thirteen-year-old daughter. Sue is powerfully aware of how the world has magnetized the attention of her daughter in the last six months. She and Suzy have talked a hundred times about true identity, true character, and true beauty. But the battle is far from over.

Jon is an elder with shepherding responsibilities over twenty families. He is increasingly aware that he simply is not attracted to his wife anymore. He wonders why he ever married her and what would happen if his peers in ministry knew. He has not told a soul.

Josh had planned to serve the Lord in some way since he was a little boy, but now that he is a teenager, his parents drive him

crazy. He spends much of his time at home, isolated and angry. Who will help him?

Sally has just sung “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” but she wonders where God was when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The pulpit prayers for “the sick in our midst,” even when they mention her by name, seem far away and general. What if God does not heal her and MS slowly kills her? What about her eroding trust that God is good?

These are the sermon-listeners. They are also the counsel-needers and counsel-givers. They are God’s advancing army, bringing the Kingdom to real people in real situations. They desperately need to know the “Kingdom come,” yet they sometimes unwittingly follow and offer the counsel of another kingdom—the counsel of darkness, confusion, and falsehood. They are counselee/counselors, people in the process of sanctification who need both to grow and to equip others to grow.

Generally speaking, the church brings God’s Truth to God’s people in two primary ways: through public preaching and private counsel. This article will examine the relationship between these two truth ministries. Much of what has been said and written about this relationship tends to be based on weak definitions of both preaching and counseling. Preaching is reduced to doctrinal instruction, exegetical exposition, and moral exhortation. Counseling is shrunk to the size of people’s perceived problems and to dispensing problem-solving techniques, relational cures, and situational fixes.

It is important, therefore, that we take a fresh look at preaching as *one aspect* of the whole counsel of the church. By doing this we can begin to understand how preaching and counseling are identical in content and purpose, but significantly different in

context, method, and process. Let’s first consider four propositions about the purpose and practice of preaching that show us how good preaching *should* create a community of counselors.

Four Propositions about Preaching ***The Purpose of Preaching Is to Proclaim the Counsel of the Creator***

The need for preaching is rooted in the *nature of God*. The God who creates the world in Genesis 1 and 2 is not only a God who *does*, but also a God who *says*. In fact, God’s speech is actually the instrument of his creating work! What he has to say is vital to everything that humans are to think, desire, and do. He *is* truth! His words alone are able to define what is beautiful, right, and true. His words literally “exegete” what he has made. He is the Great Preacher *and* the Great Counselor.

Preaching also has its roots in the *nature of people*. Who are these creatures, anyway? They are thinkers. They have been given the ability to analyze and interpret their *experiences*. They do not live life based on the facts, but on their interpretation of those facts. God designed people to be *revelation receivers*, giving them conceptual and communicative abilities so they could know, hear, and understand him. Without God’s words they would not be able to make proper sense out of themselves or his world. So God in his creative wisdom blesses Adam and Eve with his words. God’s counsel in Genesis 1 and 2 speaks to the deepest issues of the human existence: identity, meaning and purpose, relationships, and worship.

People are also worshipers. Worship is not just an intention or an action; it is a state of being. We were uniquely designed for worship, and every thought, desire, choice, decision, word, and action expresses wor-

ship. According to Romans 1, there are only two possible objects of our worship: either the Creator or the creation. If God is not the object of my worship—and thus functionally ruling my heart—then something in the creation is calling the shots.

Formal worship in the church must be shaped by an acknowledgement of the war that is taking place every day on the field of functional worship. No war could be more important, because this war is fought for control of the human heart. One of the primary purposes of formal worship is to recapture and redirect functional worship. Good preaching will not only reinterpret life in light of the glory of God, but it will expose idolatry and encourage a joyful, practical, robust worship of God.

Every congregation is full of these interpreter/worshippers. Pete is polite and friendly in public, but he seethes with anger when he reflects on his life: single, forty-five years old, recently jobless. Martha simply does not know how to help her mother to see God amid experiences of the ravages of old age. These people sit in the pews, not just as worshipers in the formal sense, but also as interpreter/worshippers in the most functional, life-shaping sense that Genesis describes.

