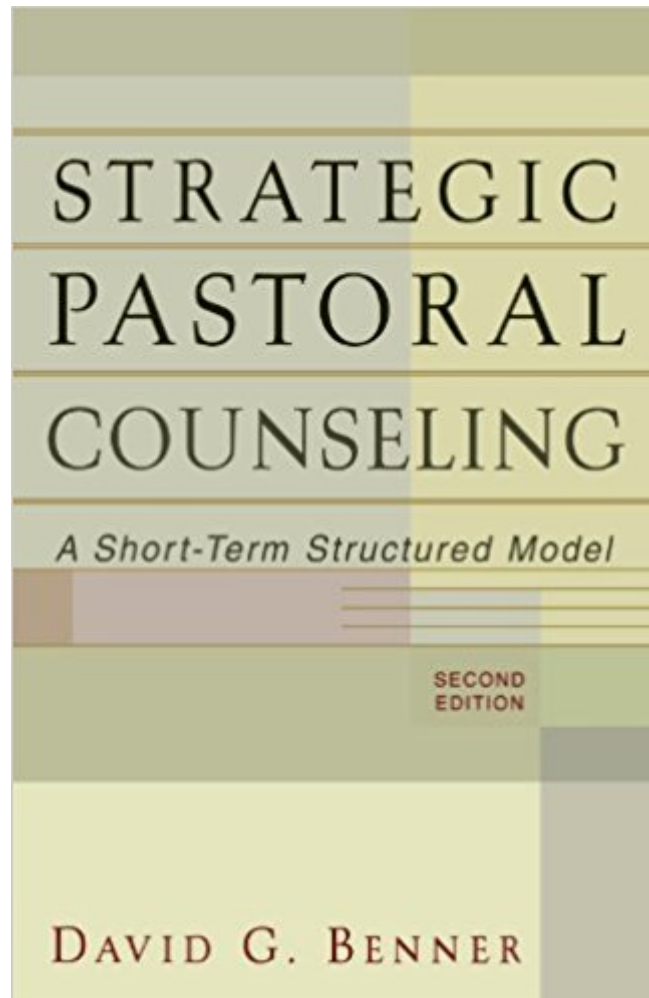




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Strategic Pastoral Counseling: A Short-Term Structured Model



Synopsis

Therapeutic counseling in a Christian context can be highly effective when it maintains narrowly focused goals in a time-limited setting. The details of this proven model of pastoral counseling are described in this practical guide. This second edition of Strategic Pastoral Counseling has been thoroughly revised and includes two new chapters. Benner includes helpful case studies, a new appendix on contemporary ethical issues, and updated chapter bibliographies. His study will continue to serve clergy and students well as a valued practical handbook on pastoral care and counseling.

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Customer Reviews

Strategic Pastoral Counseling describes and examines the SPC Model of David Benner. The SPC Model is described as a brief, structured counseling approach that is explicitly Christian and that appropriates the insights of contemporary counseling theory without sacrificing the resources of pastoral ministry. It is designed to meet the needs of pastors for a counseling model. The book examines the subject of pastoral counseling and then introduces the SPC Model. Finally there is a case study that depicts how the model works. All that the pastor is able to accomplish in the five-session case study seems exaggerated but the case study is effective at portraying SPC in action. I would recommend this book to pastors looking for a realistic counseling model for church ministry or desire input for improving their current model or creating a new model. Below I have briefly outlined the SPC model. There are six characteristics of Strategic Pastoral Counseling (SPC).

1. It is brief and time-limited, working within a suggested maximum of five sessions. Both the pastor and the parishioner are forced to work continuously at maintaining focus and direction. To accomplish this objective the counselor must be active and directive. The counseling relationship must be a partnership and concentrate on one central and specific problem. Also the time limitation must be maintained. 2. The use of written materials is at the heart of SPC. The Bible as well as a variety of other devotional, inspirational, and practical books are assigned to the client. The literature should be integrated within the counseling session, not simply offered as a supplement to them. The books must be compatible with the pastor's counseling philosophy and integral to the work with the parishioner.

1. What are the strengths or weaknesses of Benner's reasons for the five sessions? Basically, Benner sets up a five session model for counseling any client that is looking for spiritual direction in their life no matter what the problem may be. These five one hour sessions include three basic stages of counseling. The three stages are the encounter stage, the engagement stage, and the disengagement stage. The encounter stage takes one session, the engagement stage takes the next three session, and the disengagement stage take up the final session. The strengths of this time-orientated method are many. First, pastor realistically cannot expend hours upon hours of their day just counseling laypeople. There are many other important duties to attend to, especially if a pastor is in a role as a solo pastor. Second, if extended amounts of time are needed then probably a professional licensed counselor may be needed. Third, the client may get too attached to the pastor becoming a "leach" of the pastor's time, energy, and resources. Fourth, God calls pastors to best utilize their time in a God honoring way. Meeting with one person, once a week, for a year is probably a poor use of that pastor time in that the client may have emotionally attached themselves to the pastor and vice-a-versa. Fifth, it helps to bring closure mentally and emotionally to both parties. This is vitally important to the health of both individuals for the long run. As far as weakness, there is really only one. This is that the counselor and the client may have not found adequate direction while seeking out the real problem at hand. But as Benner mentions in his book, the counseling process must also be directive and intentionally hardworking for all five sessions.

Benner begins this book by discussing the context in which Pastoral Counseling is to take place. He maintains that the challenge for pastors has "been to find a model of counseling that is both distinctively pastoral and psychologically responsible" (p. 13). This is so because Pastoral Counseling (counseling which is genuinely pastoral) must be subsumed under the general rubric of

the Pastoral Ministry. In other words, the pastor is not a clinical psychologist and he should not counsel like one. He is a pastor and he must counsel those in his congregation with the selfless, caring nurture which is to characterize those who are responsible to look after the spiritual well-being of Christ's flock. In the chapter entitled The Uniqueness of Pastoral Counseling, Benner provides what I believe to be the most useful information in the entire book. Here, in addition to defining what he means by Pastoral Counseling, he explores the training, the role, the context, the goals, and the resources of Pastoral Counseling. As I will only be able to touch on one of these elements, let it be known that Benner remarks that "pastoral counseling is unique in its use of religious resources. Prayer, Scripture, the sacraments, anointing with oil or laying on of hands, and devotional or religious literature are all...available as potential resources for the counseling process. The failure ever to employ any of them suggests an erosion of the distinctively pastoral aspects of one's counseling" (p. 29). Lest there is any question of Benner's commitment to Christianity, see his comments under the heading, Explicitly Christian Counseling, on pages 57-61.

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