

THE NATHAN MODEL FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING: PRINCIPLES FROM 2 SAMUEL 12:1- 24

ACADEMIC PAPER

2023

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ABSTRACT

Sometimes, Christian counselors struggle to determine a suitable approach when confronting people of high esteem in their societies [1]. When leaders or elites fall into sin, it is challenging to drive them toward realization, confession, and restoration because one may be afraid of disgracing or annoying them during counseling. Prophet Nathan had a similar challenge when King David sinned against the LORD (2 Samuel 12:1- 24). However, God empowered Nathan with wisdom to lead David toward restoration, and he counseled David without humiliating or infuriating him. Nathan's approach made David acknowledge that he had transgressed against the LORD and needed God's forgiveness. Therefore, Nathan's model provides a framework and invaluable principles for approaching, confronting, and restoring people of high esteem in every society.

KEYWORDS: BIBLICAL COUNSELING, MODEL, CHRISTIAN COUNSELOR

HOW TO CITE THIS WORK

Lawrence Mpeta, "THE NATHAN MODEL FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING: PRINCIPLES FROM 2 SAMUEL 12:1- 24", Elpis Live Community, <https://elpislive.com/the-nathan-model-for-biblical-counseling-principles-from-2-samuel-121-24/>

**THE NATHAN MODEL FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING: PRINCIPLES FROM
2 SAMUEL 12:1- 24**

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Due Date: August 10, 2023

Date Submitted: June 12, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, Christian counselors struggle to determine a suitable approach when confronting people of high esteem in their societies.¹ When leaders or elites fall into sin, it is challenging to drive them toward realization, confession, and restoration because one may be afraid of disgracing or annoying them during counseling. Prophet Nathan had a similar challenge when King David sinned against the LORD (2 Samuel 12:1- 24). However, God empowered Nathan with wisdom to lead David toward restoration, and he counseled David without humiliating or infuriating him. Nathan's approach made David acknowledge that he had transgressed against the LORD and needed God's forgiveness. Therefore, Nathan's model provides a framework and invaluable principles for approaching, confronting, and restoring people of high esteem in every society.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CHOOSING A SUITABLE APPROACH

Counseling people of high esteem is common in the Bible.² The Bible records distinctions in the counselees' responses depending on their personalities, nature, and the counselors' approach. The Bible shows that while the godly counselees welcome advice, the ungodly are often antagonistic. Unfortunately, antagonism toward counseling leads to terrible consequences. To prevent this, counselors need a proper approach whenever restoring others.

Choosing a suitable approach is a prerequisite for restoring transgressors. Nathan used a parabolic approach when the LORD sent him to confront David (2 Samuel 12:1). Because David had a background of shepherding, "Nathan's story is a 'sheep story,' one that a shepherd can easily grasp and with which he can readily identify."³ Nathan chose a story-telling approach because of its aptitude to stimulate emotions and provoke thoughts despite one's societal position. His approach was a hook that only a few could escape. An appropriate approach is fundamental when counseling people of high esteem.

¹ Examples of people of high esteem include kings, presidents, senates, pastors, church elders, deacons, parents, role models, aristocrats, celebrities, leaders, or any other influential people in a society. However, the principles of Nathan's model for biblical counseling apply to almost everyone regardless of his position in society.

² A few examples of passages dealing with counseling people of a high esteem include: Nathan counseled King David (2 Samuel 12:1-24), Elders advised King Rehoboam (1 Kings 11:42-43, 12:1-20), Daniel advised Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:1-37, 5:20-21), John the Baptist confronted Herod the Great (Luke 3:19-20), Paul counseled Peter (Galatians 2:11-21), Elders advised King Rehoboam (1 Kings 11:42-43, 12:1-20), etc.

³ Bob Deffinbaugh, "A Study of 2 Samuel: David and God (Nathan) (2 Samuel 12)," *Bible.org*, (2004), accessed May 1, 2023, <https://bible.org/seriespage/11-david-and-god-nathan-2-samuel-12>

Furthermore, to provide restorative advice, counselors must approach transgressors with love and compassion. If condemnation or judgementalism informs an approach, restoration becomes improbable to occur. Had Nathan been judgmental, David would have felt exasperated, and he would not have heeded the counsel. Paul said, "If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:1-3, NIV). Unless a counselor is gentle in approach, sinners struggle to acknowledge their wrongs and realize the need for repentance.

