



When to Lead with Policy vs. Principles in a Counseling Ministry: Samples from The Summit Church

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There are times when the Bible leads with policy – firm protocols.

Example: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” Matthew 18:15-20

There are times when the Bible leads with principles – core values to be contextualized.

Example: “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord. Yet in my judgment she is happier if she remains as she is. And I think that I too have the Spirit of God.” I Corinthians 7:39-40

In the same way, in church ministries we sometimes lead by protocol and other times lead by principle. In this session we want to answer three questions about this subject:

1. Generally, when is it wise to lead by principle vs. protocol?
2. Counseling specific, what are examples of leading by principle?
3. Counseling specific, what are examples of leading by protocol?

We will answer these questions with a focus towards *the administration or oversight of a counseling ministry* more than a focus on instructing a counselee in a variety of helpful conversations. I will offer examples from the church setting where I serve, The Summit Church (Durham, NC).

Generally: Principle vs. Protocol

- *Principle* – When it’s okay, or even best, for there to be a variety of responses to a situation built around a common core principle.
 - When all available options are potentially legitimate
 - For decisions that are best made based upon wisdom criteria
- *Protocol* – When it’s important, or even essential, for there to be uniformity of response because certain criteria are met.
 - When moral, ethical, or legal criteria require a specific response
 - When factors safety, liability protection, or recidivism rates are highly relevant

Counseling: Examples of Principle-Based Assessment



Below are three examples from The Summit Church for the type of questions we believe are best answered through a principled-based assessment.

1. **Question:** “How do I know if I am a good fit (am competent enough) to be the primary helper (i.e., counselor) for a friend or someone in my small group?”
 - a. Reality: A myriad of factors can impact this decision – personal experience with subject, age, season of life, dual interests, severity of struggle, etc.
 - b. Competency Question: Do you know the next question to ask and why?
 - c. Context: “Counselor” is not the only helpful role one can fill. *Leads to next example.*
2. **Question:** “How do I know if I am functioning as a counselor with someone? Is every request for advice ‘counseling’? Is every discussion of emotion or relationships ‘counseling’?”
 - a. Two criteria to determine whether someone is relating to you as a counselor:
 - i. Are they *accelerating the rate of their disclosure* beyond the level of trust and respect your relationship would warrant?
 - ii. Are they *giving additional weight to your words* as someone holding advanced training or expertise (academic or experiential)?
 - b. Reality: Having training in counseling does not mean every relationship you have is a counseling relationship. *Leads to next example.*
3. **Question:** “I want to lead a ministry to help people with [particular life struggle]. What is the best way or setting for me to do this?”
 - a. Example: Member exploring the possibility of leading a G4 group on depression (sample of curriculum can be found at bradhambrick.com/depression)

Counseling: Examples of Protocol

Below are four examples from the formal counseling ministries of The Summit Church for the type of questions we believe are best answered through a policy-based approach. Links are provided to where you can find sample policies related to each of these subjects.

1. Confidentiality
 - a. Varies based on the level of formality in the helping relationship
 - i. Peer relationships are held to peer standards (basic morality regarding speech)
 - ii. As formality increases two things happens which leads to a heightened standard
 1. There is a clear helper and helpee in the relationship (role definition)
 2. A power imbalance emerges (not a matter of pride or worth)
 - b. Pre-Marital Mentoring (summitrdu.com/GCM)
 - c. G4 Support Groups (summitrdu.com/G4)
 - d. Graduate Intern Counseling (summitrdu.com/counseling) – see intake forms
 - i. Counseling Advocate (bradhambrick.com/advocate) – coming full circle, back to peer-based relationships within formalized counseling
2. Church Discipline (bradhambrick.com/churchdiscipline)
 - a. Issues
 - i. Church discipline is, by definition, a collective effort. In larger churches, these individuals may not know one another well. How do we synchronize efforts in order to avoid triangulation?

- ii. Church discipline is a process that occurs over a space of time. The more time that passes, the less clear process and narrative become. How do we mitigate these effects?
 - iii. Church discipline can often involve outside professionals: law enforcement, social workers, counselors, attorneys, etc. How do we ensure there is the opportunity to involve the cooperation of these individuals?
 - iv. How to ensure church discipline that doesn't result in restoration in one church protects other churches while not incurring undue liability?
- 3. Responding to a report of sexual abuse (bradhambrick.com/beyondprevention)
 - a. Challenge: When a report of abuse is made within the church two realities exist: (a) the bias of relationship can be strong, and (b) the leadership need to know the situation well enough to know how to provide pastoral care.
 - b. Goal: To ensure all mandated reports are made in a way that allows for maximum protection of children and pursuit of justice, while also allowing for quality pastoral care for the myriad of people affected when events like abuse occur.
- 4. Attendance or membership by a registered sex offender (bradhambrick.com/rso)
 - a. Reality: There are an increasing number of people who fall under the legal category of "registered sex offender." We should be thankful for this heightened awareness because of the recidivism rate of this sin/crime (it's both).
 - b. Ministry: During the legal process and after paying their debt to society, individuals who have abused minors need the gospel and pastoral care.
 - c. Second Reality: Parents of children in the church rightfully have concerns about the presence of registered sex offenders near their children on a regular basis.
 - d. Ministry: Church leadership is tasked with the responsibility of balancing the shepherding needs of the congregation.
 - e. This policy provides guidance and regulations on how to balance these realities and ministry needs.