Every week the preacher incarnates the Great Speaker. As God's representative wielding God's Word, he stands at the portal of people's lives. Every one of them, just like Adam and Eve, needs to hear the words of God. If they are ever to understand their lives, they must first hear and understand God. Any attempt to live without the words of God will curse them to a sub-human existence.

The preacher also stands powerfully aware of the great worship war that rages on the battlefield of every heart (including his own). He shines a bright and penetrat-

ing light on the glory of the Creator, who alone is worthy of commanding and controlling our worship. He accepts the high and holy calling of bringing the Creator near enough to produce a life-shaping, heart-gripping awe in all who listen. People who awaken to the worship war in every heart start to become wise counselors, even as they see more clearly their own need for the help of brothers and sisters.

The Purpose of Preaching Is to Give Voice to the Wonderful Counselor

Preaching is also rooted in Isaiah 9:6 and the promise of the coming Messiah, the Wonderful Counselor. As we consider this promise, we must resist the mental monotone that often afflicts us when we encounter an all-too-familiar portion of Scripture. Allow yourself to be amazed by what is being promised. This is not a promise of a wonderful counselor who is wise. Rather, *the Wonderful Counselor is Wisdom!* Wisdom came to earth in the person of the Messiah, the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Why is this so important? Because sin reduces people to fools. Sinners regularly get lost in the woods of their own foolishness. We all need to be rescued from ourselves, and this is the promise of our rescue. Wisdom is coming! Wisdom is coming! And his name is Jesus.

Preaching is weekly rescue. We are all fools by nature. We all tend to be magnetized by what is foolish and repelled by what is wise. We need to be led to recognize and confess how comprehensive and profound our foolishness actually is.

Remember the interpreter/worshippers in the pews. George thinks that angrily getting in his teenage son's face really is a way to motivate him to do right. Paula believes that the self-image-enhancing strategies of her self-help books really will

cure her depression. Sally has an MA in Child Psychology but does not know how to discern whether the “wisdom” she has learned is really wise. Each of these people needs to be fed the finest morsels of the Wonderful Counselor’s wisdom as they sit expectantly at his table. They need to know that true wisdom is not the product of research, intellect, or experience; it comes through a relationship to the One who is Wisdom.

A wise and faithful preacher speaks as an ambassador of the Wonderful Counselor, incarnating Wisdom. He skillfully exposes and exegetes the foolishness that masquerades as true wisdom. He lovingly teaches people to live in close communion and humble dependence on him who is Wise. He is a shepherd–counselor, rescuing the stray sheep who are trapped in the thorn bushes of their own foolishness and feeding the skinny sheep who are wisdom-starved.

Preaching makes the One who is Wisdom visible and audible. In that moment, truth silences the background clamor of our fallen foolishness. And at the center of this weekly wisdom banquet is the cross of Jesus Christ. Only there will I understand my true identity and see the profundity of my need. The cross alone bridges the chasm of foolishness and transports me into the Kingdom where Wisdom himself sits on the throne. If preaching is *weekly* rescue, mutual counseling is *daily* rescue. “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (Heb 3:12).

The Purpose of Preaching Is to Incarnate the Word Made Flesh

The roots of preaching pass through John chapter 1: the Word has come in person. Jesus is the Word, God’s ultimate state-

ment of self–revelation. God’s eternal revelation of himself does not culminate in a logical syllogism, a philosophical treatise, or a theological outline. In the grandeur of his redemptive love, God does not argue; he comes! It is a mind-bending historical moment. God actually lives, breathes, walks, and speaks on earth. The eternal, invisible One is made visible.

