Bob: If you have a friend, a co-worker—someone you know—and you hear their marriage is in trouble, do you draw near to them?—or do you find yourself backing away? Here's pastor and counselor, Jonathan Holmes.

Jonathan: Sometimes, what I find is that, because we are so fearful of offering advice or counsel, that we can really pull away from people in crisis. If you don't have the skill/don't have the confidence you need/that you feel your couple friend needs, then, at least, be willing to say, “Listen, I'm willing to help you though. Let's go talk to our pastor—let's track somebody down. And listen, I'll absolutely be committed to coming alongside and walking with you.” Just be a friend—to talk these things out together.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Monday, August 26th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. If you're somebody who loves the Lord/reads your Bible, you may be more competent to help friends in need than you realize. We'll talk more about that today with Jonathan Holmes. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. If you had to distinguish, for me, between discipleship and counseling, could you come up with a difference? I mean, what's discipling somebody and what's counseling somebody?

Dave: Wow; Bob starts with a deep one. [Laughter]

Bob: Yes; I thought I'd throw you—

Ann: Yes, honey; that's a really good question for you.

Dave: Yes; I knew she'd throw it right back at me. [Laughter]

Well, you know, it's interesting—when you asked that, my first thought was, “I've always said that I'm not a good counselor,”—I've said that, even at church, like, “You don't want to come meet with me.”

Bob: —“for counsel”? 
Dave: Yes; and a lot of people want to meet, especially with Ann and me, because we talk about marriage; and we wrote a book on marriage. They think, “Oh, they're good counselors about marital topics.” And yet, my secretary for 20 years, would say—for 29 years; Debbie is—she would say: “Don't meet with Dave. You're going to walk out and go, ’Now, I need a real counselor;’ [Laughter] because all he said was: ’Grow up! ’ ‘Quit doing that’”; right?

You know, when you think about it—and that's an exaggeration—when you think about counseling someone or discipling someone—Bob, when you asked the question, I thought, “I'm a good counselor!” because it's discipling; right?

Bob: There are some parallels there. We've got a counselor/discipler joining us on FamilyLife Today, and we're glad to have him. Jonathan Holmes is here. Jonathan, welcome to FamilyLife Today.

Jonathan: Thank you for having me.


Dave: See, that's what I need! [Laughter] It's what I need!

Bob: It's what all of us need. In fact, I was with some friends recently; and I was describing your book to them. They were like, “Where do I get that?”

Ann: Yes.

Bob: Any of us, Jonathan, who are involved in the lives of friends/couples—we're all in situations, where—mostly, as laymen/as friends, we're called upon to—somebody will say, “Do you have any suggestions for me?—any ideas?”

Is there a difference between counseling and discipling?

Jonathan: That's a great question—one we get quite a bit. When I think about counseling/discipleship, I think counseling would be described as intensive discipleship. It's typically for a little bit of a shorter period of time and you're not spending a lot of time there, in terms of discipleship. Discipleship can be a little bit of a longer relationship.

I like to describe counseling as a rest stop on the way to vacation. Nobody wants to spend their entire life at the rest stop [Laughter], at the vending machines and going to the bathroom. [Laughter] Sometimes, you need to take a little bit of a detour. For a lot of couples, that's what counseling can be—it's: “Hey, we know where we're headed, to some degree, but we need a little bit of tune-up. We need some encouragement; we're at a little bit of a crisis point.” Counseling helps pull you off the side of the road—spend
a little bit of time with you—but we don't want you there forever. We want to get you back in the body-life in the church.

**Bob:** Jonathan is the pastor for counseling at Parkside Church, outside of Cleveland, Ohio, which, some of our listeners have heard of Parkside Church because their pastor is heard on a daily radio program called *Truth for Life*, and I'm heard on that as well. [Laughter]

**Dave:** I was going to say, “Bob, have you ever been heard on that show?”

**Bob:** Alistair Begg is the pastor at Parkside, where you are the pastor for counseling. You've set up a counseling center at the church, that's not just for your church, but for people in the community.

