

Lesson 3 – Case Study – Relationship Building in Pastoral Counseling

TLO: Identify the principles that help build relationships in pastoral counseling.

ELOs: Describe the concepts in the Coming Together phase of counseling.
Describe the concepts in the Exploring Together phase of counseling.
Describe the concepts in the Working Together phase of counseling.

C: Chaplain

M: Male Soldier

F: Female Spouse.

Setting: Couple walks into the room ahead of the chaplain and sit down next to each other. However, they have very different appearances. The wife sits down and folds her arms and legs, and leaning forward, looks straight at the chaplain's seat and then the chaplain as he sits down. The husband, in contrast, sits down, leans back, and looks toward the ceiling.

C: Well, it's nice to finally meet you. It seems like it was hard for us to find a time when we all could meet.

F: Well, of course it is. M doesn't want to be here. It took two weeks for him to run out of excuses. I finally had to call his First Sergeant to get him to come to this appointment.

M: (to the F): You did not have to call the First Sergeant and air our dirty laundry. I'm happy to come to this appointment. I just wanted to work this into my schedule so it wouldn't raise too many questions.

C: (to the M): So you're glad to be here, now that you're here? Good! So what's going on? How can I help you?

F: We've got problems, and M never wants to face them. He'd just rather ignore them and pretend they don't exist, and then head to Afghanistan so we can put off solving them for another year. But I'm tired of it.

M: (Interrupting angrily): Oh come on, you make it sound like I'm a monster or something. Do I ever refuse to talk with you when you want to talk about things? No! I just get tired of going over the same things again and again, and again.

C: Hold on: I appreciate the way you both want to jump right in and get to work, that's great. But I'm afraid I'm having a hard time keeping up. Sorry. You guys are way ahead of me. Would you be willing to go a little slower so this old man can keep up? I'm sorry to do that, but you know how we old men are (smiling). Now it sounds like you've been struggling to resolve some thing or things. Is that right?

F: It's ThingS. Plural. Where do you want to start?

C: Well, wherever you think is best. Can you tell me a little more about what some of the things are you've been struggling to resolve?

F: Well, recently, M has simply been spending too much money, and our USAA credit card is maxed out! And we don't have anything to show for it except for some guns.

M: (Interrupting): I didn't spend all that money; that card was over \$8,000 before I even got back from Iraq!

C: I see, so how much money to spend. OK, I got that down (Making a note). What is something else you two are stressed out about?

F: I'm tired of him spending all day Saturday's with his friends. He sees enough of them at work during the week and on the weekends I need some time when he can watch the kids so I can shop and take care of things I can't during the week.

M: Oh come on, I've been home all weekend for the last month.

F: (Jumping in): No, Saturday before last, you spent all Saturday morning out hunting, and I missed an appointment because I couldn't take Jessica and Jeremy.

C: Ok, I see another issue, time budgeting. That's a tough one-I know I never seem to have enough time either for everything that's important. I've got that one down too. What else?

M: (Chuckling) How much time do you have?

C: (Smiling) This list could get pretty long, eh?

(Both nod)

C: Well, I'm concerned we do something good even today. I don't want us to just be walking out at the end with an angry list. We've all the time in the world to eventually get to everything, but for today, maybe let's just stay with these two, unless, is there one more issue you want to make sure we talk about today? (to M): It sounds like these first two are at the top of F's list. Do you have something you'd want to make sure gets into the top 3?

M: Not really. I really want us to get a budget for money. I'm tired of feeling poorer and poorer each month. (F nods).

C: Ok, then, just two. This should be easy (smiling). Normally, I'm a three miracle per hour chaplain, so two shouldn't be too tough. We might have time for some coffee....

Case Study Discussion Questions:

- 1) What stage of the relationship do you see the Chaplain working in through this discussion?
- 2) What steps do you see him taking to begin to get this couple to clarify the issues they want to work with
- 3) This Chaplain used humor a bit in this discussion. How do you think this helped? What are the dangers in using humor like this?
- 4) If you were this Chaplain, what might you say or do next to move this conversation along in a helpful direction?