Why was such an awesome miracle necessary? Because sin not only reduces us to fools, but also inflicts us with a profound blindness. This spiritual blindness affects us in many ways, but ultimately it obscures our God as he has revealed himself. Yes, God as a Spirit is physically hidden, but sin blinds us from him in a much more profoundly spiritual sense. Like the people in the days of Christ, we do not see God even when he is right in front of our eyes. The troubling thing about Sara’s story of her divorce is not just that it is a sad story of rejection and abandonment. It is that her recounting of the story is utterly godless. In her heart-wrenching narrative there is no recognition of God’s presence, plan, or active love. Sara suffers not only from the consequences of a nasty divorce, but from a fundamental inability to see God. This aggravates and distorts the impact of the divorce on her heart and behavior. The hope and help that Sara really needs begins with seeing God.

Listen when people tell you their stories. Usually their stories will be devoid of any functional recognition of God’s presence, power, goodness, and grace. When they do not see God, they become dazzled and captured by other glories—the fading glories of relationships, position, possessions, appearance, and achievement. They get worried or depressed or terrified by the wrong things. When they do not see the glory of God, they treat their problems with

more problems! Failures in human wisdom, character, and strength will be treated with another dose of human wisdom, character, and strength, rather than a cry to the God of real rescue.

Fran has been to a long list of counselors. Some have been friends, some have been professionals, but they have all told her the same thing: “Get more insight and try harder!” Yet Fran has a basic lack of personal motivation. In her honest moments she will tell you that she would much rather avoid life than live it. Much of what she does is an attempt to avoid trouble any way she can. Her life lacks the courage that seeing God before her eyes would give her.

People often see the difficulty of their situation, the magnitude of their suffering, and the sin of others. They may even see their own sin, but they usually fail to see God. In the incarnation we see the glory of God’s truth that exposes, reveals, illumines, convicts, encourages, and makes wise.

Preaching is a weekly unveiling of God’s glory before those who have a hard time seeing. The purpose of the sermon runs deeper than handling the text properly, or even applying it cogently. It runs deeper than expounding doctrines, commands, and principles. The central purpose of every sermon is to reveal God in all the glory of his grace and truth. At the center of this purpose is Christ, who *is* truth and who *is* grace. The fire in the belly of every good sermon is a deep desire to make Christ seen, known, and loved.

Geena simply wants a way to turn her daughter into a “responsible human being.” Frank is just tired of being discouraged. Jane is willing to do just about anything to get her husband to be tender and affectionate. But the cross reminds them that they need more than personal, rela-

tional, and situation adjustments. They need to be rescued, reconciled, empowered, accepted, adopted, and loved.

What we need can only be found one place: the Redeemer Christ. That Redeemer intends to make *us* his living representatives to each other. Preaching brings Jesus Christ to our human struggles. It ought to teach *us* to come to *each other* as small Christs, incarnating in a real way God’s mercy, compassion, patience, and steadfast love. Preaching brings Jesus in word to all of us, so each of us can bring Jesus in deed and word to each other.

The Fundamental Content of Preaching Is a Story

In the most basic sense, the Bible gives us a narrative. Our problem is that much of our preaching does not sound like we are expounding a story. It often seems like we are exegeting abstract concepts, and then applying principles to everyday life. But the gospel is not a concept. It is the most important story ever lived, written, or told. The goal of preaching, therefore, is to embed the stories of the listeners in the larger story of redemption. Good preaching calls people to a “God’s Story” mentality. Theological concepts and outlines simply provide a shorthand way of describing the plot.

Think about it for a minute: What is the hope of the person in the pew? It cannot rest in terms, principles, formulations, and abstractions. The hope of the believer is entirely relational. It rests on a living Christ, who has acted and will continue to act on behalf of his own. In the Story we see Christ in action, faithfully fulfilling his redeeming rescue mission. I will only understand my identity as a believer when I daily see my story embedded in his Story.

Preaching needs to be *narrative* preach-

ing, for at least three good reasons. First, narrative preaching addresses the real struggles of the person in the pew. Suppose you are in the middle of Manhattan. You get off the subway at 34th Street and 7th Avenue with the intention of going to Rockefeller Center, but you quickly get lost. Now, you are not totally lost. You know you are a human being in the universe. You know that you are in the United States, in New York State, and in Manhattan. You have loads of “theological” (geographical) knowledge, but you are seriously lost, because you do not know how to get where you need to go.