**Jonathan:** Yes; we have a ministry at Parkside Church called Fieldstone Counseling. It's a Christian counseling center that serves families, and churches, and local ministries across northeast Ohio. We found so many people are looking for Christian-based counseling—there's not a lot of them out there and there's not a lot of them out there that people, I think, can trust—that they feel that the counsel is biblical and that's oriented towards their faith.

**Bob:** Do you look to incorporate traditional counseling dynamics along with the Bible? This is called integrationism—right?

**Jonathan:** Right.

**Bob:** —where you take secular counseling technique and the Bible and put them together. Is that a good way for counselors to go? Or do you just open your Bible and say, “Here's what the Bible says...” and “We go with that.”

**Jonathan:** Integration, you know—across the spectrum—you're going to find a number of people, who are doing it well and then people, maybe, who are not doing it so well. I think good biblical counseling—model and method—takes God's Word seriously but then, also, really seeks to understand people well.

And when you read the Gospels/when we see the wonderful Counselor in action—we realize that He's not just preaching sermons at people. Actually, His ministry is largely private and interpersonal. You see Him eating meals with people; you see Him living life with people; you see Him ministering to individuals/small gatherings. His public ministry—things like the Sermon on the Mount or His teaching—actually accounts for a small part of what we see in the Gospels. What you see is Christ moving towards people, with intentional care and with hope. I think that's what biblical counseling best represents when it's done well.
**Dave:** When you say it that way, it makes it sound like almost anyone—a mature follower of Christ—could be a biblical counselor. Is that true?—do you believe that?

**Jonathan:** I do believe that. I think that Paul, in the Epistles, tells us that he is confident that we are able to speak truth in love. In fact, that's actually a role that every person is called to do. You look at Ephesians 4, and he begins to lay out the gifts and what-not. But when he gets to Ephesians 4:15-16, he says, “Listen, all of us are to be speaking truth in love to build up the body together in Christ.”

When we think about counseling—absolutely, there's definitely layers of competency and skill that different couples or different individuals have more skill or competence in. But I think that, at a baseline level, every believer/every Christian should absolutely be equipped to be able to come into the life of another couple and be able to listen to them, ask good questions, and to really be present with them.

**Ann:** And is that what prompted you, then, to write your book?

**Jonathan:** Yes.

**Ann:** —to equip couples to be—

**Jonathan:** Absolutely; absolutely. One of the things in counseling ministry—I'll get phone calls and inquiries from couples, pastors, elders, ministry leaders—across the board. The number one question is: “Can you help me with this case? I need advice on this. This guy came in—he's looking at pornography,” “…This woman's filed for divorce; what do I do?”

And what I've found is—not so much that people didn't like doing marriage counseling or that they were afraid of the hard work of it—but they didn’t know how to do it; they were just ill-equipped. I'd fire off email after email, listing off some different resources and trying to coach people through it. Finally, I said, “Maybe I should just write a book and try to include a lot of this that I refer people to.”

**Dave:** Of all the things you counsel, what are the top three or five things that you see people really need help with?

**Jonathan:** I think the perennial topics that you are always going to get are anxiety, depression—people just struggling with, “How do I deal with the ever-increasing pressures of life, and family, and work, and hardship?”—navigating through that—not only personally; but then, also, with children. We see huge amounts of families just navigating and really drowning as it relates to their children dealing with anxiety and depression.

Marriage and family issues are definitely up there too. It's the bread and butter, I think, of much counseling: “What do you do with husband and wife dynamics?” “What do you
do when there's sexual sin?" “What do you do when there's infidelity?" “What do you do about in-law issues?"—“financial issues?"—“rebellious children?"

That grouping of marriage and family, anxiety, and depression—forms a large amount of the work that we do.

