

Role of Counseling in Spiritual Growth

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Have you ever heard that a camp counselor is a mother, father, preacher, teacher, doctor, nurse and referee? Well, from personal experience at Camp Gander Brook in Maine, I can assure you that his duties range through these roles and many more. For metaphorical reasons, however, I think the role of a counselor in spiritual growth is one that we would hardly ever think of him as having, and that is one of being a gardener.

Prepare the Soil

A gardener knows that to get his seed to grow he first has to plant it, and to get good growth he first needs to prepare the soil. When he prepares the soil he doesn't just scratch the surface of it either; he goes down deep. He actually becomes familiar with his soil and knows its contents. A counselor similarly, to achieve any spiritual growth has to have worked with the soil he wants to plant in. He has to know what it contains. The soil I speak of is God's word—the ground from which all spiritual growth comes.

Plant the Seed at Best Time

A gardener always plants his seed at the best time of the year. Most often, this is in the spring. The counselor has a great opportunity to plant the seed and plant it in the right soil because he comes in contact with his seed (the campers) in the spring of their years. If planted in the right soil then they won't need transplanting when they are older.

Correct Depth

Another thing that a gardener considers when he plants seed is the depth to which he plants it. To grow at all some seeds need to be planted deeper than others. The counselor needs to consider individual differences when he tries to teach the campers of Christ. Some need to go deeper into God's word before it has any effect on them; whereas, on others it will have immediate effect. It often happens that they start to grow when you least expect them to.

Right Kind of Light

After the seed is planted and has started to grow it needs light to sustain its growth. Not all light, however, has a part in plant growth. This has been pointed out in scientific experiments where it has been shown that only certain wavelengths of the visible spectrum will promote growth. Many campers are already Christians. They have already been planted in the right soil; but to grow spiritually they need light, and the right kind of light. All too often the only light they receive is from the television or from non-Christians. Have you ever noticed how plants tend to grow toward the light? Children and adolescents tend to grow toward what light they perceive, or they are great imitators and "hero" worshippers. The task of the counselor then is to be the right kind of light for the campers are bound to be imitators of him. He often becomes their "hero" who they want to be like. Therefore, since they are looking to him for light he needs to keep his Christian light shining twenty-four hours a day. I would classify this as the most important role that the counselor plays in the spiritual growth of his campers for if the counselor shows Christ in his life the campers are going to also.

Right Kind of Nourishment

A plant also needs nourishment if it is to continue to grow. This nourishment usually comes from the soil, but some times the gardener has to add some fertilizer. Some fertilizers are nothing but catalysis which help to release the nutrients that are already in the soil but tied up chemically. A counselor uses this type of fertilizer when through cabin devotionals, Bible readings, and question-answering sessions he helps to unbind, make clear, and release some of the nutrients that are so bountiful in God's word.

Proper Training

While a plant is growing a gardener trains it if he wants it to have the proper balance. A counselor also needs to give some training to give the campers the proper balance. He does this by exhortation and sometimes by reprimanding. He teaches them to pray, sing, read scripture, plan and lead devotionals, and most important how to get along with others.

A tree grows deep into the soil; a tree grows out to infold its neighbors; and it grows upward to the sky . A Christian youth ought to be this way also. His roots should grow deep into the soil of Gods word: his arms should grow out to infold his neighbor; and his arms should be lifted upward in worship to the creator. It is the role of the gardener (the Christian camp counselor), to help his campers grow in this way, for this indeed is spiritual growth.