Jesus is an outstanding model for approaching sinners. When the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who was caught in adultery, Jesus did not condemn her as they did; instead, He asked them to conduct a self-introspection that led to the realization that they too were sinful (John 8:3-7). Thus, Counselors must avoid being judgmental because they also stumble as those they wish to restore. Jesus taught against judging others, and He encouraged self-introspection before noticing the transgressions of others while disregarding theirs (Mathew 7:1-3). Paul said, "Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" (Romans 14:13, ESV). Therefore, Judgementalism can prevent a counselor from restoring any person who has fallen into sin.⁴

The approach methods vary depending on the counselor's situation, culture, and nature. Nathan chose a parabolic approach that resonated with David by understanding the king's personality, cultural background, and the contempt he committed against God. Almost all the Davidic narratives have values of honor and shame that defined the Jewish culture.⁵ Nathan's approach demonstrates his cognizance of the shame that had befallen David and his household. Had Nathan wrongly approached David, he would have been defensive against restoration. Understanding the counselee's times, situations, culture, and characteristics is crucial in restoration. Paul said, "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father" (1 Timothy 5:1, NIV). Therefore, what informs a counselor's approach determines whether restoration will occur.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CONFRONTATION

⁴ John Piper, "How to Correct a Fellow Christian," *Desiringgod.org*, (2021), accessed May 30, 2023, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-not-to-correct-a-fellow-christian>

⁵ Gary Stansell, Crüsemann Frank, and Wolff Walter Hans, "Honor and Shame in the David narratives," *Was ist der Mensch*, accessed May 25, 2023, (1992): 94-114, <https://ixtheo.de/Record/1588727564>

After choosing the right approach, a counselor must confront a sinner. When Nathan finished telling the parable, “David became very angry at the rich man and said, ‘I swear by the living LORD that the man who did this ought to die! For having done such a cruel thing, he must pay back four times as much as he took.’ ‘You are that man,’ Nathan said to David.” (2 Samuel 12:5, NIV). Notice that Nathan’s parabolic approach was the foundation where he constructed the confrontation with the king. The approach prompted David’s anger and judgment against the rich man as if it was a real story. While in that condemnatory mood, Nathan confronted David and said, “You are that man” (2 Samuel 12:6). David could not resist the confrontation because he already shot himself in the foot by judging the rich man in the parable. Therefore, counselors can as well optimize such techniques when confronting sinners, leaders, or people of the high esteem in their society.

The purpose of confrontation in counseling is to address sin and not to attack the person of a counselee.⁶ “Biblical confrontation is not an opportunity to air out every grievance and petty issue you have against someone else. Biblical confrontation is usually reserved for 3 key areas: reestablishing unity, addressing sin, and encouraging wisdom.”⁷ Nathan confronted David without raising personal attacks or other issues outside the topic. Confrontation means speaking the truth in love with the goal of helping a sinner to realize the need for repentance and restoration (Ephesians 4:15). A counselor is susceptible to attacking a counselee if love does not inform confrontation.

Counselors must be honest with their counsees during confrontations. Unless a counselor is honest, a counselee may not realize the enormity of his transgression. Counselors must unequivocally point out one’s wrongs without fear or favor. Had Nathan not told David that he was that rich man in the parable, David could not have realized that he had sinned against the Lord. Counselors must be brave to address sin regardless of who commits it. They must fear God more than people and recognize that obedience to His command to love others requires correcting them when they wander from the path.⁸ Just as Nathan confronted David

⁶ For further reading about confrontation, see Cheryl Marshall, “7 Tips for Confronting a Friend in Sin,” *Crossway*, (2021), accessed June 2, 2023, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/7-tips-for-confronting-a-friend-in-sin/>, Jerrod Rumley, “Four Steps to Consider in Confrontation,” *Open the Bible*, (2016), accessed June 11, 2023, <https://openthebible.org/article/four-steps-to-consider-in-confrontation/>

⁷ Center Point Baptist Church, “Confrontation,” *Christ Life Resources*, (2023), accessed May 22, 2023, <https://centerpointdmv.org/confrontation/>

⁸ Steven J. Cole, “Lesson 14: The Gentle Art of Correction 2 Timothy 2:23-26,” *Bible.org*, (2013), accessed June 1, 2023, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-14-gentle-art-correction-2-timothy-223-26>

for his wrongs, so did Paul when Peter lived in hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-14). Moreover, counselors must not be cowards who fail to address sin because of the position, social class, or societal esteem of a sinner.