**Ann:** With anxiety and depression being on the rise, why do you think that is?

**Jonathan:** I think one of the things with anxiety and depression—in terms of: “What do you do with it?”—is I think that all of us can start with just being honest. I think that's one of the very first things that you can do with any couple/with any individual to build relationship rapport—is you move towards them and say: “I get it. I actually know where you've been.”

I think that's why, in marriage counseling, that word can scare people; but one of the strongest/one of the best things I think other couples or other individuals can do, when they're discipling or whenever they're doing counseling, is that they can be honest about their own struggles. They can move towards people in a way that says, “Listen, you're not alone.”

One of the built-in realities that we have in the church is that we are, already, together in one family. We already start off with a built-in relationship that I actually think sets the stage for speaking truth in love and for wise helping and wise encouraging. That's actually one of the biggest hopes that I hope people come away from the book with is: “Listen, you're actually well-placed and well-positioned to be involved in other couple's lives—to move towards them and to ask good questions.”

**Dave:** And yet, it's scary—

**Jonathan:** Oh, yes.

**Dave:** —even with friends or people you're in small group with to go there.

**Jonathan:** Absolutely.

**Dave:** You know, to be vulnerable—it's easier to post the Facebook® or the Instagram® pictures that says, “We're okay,” even if it's somewhat vulnerable. But to sit down with a counselor—you've got to go there. Talk about that stigma—the fear of: “I need counseling.”

**Jonathan:** The stigma of counseling, I think, can be huge; because we're a people, I think, who don't like to struggle publicly. We're people who don't like to air out our dirty laundry, especially when it comes to marriage. The world's mechanism, a lot of times, for dealing with that is: “Well, you just kind of part ways amicably—you go down the
path of divorce,"—or maybe—“You just kind of stay in it for the kids and, then, part ways after that.”

The idea that you need help—that you're maybe not what your spouse thought you were when you entered into the relationship—that touches on a lot of areas of pride and embarrassment. I think all of those factors can keep people from pursuing marriage counseling.

A lot of times, I'll even try to reframe marriage counseling just as marriage enrichment or marriage encouragement—you know, marriage care: “Listen, this something that my wife and I—we have marriage mentors in our life. We want people speaking into our life.” That type of culture—if we could just have the church pick that up—I think all of our marriages in the church would be better for it.

**Bob:** And I think everybody here is about to say, “Amen!” and “Hallelujah!” to that. [Laughter]

I was with a couple recently—pastor friend and his wife—they just casually, in the course of the conversation, said, “We had a situation, last week, where we were not on the same page; we didn't see things the same way.” He said, “So we called a friend, who is a counselor, and said, 'Could we get some time with you to talk about this?'”

**Dave:** Bob, I told you never to tell anybody about that conversation. [Laughter]

**Bob:** He spoke of it in such blasé terms—it was kind of like: “Yes; of course, this is what you do. We got sideways on something. We called a friend and said, ‘We need some help on this.’” It was like: “We get counseling regularly.” He de-stigmatized the whole thing.

I think there are a lot of people who—they don't go see a counselor until there's a crisis.

**Dave:** Right.

**Ann:** That's a good point.

**Bob:** What I hear you saying is that we'd all do a whole lot better if we would just get a tune-up every once in a while; and sat down with somebody, who would say, “So, let's talk about our marriage.” And that person would say, “Do you have any areas of conflict or low-grade dissatisfaction?—anything we can talk about?”

**Dave:** You said it earlier, Bob, that your friend said, “We need to go get some help.”

**Bob:** Yes.
Dave: That's all you're doing! I mean, what person or what marriage doesn't need help? And if you can view others as people that can help you—now, here's the thing—wouldn't it be wonderful to go to somebody that's skilled at it though as well? They've had some schooling; they've had some experience.

I mean, it is one thing to go to my friend; and that's great, and it's really important. But man, every once in a while, you need somebody, with some insight, to go, “Let's talk about this.” Sometimes, your friend can't do that.

Bob: What do you do if you're friends are sharing something with you, and you're trying to help them, but it's like: “This is way out of my league. I don't know what to do about this.”