I propose that vast numbers of people to whom we preach are “lost in Manhattan.” They may not seem like they are lost, because they talk with such knowledge about where they are. But with all that knowledge, living in the middle of their own story, they do not know how to get from where they are to where God wants them to be. In fact, unlike being literally lost in Manhattan, they do not even know that they are lost. They have not understood that the Story gives them a whole different destination.

Sally is lost in the middle of her own story. Her marriage is cold and distant, but under the surface there is anger. She does not understand it, and so she does not know what to do about it. Sam sits at night and thinks about his teenage son, Josh. Once again he did not come home from school. Josh has lost his way, but Sam has no idea how to help him find it again. Joanie is waking up again to overwhelming waves of discouragement. Nothing significant happened today, yet she feels a darkness that she cannot lift.

In their lostness these people experience many significant things. They experience *hermeneutic disorientation*: “I don’t know

what it all *means*! My story doesn’t make sense.” Every living person is a hermeneutician; that is, one who works to make sense out of his life. In my lostness I generate all kinds of interpretations, but nothing really seems to fit. In the middle of my own life I have felt at times like the impatient child who is trying to force the puzzle piece into a place where it does not really fit. Yet, my interpretations are significant, for they set the direction of my life. What I do is not based on what I have experienced, but on how I have made sense out of what I have experienced. Many people in our churches on Sunday are in a personal state of hermeneutic disorientation.

Lost people also experience *spiritual claustrophobia*: “It’s all about me! My story is about ME.” When I am lost, the world tends to shrink to the size of my lostness. On that corner in Manhattan I become concerned with only one thing: that I am lost. I do not see the sights or hear the sounds. I do not notice the people who pass by me. In that moment I hope for only one thing: to find my way. This is one way that my experience of lostness distorts my world. It makes me more central, more significant, than I was ever meant to be. In my lostness, the only relationships I want are those that might help me become “unlost.” I care about others, but in a deeper sense, I really only care about myself.

We were never created to live in the deoxygenated confines of a self-defined world. We are meant to live in the “big sky” country of a God-inhabited, God-defined world. Often preaching that talks about the Kingdom of God feels like a “bait-and-switch” to lost people. They come to church, thinking the pastor would talk about “them,” but instead he talks about “it.” They have lived so long in the claustrophobic confines of their own needs that

they find it hard to relate to the grandeur of the now-and-then Kingdom.

They also experience *spiritual blindness*: “Where is God? My story unfolds with no God in view.” “There is no God!” People who are lost simply quit seeing. If I am lost in Manhattan, I do not notice the skyscraper across the street with silver-blue windows reflecting the whole New York skyline. I do not see the vendor hawking roasted nuts. My vision is clouded by my plight. The most important vision system of a human being is not the physical eyes, but the eyes of the heart. You can be physically blind and live quite well. You cannot be spiritually blind and live well.

What does the person lost in Manhattan really need? It is tempting to respond, “Directions!” But think for a moment. If you give him excellent directions and he gets from point A to point B, he will get lost again as soon as he tries to get to point C. What he needs is a helicopter view of New York City in his head. If you have the big picture, you are able to orient yourself and move in the right direction.

This is what we all need every Sunday—the helicopter view of life that only the grand story of redemption can give. Preaching must pull us out of our confusing little corners and enable us to see the grand vista of life. Only this kind of “whole story” preaching can enable us to orient ourselves in every new situation. Only God’s Story can confront the blindness and claustrophobia that continually weaken our functional spirituality. Do you see how preaching that finds us when we are lost in our own story equips us to enter other people’s stories to help find them?

There is a second reason to be committed to narrative preaching. It confronts the core issue of redemption: the battle between self-rule and God’s rule. Second

Corinthians 5:15 says that Jesus died so that “those who live should no longer live for themselves, but unto him who died for them and was raised again.” The primary thing God saves me from is myself! The most fundamental form of human idolatry is the idolatry of self. Sin renders me hopelessly enslaved to myself. Because of sin, what means most to me is *me*.

