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Strategic Pastoral Counseling

5. Pastoral Counseling as Soul Care

This opening chapter positions pastoral counseling within the older, broader tradition of Christian soul care. It argues for a middle road: counseling that is genuinely pastoral and spiritually focused, yet informed by the useful insights of modern psychology. It then maps five overlapping forms of soul care and shows where counseling fits among them.

Key takeaways

- "Soul care" comes from the Latin *cura animarum*, which means both care (supporting well-being) and cure (restoring lost well-being). The church has always done both.
- "Soul" (Hebrew *nepesh*, Greek *psyche*) means the whole person, not a part. We don't have a soul; we are soul. Soul care addresses the whole person, especially the inner life.
- Historic soul care has four elements: healing, sustaining, reconciling, and guiding. Its overarching goal is spiritual formation — forming the character of Christ in people.
- Modern culture narrowed soul care into clinical therapy, letting counselors displace pastors and laity. The author wants to recover the fuller picture.

- Five forms of soul care run from least to most specialized (not least to most important): Christian friendship, pastoral ministry, pastoral care, pastoral counseling, and spiritual direction.
- Christian friendship is the foundation; strong friend/family soul care reduces the need for formal help. Its source is the friendship within the Trinity.
- Pastoral counseling differs from other pastoral care: it's usually initiated by the parishioner, is problem-focused, takes more time, needs more responsiveness, and requires hearing the person's story before introducing Scripture.
- Spiritual direction is Spirit-centered, not problem-centered. The Holy Spirit is the true director; the human helper aids discernment and surrender to God.
- Counseling is best understood as a structured 'being-with' a person — first about who the counselor is, not just techniques. It requires boundaries: real appointments in a consistent setting, not hallway chats.
- Confidentiality matters: don't preach directly from what you hear in counseling; use Spirit-guided discernment, or simply talk to the person first.

Passages worth keeping

"We do not have a soul; we are soul—just as we are spirit and we are embodied."

Defines the whole-person view that grounds the chapter's idea of soul care.

“Speak little; listen much; think far more of understanding hearts... than of saying clever things to them.”

Fénelon's counsel captures the listening, relational posture the author wants in pastoral counseling.

How it connects

The chapter frames pastoral counseling as one expression of God's covenant 'being-with' his people — the counselor and spiritual director both point past themselves to the Holy Spirit as the true Counselor and Director.

Scripture referenced

- **1 John 4:7** -- Cited for the call to love/befriend one another, grounding Christian friendship as soul care.