Jonathan: In that case, the most honest answer is to say, “I don't know, but I want to walk with you to find the right answer.” One of the things I try to tell couples or other pastors in ministry is that we never want to offer simple answers to complex problems. Marriage is complicated, and all of us that are married can agree with that. We've been there; you realize that, rarely, are marital issues just simple, where: “Just read this verse…” or “Practice this strategy…” or “Do this ‘How to…”’ or “Read this book.” It's so much more complicated than that. And then, you add in all the pressures of life, and family, and whatnot. You realize that marriage is a complicated relationship, so we don't want to offer simple or simplistic answers.

But sometimes, what I find is that, because we are so fearful of offering advice or counsel, that we can really pull away from people in crisis. If you don't have the skill/if you don't have the competency needed/that you feel your couple friend needs, then, at least, be willing to say: “Listen, I'm willing to help you though. Let's go talk to our pastor,” “…Let's go talk to this Bible study leader,” or “…the one you meet with—your discipler,” “Let's track somebody down. Listen, I'll absolutely be committed to coming alongside, and walking with you, and just to be a friend to talk these things out together.”

Bob: We live in a day, Jonathan, where a lot of people will reach out and think: “I don't know what's wrong with me. I need a professional.” And what they really need is—

Jonathan: —a friend.

Bob: —a friend, who—

Ann: —and discipleship.

Bob: Yes.
Jonathan: —and discipleship. When we think about counseling, within the context of a local church, I actually think, “Man, this is God's best place for that work to happen.” You have built-in relationships, built-in trust, built-in rapport.

When therapists talk about: “What is the number one indicator for a positive therapeutic relationship?”—you know what it is? It's not the modality; it's not how well-trained the counselor is—it's the relationship. Can the counselor and the counselee—can they develop a relationship of trust? That's the number one indicator of therapeutic effectiveness.

Bob: If somebody comes to your counseling center at your church, how often are you seeing somebody and thinking, “You don't need a counselor; you just need another couple, who could mentor you and walk through this with you”?

Jonathan: More times than you can count.

Bob: Really?!

Jonathan: Yes; the couples that we see are incredibly isolated. You have wives that have suffered for a long time in marriages/you have husbands, who are frustrated in marriages—but who don't talk about it for all the reasons we just mentioned—and who have not wanted to reach out and get help.

To your point—I think that you guys mentioned earlier—we see them, at 25 years; if we had seen them, at 6 months, we could have addressed a lot of this. But they've been going to church on Sundays, and then Monday through Saturday, their faith doesn't really infect and infiltrate their marriage. You get people who are very disconnected and don't have those type of friendships.

Ann: I think, for Dave and me, we've done life with seven other couples for about twenty-five years. And in that time, we've seen a lot of marriages go up and down. We've seen affairs; we've seen rebellious kids—but because of that love in those relationships, we've talked through that.

We'll sit down with couple—and I think this is so important in friendship—just to say, “How's your marriage doing?”

Jonathan: Yes.

Ann: I think we're afraid to go there, because we're afraid of offending one another. It's tricky, when we're doing this as friends; because there have been times, where Dave and I have watched couples, and Dave will say, “Dude, you're being a jerk to your wife!” [Laughter] I'm like, “Oh, my goodness!”

Dave: That's called “the truth, not in love.” [Laughter]
Jonathan: That's the Dave Wilson counseling term. [Laughter]

Ann: Yes; there it is. [Laughter] And yet—

Bob: “Stop it!” “Stop it!”—right?

Jonathan: I can learn from that!

Dave: I’ve got to start charging for this. [Laughter]

Ann: And yet, because there's a relationship—and with these guys, they love each other so much—he hears Dave, and he responds, and listens. Whereas, his wife has been saying it forever—

Jonathan: Right.

Ann: —because it's her, and not Dave. Dave has this rapport and respect that he receives it.

