

Discipleship Counseling (2003)

Anderson wrote *Discipleship Counseling: The Complete Guide to Helping Others Walk in Freedom and Grow in Christ* in 2003 and sees it as his most lasting and significant writing. His thesis is that the primary battleground between Satan's lies and God's truth is in our minds, so discipleship is the process of biblically understanding and applying our identity in Christ.¹ He writes that "the ministries of counseling and discipling are the same in the Bible, although too often they have become separate and unrelated disciplines in the Christian community."² It is a work that is especially helpful for biblical counselors and pastors encountering spiritual warfare issues, but is also a great introduction and foundation for all ministers and Christians who have yet to be exposed to spiritual warfare encounters.

Discipleship Counseling begins with a Christian perspective on mental health before presenting the process of discipleship counseling. The roles of encourager (counselor) and inquirer (counselee) are described while emphasizing God's ultimate role as the Wonderful Counselor (Isa 9:6). Anderson believes that "having the right message and method is not enough. You have to have the right people who are dependent on God."³ He describes discipleship counseling as "an attempt to meet people where they are and help them resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts so that can be established alive and free in Christ."⁴

Anderson continues by explaining both the theological basis for discipleship counseling as well as the practical aspects, highlighting the use of *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*. He communicates some of his foundational principles as with an emphasis on

¹Anderson, *Discipleship Counseling*, 13-14, 25.

²Ibid., 13-14.

³Ibid., 12.

⁴Ibid., 14.

Scripture as “the only reliable source for faith and practice (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).”⁵ He focuses on the “finished work of Christ” as well as the “present ministry of the Holy Spirit.”⁶ He believes faith to be the essence not only of salvation but of sanctification and that the Christian community is the best forum for spiritual growth.⁷ Like most of Anderson’s other works, it is scripturally saturated: it is difficult to open the book and find a section without a direct biblical reference.

Anderson counters what he believes to be a typical over-reliance on psychology and psychiatry and emphasizes the biblical process of discipleship. He writes that “this battle between the father of lies and the Spirit of truth is fought primarily in the minds of all humanity.”⁸ He holds to the importance of understanding that “there is no time when our minds, emotions, wills, personalities and relationships are not contributing factors. Likewise, our present condition always has some spiritual basis.”⁹ Despite the seemingly complex reality of ministering to the whole person, he presents a simple solution. He argues that “there are a million ways into sin, but the way out is always the same. . . . Repentance and faith in God has always been the answer, so that means we have to take personal responsibility for our own attitudes and actions.”¹⁰

Anderson clearly communicates that his *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* is a useful tool, full of insights to both counselors and pastors. He explains the process of discipleship as sanctification:

⁵Ibid., 16.

⁶“I believe that the message and method of discipleship counseling must be based on the finished work of Christ (see Colossians 1:27-2:10). . . . I rely totally on the present ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-15).” Anderson, *Discipleship Counseling*, 16.

⁷“We are limited by the faith of the counselees. We are not only saved by faith, we are sanctified by faith (see Galatians 3:1-5). . . . We all need the support of the Christian community and we all need to renew our faith and walk with God (see Hebrews 10:17-25).” Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 25.

⁹Ibid., 58.

¹⁰Ibid., 61-62.

We are positionally sanctified by faith the moment we are born again because of what Christ has already done for us. We are progressively sanctified by faith when we are transformed by the renewing of our minds, which requires repentance and faith.¹¹

To those who are intimidated by, skeptical of, or just uninformed about the demonic, Anderson reassures them that “whether the demonic part is 0 percent, 5 percent, 10 percent or 50 percent does not make any difference.” He believes that “the critical part is submitting to God. Resisting the devil is simple if there are no unresolved issues between us and our heavenly Father.”¹² Anderson explains that discipleship counseling can lead people towards freedom in Christ, but in order to remain free, people need to know

(1) who they are in Christ; (2) the authority and protection of the believer; (3) the nature of the battle that is going on for their minds; and (4) how to walk by faith by the power of the Holy Spirit according to what God said is true.¹³

Discipleship Counseling is an excellent survey of Anderson’s understanding of discipleship and spiritual warfare. It might be a little overwhelming or over-informative for the average pastor or layman. For someone who has not experienced overt spiritual warfare, or is cessationist in their understanding of the demonic, they may disregard Anderson’s approach and bemoan his heavy use of experience.

¹¹Ibid., 338.

¹²Anderson, *Discipleship Counseling*, 148.

¹³Ibid., 167.