

# God's Call to Nouthetic Counseling

## Week 6

**Purpose of the Lesson** - To equip believers to understand nouthetic counseling as a biblical, Christ-centered ministry of loving confrontation that uses God's Word to address sin and restore people toward spiritual maturity for God's glory.

### I. What is Nouthetic counseling?

- A.** Nouthetic Counseling is a biblical counseling approach developed by Jay Adams that centers Christ and Scripture as the sufficient and authoritative means of addressing personal and spiritual problems.
- B.** The term derives from the Greek verb *noutheteō*, which is typically translated as “warn,” “admonish,” or “instruct.”<sup>1</sup>
1. Noutheteō is a Greek term derived from the words *nous* (mind) and *tithēmi* (to put), referring to instruction aimed at correcting a person's actions and attitudes. It literally means “\_\_\_\_\_,” referring to corrective instruction directed at the inner person.<sup>2</sup>
  2. The term presupposes that something is wrong and aims to correct it. Its ultimate goal is to bring about change in belief, attitude, habit, or lifestyle, serving as a warning to change; calling people to repentance before consequences follow due to continued sin.<sup>3</sup>
  3. While *didasko* emphasizes instruction and doctrinal teaching, *noutheteo* goes further by addressing the will and affections, aiming at repentance and life change.<sup>4</sup>
  4. It conveys the ideas of encouraging, advising, and finally warning people of the consequences of their behavior. It is to give counsel that warns and seeks to restore what is wrong in the person's life.
  5. Biblical nouthetic counseling rests on three foundational convictions: the sufficiency of Scripture, the sinfulness of man, and the necessity of sanctification through obedience to Christ.
  6. Biblical counseling also carefully distinguishes between suffering caused by living in a fallen world (trauma, anxiety, depression) and sinful responses to that suffering; both must be addressed biblically but not confused.
- C. Biblical Usage**
1. Paul uses it to explain that Old Testament examples of punishment were written for instruction, so believers would learn from past mistakes.

---

<sup>1</sup> D. W. Peters and J. D. Carter, “Nouthetic Counseling,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 798.

<sup>2</sup> Thoralf Gilbrant, “Νουθεσία,” in *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary* (WORDsearch, 1991)

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur Jr., *MacArthur Pastor's Library on Counseling*,” 104.

<sup>4</sup> T. W. Hall and P. C. Lewis, “Counseling and Psychotherapy: Biblical Themes,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, ed. David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 277.

- a. **1 Corinthians 10:11** — *Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our (nouthesia) **admonition**, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.*
    - b. What does this verse teach us about why God included stories of failure and judgment in Scripture?
  2. Fathers (parents) are to put their children in mind of the Lord; of His existence, perfections, law, and claims on their hearts and lives.
    - a. **Ephesians 6:4** - *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and (nouthesia) **admonition** of the Lord.*
    - b. How is parental discipline and instruction meant to be different from simply “raising good kids”?
    - c. **How does Deuteronomy 6:4-9 support nouthetic counseling?**
      - **Deuteronomy 6:4–9** — *4; “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5; You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 6; “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7; You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8; You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9; You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*
3. Paul speaks of a divisive individual who is self-willed, doing and teaching as he chooses, independent of the teaching and practice of the Church.
  - a. **Titus 3:10** - *Reject a divisive man after the first and second (nouthesia) **admonition.***”
  - b. After he was admonished (nouthesis), which means they sought to put the truth into his mind through warning/rebuke, if he continued in his stubborn ways, he was to be rejected by the Church.
  - c. Why do you think Paul requires repeated admonition before church separation takes place?
4. **Acts 20:31** - *Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to **warn** (nouthetically confront) everyone night and day with tears.*
  - a. Paul presents nouthetic confrontation as a consistent pastoral duty, carried out persistently (“night and day”) and personally (“everyone”), showing that biblical confrontation is not cold or detached, but is motivated by sincere love and emotional involvement.
  - b. What does Paul’s example teach us about the tone and emotional attitude we should have when confronting sin?
5. **Colossians 1:28** - *Him we preach, **warning** (nouthetically confronting) every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*
  - a. According to this verse, what is the ultimate goal of preaching and counseling? What are we aiming to produce?
  - b. This verse connects nouthetic counseling directly to the goal of sanctification: the aim is not merely behavioral improvement, but maturity in Christ, so that believers are conformed to Him in holiness.