Bob: But if you went to the average couple at Parkside Church and said, “Hey, we'd like to have you meet up with a couple that came to us for counseling; and just, you know, talk with them and share—they're going through a rough patch.” That average couple would be: “Are you out of your mind?! We can't do that! We don't know what to tell them!”

Jonathan: Right: “We don't know what to tell them. We don't have a perfect marriage,”—that will be the phrase I hear.

Ann: Oh, that's a big one; isn't it?

Jonathan: Huge phrase here: “Well, we don't have a perfect marriage.” I say: “You know what? Nobody has a perfect marriage. There's only one perfect marriage—and that's God and how He comes to us, in Christ, and takes us as His bride—that's the perfect marriage,” and “We are, imperfectly, telling that story every day of our lives as we unite together in marriage. If the requirement was perfection in marriage, then yes, no one would be qualified to help.”

Here’s one of the first things that you can do—any marriage couple/anybody who's listening today—the two things I always tell people you can always move forward in—is: “Learn how to ask better questions and be a better listener.” Proverbs says that the fool seeks no understanding but in only hearing his own opinions, but a wise person will move towards and seek understanding.
All of us can do that—we can all grow in asking better questions—questions like, “Hey, how’s your marriage doing?” And then, you follow up from that, “Tell me a little bit more about that,”—right? Something as simple as asking a question and, then, knowing the right follow-up. That already gets you below the surface—helps you move a little bit deeper. But we can’t just be good question-askers, we also have to be good listeners.

**Bob:** I’m going to add one thing to your list of two. We can ask better questions; and we can do a better job of listening; and at the end of the day, we can say, “You know, I don’t have the answers; but can I pray for you?”

**Jonathan:** Yes.

**Bob:** I think we devalue—

**Ann:** I agree.

**Bob:** —it’s kind of like, “That’s just a way to get out of the conversation.” No; to really say: “I don’t know what the answers are; but let’s, together, go before the God of the universe and just say, ‘Lord, we need help and we need grace and mercy.’” I think, sometimes, God, in the midst of my praying, is giving me words that are words of life for the person that is hearing the prayer.

**Dave:** He’s giving you wisdom. James 1—ask for wisdom—you’re, in a sense, asking for wisdom; and now, you’ve got to have the courage to speak that truth in love.

**Jonathan:** Yes.

**Dave:** You know, that’s where it gets sticky; because you’re like, “I don’t know if I should”; and yet, I think the couple is longing for—they’ve asked you: “What are you feeling? What is your instincts?” Speak it and watch what God does.

**Jonathan:** One of the things I’ll do with couples, when I have them in my office or in our counseling room, is—I’ll tell them, at the beginning of the session: “Hey, I want to give you a little bit of lead time; so that you don’t feel caught off guard. At the end of this session, I’m going to have you pray for your spouse.”

**Ann:** I like that.

**Jonathan:** You would think that we’re asking them to climb Mt. Everest—[Laughter]—barefoot. You get this deer-in-the-headlights look; but consistently, you see Paul praying good things about the people that he’s writing to. I’ll say, “Listen, I want you to really search hard.” I mean, a couple could really be at their absolute worst; and I’ll say: “ I want you to pray one thing, where you see God up to good in their life—just one; okay?”
We get through the first session and, I mean, it's stilted, “God, I thank You that Susan's here,” and “Amen,”—it’s tough. It's a beautiful thing to see—by session six or seven—the prayers get a little bit longer, the observations get a little bit deeper, and the encouragement is more true to what God is doing.

Again, it's a simple thing; but it points to that power of prayer. Something as simple of: “How can I pray for you?” and “What am I praying about?”—that's a powerful movement. I find it's hard for couples to be arguing with each other/threatening divorce when they're praying together. It's just a fundamental, simple thing.

**Ann:** I'm going to use that—that's really good. You're asking them to pray for their spouse in what they see and something good—anything?—one thing?