A Counselor must confront others with love, patience, and humility. Even though someone has succumbed to sin, he deserves a gentle and humble confrontation. If arrogance, pride, and hate inform the process, a sinner may become defensive or undermine the advice. Further, with a gentle spirit and soft answer, a counselor may overcome any wrathful actions or words that may arise during the confrontation (Proverbs 15:1, Ephesians 4:2). Therefore, a counselor must characterize the process with love and patience for a counselee to understand that confrontation is not a sheer attack against him.⁹

The Limitations of Confrontation

Sometimes, some factors may prevent a desirable confrontation outcome. Although a counselor may have determined the right approach and a proper confrontation method, there is not always a guarantee that a counselee will respond positively. Some counselees may reject or undermine counselors' confrontation if they foresee the personal repercussions of acknowledging their trespasses. Furthermore, some people of high esteem find it hard to welcome confrontations if they realize that the aftermaths of their wrongs will include shame, discipline, or loss of influence. However, below is how a counselor can address such issues.

If a counselee resists confrontation because of the fear of shame, a counselor must use God's Word to address this problem. A counselor must know that some counselees would rather conceal their sins than face the shame that may result from confessing their transgressions. In such instances, a counselor must underscore the significance of acknowledging and confessing sin. David said, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit (Psalm 32:1-2). Thus, a counselor must inspire a counselee to admit his wrongs and hold that it is better to confess sin and face the embarrassment than conceal it and live in condemnation before God.

⁹ For about this, see Beverly Moore, "The Beauty of Confrontation," *Biblical Counseling Coalition*, (2017), accessed June 9, 2023, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2017/10/18/the-beauty-of-confrontation/#:~:text=A%20biblical%20definition%20of%20confrontation%20is%20having%20a%20face%20to,for%20the%20person%20being%20confronted>

When a counselee rejects confrontation because of the fear of losing power, dignity, influence, or leadership, a counselor must also use God's word to address the problem. John the Baptist encountered this problem: "John reprimanded Governor Herod, because he had married Herodias, his brother's wife, and had done many other evil things. Then Herod did an even worse thing by putting John in prison" (Luke 3:19-20, NIV). King Herod is an example of a leader or people of high esteem who seek to protect their dignity, position, power, and influence by undermining counsel against their transgressions. Therefore, a wise counselor must use scriptures to address pride and arrogance that may prevent a successful confrontation. Examples of scriptures include Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

The fear of discipline may cause some counsees to be antagonistic toward confrontation. Unfortunately, the circumvention of confrontation may sometimes lead to terrible circumstances. For instance, King Rehoboam refused the elder's counsel and embraced the young men's counsel that brought destruction (1 Kings 11:42-43, 12:1-20). "He rejected the sound advice of the elders who had served his father and were still serving him. Instead, he took the insolent response of the young men...this insulting response led to the Israelites rejecting Rehoboam as king and appointing Jeroboam to rule over them as their new king."¹⁰ A counselor may use such stories to address any form of a counselee's antagonism toward confrontation. Additionally, the end of King Nebuchadnezzar and Herod the Great are great examples that counselors may use to confront antagonistic counsees.

Therefore, whenever a counselee displays attitudes or fears hostile to confrontation, a counselor must discern and address the roots of such hindrances with the scriptures. God's Word provides counselors with enough tools to address any constraints during the confrontation. Thus, a great counselor needs an awareness of the limitations and must know how to address them. Furthermore, a biblical counselor must permit God's Word and prayer to inform the process of confrontation.

THE PRINCIPLE OF REALIZATION AND CONFESSION OF SIN

¹⁰ Renew Christian Center, "The Consequence of Rejecting Sound," *Renew Christian Center*, (2019), accessed June 9, 2023, <https://renewchristiancenter.org/blog/2019/04/06/the-consequences-of-rejecting-sound-advice>

The Nathan model for biblical counseling demonstrates that a successful confrontation leads to a counselee's acknowledgment and confession of sin. Unless a counselee realizes and confesses his sin, restoration cannot take place. When Nathan told David that he was that man in the parable, he further told him about the sins he committed against the LORD and the consequences that were to follow.

Nathan's confrontation began with how David displeased the LORD despite all what He had given him. God Anointed David to be king over Israel, rescued him from Saul, He gave him wives, and Nathan affirmed that God was willing to add more if all these things were little for David (2 Samuel 12:7-9). David, however, despised God's Word and sinned against the LORD. David struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and he took Uriah's wife as his. Thus, Nathan told David that the sword would not depart from his household for despising the LORD.

Furthermore, Nathan listed the consequences that would follow David and his household because of his contempt for the LORD. Nathan told David that God would overtly take his wives away and give them to someone close to him (2 Samuel 12:11-12). Upon hearing this, David *realized* that he had sinned against the Lord. He replied to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD (2 Samuel 12:13)." Further, Nathan told David that God would strike to death the child born to him. Notice that despite David's admission, Nathan continued to inform David about the consequences of his disobedience. His goal was to make David realize the enormity of his sin and the depth of the punishment he would face.

