

Samaritan Counseling Center - Ask the Counselor Column (4-18-11)

Question:

I don't feel good about my current life situation. I have made a lot of mistakes. I have just started going back to church and I hear that I should forgive myself but that comes from people who don't know what I have done. I've talked with some who say they have tried counseling and it didn't help. I don't want to spend the money or time on doing something that doesn't work. I guess my question is how can I know if counseling will work for me and why doesn't it work for some people?

Answer:

I appreciate your question. The reason counseling does not work for some people is that while the issue they face is painful; they are not ready to face the challenges of the changes they need to make. Change is really difficult! It is much easier to live our lives on "automatic pilot".

Let's see how you can get the most out of counseling if you choose to go that route. There are a couple of basics to remember about counseling. First, there is no magical quick fix. We live in a society where we want the pain to go away without having to put forth the effort; with counseling **you** ultimately have to make the changes, and it's hard! While medication is sometimes beneficial, research shows that medication combined with counseling provides the better outcome. Second, many people live with false beliefs about themselves; since they have believed them for so long they are convinced they're true. A good counselor can help you examine those beliefs and decide if they are indeed accurate. Third, counseling provides the **time** for you to seriously take a look at the issues you are facing. Most of what we do is out of habit, and unless a person makes a conscious decisions to change or look at something differently, most follow the same route of their thought processes and consistently come to the same conclusions. A counselor can be your helper-guide in this process.

So why can't a good friend or family member do the same thing? There are some cases when advice can be helpful, but there are some pitfalls when it comes to friends and family helping in this way. First, really listening to someone's problems is an art. Some friends are willing to listen to your problems for awhile, often offering advice they have heard from the radio or television; however, they aren't trained to grasp the underlying issue that is particular to you. A counselor is trained to listen, look for the core problem, help you be aware of it and assist you in planning how to combat it. Also, friends and family members have their own problems and may begin to resent the time it takes to focus on you.

In closing, let me warn you that making changes through counseling is difficult. For example, many of us know that losing weight boils down to diet and exercise. Our having the knowledge is the easy part but when it comes to making lifestyle changes, it is much more difficult. A person's determination is the most important key to success. Counseling is much the same way. It is difficult, but if you are ready to make the changes and attack the problem, IT WORKS!

I wish you the best as you decide if counseling will work for you.

Questions may be sent to the **Samaritan Counseling Center**, 1850 Colfax Ave., Benton Harbor, MI 49022, faxed to 269.926.6780 or emailed to info@samcounseling.org. To schedule a counseling appointment at any of our five satellite offices (St. Joseph, Niles, Benton Harbor, Stevensville, or South Haven) or for more information, contact the **Samaritan Counseling Center** at 269.926.6199 or visit us at www.samsounseling.org. Shelly Perry, MSW, LCSW, (sperry@samcounseling.org) answered today's question.

© Samaritan Counseling Center

###