**Jonathan:** Yes; in the first session, I'll take *anything*; because again, these people are in here; they are at each other's throats. Because of what we know from Philippians 1:6—“that God, who began a good work in you, will be faithful to complete it until the end,”—I'll tell couples, “You might not be able to see it; but because of our confidence in who God is, He is always up to good in the life of those who believe.” And I go: “Let's have eyes to see that. We can find something good.”

A lot of times, I'll just start with that thing that I mentioned earlier of: “Hey, they're here. You might think this is a last-ditch attempt, but thank God that you're here. You've raised the white flag and said: 'Hey, we can't keep doing this. We've got to get off the merry-go-round/the crazy.' Let's be thankful for that.” And we'll start from there.

**Ann:** Wouldn't that be a cool thing?—every night, you put your hand on your spouse and you thank God for one great thing about your spouse—that would change marriages.

**Jonathan:** Absolutely. Even what you just mentioned, Ann, of just putting your hand on your spouse—something physical and spatial like that, where you are breaking that awkwardness and that coldness, can communicate amazing things.

**Bob:** You know, when I first saw your book, *Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling*, I thought, “Well, this is something that people, who do marriage counseling for a living, are going to need or want to read.” Then I thought: “Pastors are going to need it; because they're called upon to do marriage counseling, pretty regularly,” and “They may be outsourcing that, but they need to do some triage and some interaction with folks.”

And then I thought: “How many people do we run into, at Weekend to Remember® marriage getaways,—

**Ann:** Absolutely.
Bob: —“or couples we know, who have maybe been through a crisis themselves—God’s done a work and that’s stirred in them a desire to want to help others/to comfort others with the comfort that they’ve received, as 2 Corinthians 1 talks about. They’d love a copy of a book like this.” And then I thought, “Everybody just needs to have it.”

Ann: Yes. [Laughter]

Bob: Not only do you talk about how to approach counseling—but the second half of this book—Jonathan, you just go through the most common issues that you face in marriage counseling, and you give us a treatment plan/you give us a protocol: “Here’s how these issues manifest,” and “Here’s what you do,” and “Here’s what to remember.”

This is an invaluable resource—it’s something we’ve got in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can go, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com to get a copy of Jonathan Holmes' book, Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling. Again, go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order; or call us if you'd like a copy of the book. Our number is 1-800-FL-TODAY—that's 1-800-358-6329—1-800-"F" as in family, "L" as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

Now, I know this is a pretty important week for a lot of families with back to school—lots of things going on as summer comes to an end. This is a pretty important week for us at FamilyLife® as well. We have the President of FamilyLife, David Robbins, here with us. David, we're paying pretty careful attention to what's happening with our listeners this week.

David: Yes; we are. We have such an opportunity before us with this matching gift. I know you've been hearing Bob tell some stories; and it has been amazing that, you know, we have this resource that is reaching hundreds of thousands of people with Art of Parenting®, and Like Arrows, and other parts of the parenting initiative that's with it. It's having a global impact—it's reaching hundreds of thousands of people here. I was in a small group—it really brought a level of intentionality to Meg and me—we did it about six months ago, and we’re still applying some of those things.

The stories we're getting from Latin America—and as we prep to launch in East Asia, the opportunity is before us—but we can only go as fast as we can with the resources we have. That's why this matching opportunity is so important for this year.

Bob: That's why we're asking our listeners to help us take full advantage of the matching-gift opportunity that's been made available to us this month. This is the last week to do that, so would you consider making a generous donation this week to help move forward the ministry of FamilyLife and help us take advantage of this matching-gift opportunity?

If you can help with a donation, we want to say, “Thank you,” by sending you Dennis and Barbara Rainey's book, The Art of Parenting. It's our thank-you gift for your support.
You can donate easily, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to donate—our number is: 1-800-FL-TODAY—1-800-358-6329

Now, tomorrow, we’re going to talk about some of the specific issues that couples face in marriage—like: “How do you recover from an affair?” and “What can we do?—what can we say to help friends, who are going through something like that?” Jonathan Holmes will be with us, again, tomorrow. I hope you can be with us as well.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back tomorrow for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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