Therefore, Nathan demonstrates that explaining the depth of one's transgression is necessary for the admission of sin. After Nathan had shown David the transgression he committed against the LORD, he realized that he had sinned and needed forgiveness. It must be the goal of every counselor to lead his counselees toward the realization of sin. The counselees' realization and acknowledgment lead to confession and repentance.

Confession

When the counselor realizes the depth of his sin, confession becomes imperative. David's confession shows that he had realized his contempt and needed God's forgiveness. Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die" (2 Samuel 12:13). However, Nathan continued telling David about the consequences that would come in his household because of sin. Nathan's model for counseling shows that while it is fundamental to affirm that God forgives sin if one confesses, it is also imperative to inform the counselee

that God punishes sinners. Furthermore, counselors must inform their clients that while God is forgiving, he is also just; he does not let the wicked go unpunished (Isaiah 58:15-18). Therefore, after confession, godly counselees are often willing to face the consequences of their sins because they know that God is also just.

The Bible contains several scriptures about God's forgiveness when one confesses his sin. For instance, John said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NIV). Furthermore, John said, "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father— Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (1 John 2:1). A counselor must also assure transgressors that God forgives sin. Biblical history proclaims that God forgives sin when people turn away from their wicked ways.¹¹ A counselee must know that there is no sin that God can never forgive; therefore, he just needs to ask for forgiveness to be free from transgression.

Understanding God's forgiveness is crucial to the counselor's restoration and reconciliation with God and others. John Piper writes, "Forgiveness is essentially God's way of removing the great obstacle to our fellowship with him. By canceling our sin and paying for it with the death of his own Son, God opens the way for us to see him and know him and enjoy him forever."¹² When people confess their sins, God stretches his arms to restore them to Himself. Nathan's model demonstrates that confession of sin brings God's forgiveness and restoration (2 Samuel 12:24). David confessed his sin, and God restored him (Psalm 51).

THE PRINCIPLE OF RESTORATION

Restoration is the ultimate destination for the counselor's utilization of all the previous principles. It is the final stage of administering counsel to people who have transgressed against the LORD. Biblical counselors must restore those who wander from righteousness. James wrote, "My brothers if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" (James 5:19-20, ESV). Therefore, the core

¹¹ A few examples of scriptures about God's forgiveness include Jeremiah 33:8, Isaiah 1:18, Isaiah 38:17, Isaiah 43:25, Ezekiel 36:33, Numbers 14:19-21, etc.

¹² Gary Rohrmayer, "The nature and essence of God's forgiveness," *Gary Rohrmayer*, 2023, accessed June 2, 2023, <https://garyrohrmayer.typepad.com/yourjourneyblog/2015/07/18-old-testament-scriptures-showing-us-how-god-forgives-sin.html>

objective of providing biblical counseling to people is to restore them from their lostness and reconcile them with God and others.

Restoration means a sinner has repented and reconciled with God. Furthermore, it means one has obeyed God's command to repent from his sin. To arrive at this destination, a counselor must approach all steps with God's Word and prayer; furthermore, he must also realize the Holy Spirit works through him when restoring sinners (John 16:8). God rejoices when He restores His people. For example, whenever the Israelites sinned against the LORD, he punished them but also restored them if they returned to Him (Jeremiah 30:1-38:22). Thus, believers must be the custodians of restoration and reconciliation through providing biblical counseling and preaching the gospel to those who transgress.

What if a counselee is unrestorable? Counselors must realize not all counselees may reach the destination of restoration. Jesus said:

If your fellow believer sins against you, go, and tell him in private what he did wrong. If he listens to you, you have helped that person to be your brother or sister again. But if he refuses to listen, go to him again and take one or two other people with you. If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, then treat him like a person who does not believe in God or like a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-17, NCV).

Notice that Jesus' words give the most precise answer to the question above. His answer also encompasses the principles of Nathan's model. Therefore, Counselors must never consider themselves failures if their counselees have not reconciled with God or others. Instead, they must realize that human sinfulness is the major hindrance to restoration.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, Nathan's model encompasses the most fundamental principles that undergird the restoration of people of high esteem when they wander from righteousness. The model demonstrates that what informs the counselors' approach and confrontation is crucial to the counselees' realization, repentance, and restoration. Unless a counselor applies the principles, it is more probable to infuriate his counselee while preventing restoration from occurring. Furthermore, counselors must also realize that God's Word and prayer must always inform the whole process of restoration. However, if a counselee is unrestorable, Jesus said, "Treat him like a person who does not believe in God" (Matthew 18:15-17).

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