When preaching disengages the doctrines and principles of Scripture from the grand story, we offer people life without calling them to lay down their lives. When I look for answers in Scripture with only a sense of my own need, self remains unchallenged at the center. But God is not primarily in the business of meeting needs. He is in the business of displaying his own glory and calling a people who are functionally committed to live for him. As Paul says in Titus 2, God is calling to Himself “a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds.” Topical, principle-filled, need-driven preaching may appear to be practical and helpful, but it distorts the message of the Bible and therefore harms people in the long run. What good does it do a person to be less depressed or to have a better marriage when they remain, in subtle and not so subtle ways, a rebel against the very thing for which they were created?

It would be easier for Sally if her struggle were just with her husband, Bill. But there is a deeper struggle: she wonders why she ever worked so hard to be a good, biblical wife. Maybe God isn’t so good after all? Sam had always dreamed of effective Christian parenting, but he ended up with a son who, frankly, is an embarrassment. He battles the desire just to kick him out of the house. He walks by his stack of parenting books and says to himself, “It’s just not that easy.”

An even deeper problem with the Sun-

day listener is that as a self-absorbed sinner he will tend to try to write his own story. He will quietly, perhaps unconsciously, hope that God will enter *his* story and make it work. But the reality is that long before he was born—literally before the foundations of the earth—he was already part of God’s Story. His life has never belonged to him. It was always the Lord’s.

The person in the pew needs a grander reason for living than the establishment of his own happiness. He needs to be confronted with the fact that the essence of true humanity is not found in retaining one’s life, but in being willing to die for the glory of Another. Every biblical principle must be attached to this death-life-glory drama. The commands and principles of the Bible are not mechanical maxims for personal success, but invitations to die to self and live for God. Good biblical preaching does not solve every listener’s immediate problems. Rather, it teaches people how to live within the plot of God’s Story. As they deal with the realities of life in the fallen world, they respond in ways that are consistent with what the Bible says the drama is about.

The plot of God’s Story is a “glory” plot. It is about God rescuing us from terminal enslavement to our own glory, to a life producing commitment to his glory. Yes, he is committed to our ultimate happiness, in that he knows that true human happiness is only to be found in the defeat of our glory and the victory of his. When preaching opens your eyes to *the* question—self-rule or God’s rule?—counseling will go after the same key question.

Third, narrative preaching will always lead to Christ. Since the biblical story is a redemptive story, it will always point to and highlight the Redeemer. The Bible does

give us a methodology for life, but it is not a Steven Covey manual (“The Seven Daily Habits of the Highly Effective Image Bearer”). If all we needed were insights and principles, Jesus would never have come.

The biblical drama puts Christ alone on center stage. Every mini-drama within the grand drama points to him and our need of him. Every good principle looks to him for its wisdom, and to him for grace to carry it out. Every promise is rooted not in mechanical natural law, but in his redemptive acts for his people. Narrative preaching says with Paul, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). The grand story is—*his Story*.

As preachers bring the grand Story to people Sunday after Sunday, they begin to see Christ in every moment of their own story as well. When this happens, not only does their formal theology become more Christocentric, but their everyday living in this fallen world does as well. Preaching that makes us say, “I love Christ!” will create counselors who bring that same Jesus to others.

So how do I take all these great *truths* and have them affect the way I listen to preaching and, if I am a pastor, the way I preach?

Preaching and Counseling Share the Same Purpose: Equip the Counselors

Now consider this: These four roots of biblical *preaching* are the roots of all sound *counseling* as well.

In a fundamental way, biblical preaching and biblical counseling are committed to doing the very same thing. Both incarnate the Creator, the Wonderful Counselor, and the Living Word in God’s Story. In preaching, this counsel occurs in a public

forum and is broadcast widely to reach all who listen. In personal ministry, this counsel is given with specificity so that it speaks with concrete detail into the life of the one who is listening.

The preacher must do more than dispense the theological truths of the text. He must help people to see God, to hunger for his Word, to be amazed at the hugeness of the Redeemer's grace, and to live every day within his counsel. Similarly, the counselor must be more than a mechanic, a caring friend, an explorer of experiences, or a life strategist. He or she must confront spiritual blindness and help people own their desperate need for God's words. The counselor teaches people how to live in a way that is joyfully submissive to the counsel of the Redeemer.

