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Strategic Pastoral Counseling

10. Bill: A Single-Session Case Illustration

This chapter walks through one real counseling session to show that strategic pastoral counseling can be done well in a single, informal conversation. Bill, a church member, was let go from a Christian ministry and is now bitter—angry at his former boss, mistrustful of Christian organizations, and feeling distant from God. The pastor moves through the model's stages inside one meeting and helps him reach genuine forgiveness.

Key takeaways

- Counseling need not be an ongoing series of appointments; a single focused session can cover the model's major tasks and bring a pastoral presence.
- The pastor keeps the focus on Bill, not on his ex-employer, and traces his history—revealing a lifelong pattern of feeling disappointed by unfair people.
- She names the spiritual dimension: Bill's deepest loss is his hope that being a Christian actually changes people, which has pulled him away from God.
- Let the counselee choose the focus. Bill picks his anger at his boss over the 'right answer' of his feelings about God, and the pastor honors that.

- Listing specific losses (competence, friends, purpose, trust) turns vague, un-forgivable resentment into concrete grief that can be worked through.
- The breakthrough comes when Bill realizes he stands before God exactly as his boss stands before him—already forgiven, so able to forgive.
- Forgiveness is genuine but not final; the pastor tells Bill to release each fresh wave of anger with the same prayer of blessing.

Passages worth keeping

“As soon as I see myself needing God's forgiveness, I know that I am forgiven. And because I am forgiven, I can offer the same forgiveness to someone else.”

The chapter's turning point—receiving forgiveness becomes the power to extend it.

“You got bit by the sheep when all along you had been led to believe that the wolves did the biting.”

The pastor names Bill's sense of betrayal, deepening rapport and moving to the core wound.

How it connects

The session models the gospel logic of Matthew 18:21-35 and Ephesians 4:32—we forgive others because God in Christ has first forgiven us. Bill's bitterness dissolves only when he stops trying to forgive by willpower and instead receives grace he can then pass on.