Preaching and counseling exist in fundamental unity as two aspects of the church's call to zealously and unceasingly incarnate the Wonderful Counselor on earth. Their basic content and purpose are the same; both find their reason for being in the God who speaks, the Counselor who has come, and the Word who has spoken. At the same time they differ radically in context, method, and process. The more familiar you become with the story of redemption, the more you realize that it is a community story. God is not just calling isolated individuals. He is calling a "people" to himself—not only to be recipients of his grace, but instruments of it as well. Solid biblical preaching must always be shaped by these two agendas.

Most preaching attempts to show people their need for the grace of Christ and calls them to receive it. But how many sermons also are crafted with a *second* commitment, to help people know more fully what it means to function as an instrument of that grace in the lives of others? Every

sermon ought to produce faith that works through love.

The biblical model of change distributes the responsibility for ministry to every member of the body of Christ. We are called to a "total involvement paradigm" where each person in the church understands his responsibility to be part of God's ongoing work of redemption in the lives of those around him. Therefore we come to the sermon needing to hear not only how the work of grace impacts our own lives, but to understand how to minister that same grace to those around us. *Every* word we say is meant to be "constructive, according to the need of the moment, giving grace to those who hear" (Eph 4:29). Sermons that preach that way will create people who talk that way.

God has ordained the church to become an unending redemptive conversation. It is a workroom in which Christ continues to rescue, restore, and conform his people. The public sermon should equip the body of Christ for the innumerable private moments of life transforming ministry to others that occur every day. In particular, the preacher must always do two things. First, he must inform and remind people of their place in the ongoing work of redemption. Second, he must teach people how to do what God has called them to do.

The sermon is a wonderful place to examine how to be part of what God is doing in the lives of others. For the Word to be practically applied, it must always be applied to people's life *and* ministry. By "ministry," I do not mean only the formal, scheduled ministries of the local church. I mean the whole web of dynamic relationships in the body of Christ. Every relationship is meant to express God's ongoing redemption by encouraging personal, progressive sanctification. From God's per-

spective, the husband, wife, parent, friend, and neighbor are all “ministry” positions.

Good biblical preaching grows out of the realization that there is no way you could ever hire enough paid ministers and counselors to meet the ministry needs in a church. God has ordained the church not simply to be a place where ministry takes place, but also to become a ministering community. The preacher is called to counsel the counselors, to comfort the comforters, to teach the teachers, to encourage the encouragers.

Good preaching extends the arms of the pastor through the ministries of those who hear it. Every week the preacher sharpens these instruments in the hands of the Redeemer. Biblical public ministry is interdependent with private ministry. The pulpit prepares people to receive private counsel as it brings to people the grand themes of the biblical story. The friend or counselor will apply these same themes to the person’s individual life by embedding their drama in the larger drama of redemption.

Public ministry needs private ministry. Private ministry carefully builds bridges of understanding from the broad themes of preaching to the particular circumstances of an individual’s life. Preaching is the *formative* discipline of the church. It is paradigm building, foundation-laying work. Private ministry, counseling, is the *repairing, sustaining, correcting, protecting* discipline of the church. It is the work of hands-on restoration. Personal ministry has been ordained by God to be built on the firm foundation laid by the public ministry of the church.

The preacher must recognize that he is the counselor of the counselors. Everyone to whom he speaks is a person of influence. They are all giving and receiving counsel

daily. But will their conversations emerge from a “God’s Story” mentality? Are they learning how to help one another live inside of the plot of God’s Story? Does this company of counselors know how to build concrete bridges of understanding from the themes of God’s grand drama to the raw details of their neighbor’s life? Every preacher is called not only to give wise, biblical counsel from the pulpit, but also to train the company of counselors that sits before him. God, help us in our preaching not only to comfort people with the counsel of the Word, but also to train them to give that counsel to others.

ENDNOTE

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