- c. Jay Adams – “Nouthetic counseling in its fullest sense, then, is simply *an application of the means of sanctification*.”<sup>5</sup>
  - d. Jay Adams – “Fundamentally, then, pastoral counseling is helping Christians to become sanctified. Counseling involves helping people to put off old patterns which grew out of rebellion toward God, and helping them to put on new practices which grow out of obedience to God.”<sup>6</sup>
6. **1 Thessalonians 5:12** - *And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and **admonish** (nouthetically confronting) you,*
- a. Nouthetic confrontation is part of spiritual leadership and shepherding; faithful leaders are expected to warn and correct believers, and the church is commanded to respect that ministry rather than resist it.
  - b. Why do you think many Christians resist being admonished by spiritual leaders, and what does that reveal about the heart?
7. **1 Thessalonians 5:14** - *Now we exhort you, brethren, **warn** (nouthetically confronting) those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.*
- a. This passage shows that biblical counseling requires discernment: the unruly need warning, the fainthearted need encouragement, and the weak need support, demonstrating that nouthetic counseling is not a “one-size-fits-all” harsh rebuke, but wise and compassionate shepherding.
  - b. What does this teach us about the balance between truth, love, and patience in counseling?

## II. Nouthetic Counseling Consists of 3 Basic Elements.

### A. Nouthetic counseling always implies a \_\_\_\_\_ that needs to be overcome.

1. There is some sin, some wrong, some problem or difficulty that needs to be acknowledged and dealt with.
2. Something is wrong in the person's life, and the counselor seeks to encounter, subdue, and remove it by influencing the mind of the person.

### B. Nouthetic Counseling involves confronting the problem with \_\_\_\_\_.

1. The distinctive feature of nouthesia is the training by word of mouth.
2. What are biblical examples of nouthetic counseling using words?
  - a. Nathan confronting \_\_\_\_\_.
    - i. **2 Samuel 12:7** - *Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.*
  - b. Jesus confronting and rebuking \_\_\_\_\_.
    - i. **Matthew 16:23** - *But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”*
  - c. Paul confronting \_\_\_\_\_ (Galatians 2:11-14).
  - d. Jesus confronting the women at the well (John 4:16-18).

---

<sup>5</sup> Jay Edward Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 73.

<sup>6</sup> Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 77.

- e. Jesus confronting the \_\_\_\_\_ of Revelation (Revelation 2-3).
- f. Confronting sin among the Church body.
- g. **Matthew 18:15** - *“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*

**3. Notice that in these examples:**

- a. The issue was clearly defined (identify the “what”).
- b. Authority rests in the Word of God (Thus says the Lord).
- c. A call for change was made (repent- Rev.2-3).
- d. A warning of consequences if no change happened (Rev. 2-3).
- e. Hope for restoration (David was restored; Gal. 6:1).

**4. Note concerning confronting sin:**

- a. Confrontation without love = \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Love without confrontation = \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Biblical nouthetic counseling = \_\_\_\_\_

**C. Nouthetic Counseling seeks the \_\_\_\_\_ of the counselee.**

1. Jay Adams – “The goal must be to meet obstacles head on and overcome them verbally, not in order to punish but to help him.....*Nouthesis* is motivated by love and deep concern, in which clients are counseled and corrected by verbal means for their good, ultimately, of course, that God may be glorified.”<sup>7</sup>
2. **1 Corinthians 4:14** - *I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn (nouthetically confront) you.*
  - a. Paul shows that nouthetic admonition is not meant to humiliate or embarrass, but to restore and strengthen believers through loving correction, like a father addressing his children.
  - b. What is the difference between warning someone biblically and shaming them personally?
3. **2 Thessalonians 3:15** - *Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish (nouthetically confronting) him as a brother.*
  - a. Even when church discipline is necessary, nouthetic admonition must remain relational and redemptive; the goal is restoration, not hostility, and correction must be given with brotherly love rather than personal contempt.
  - b. How can we confront someone firmly while still treating them as a brother and not an enemy?
4. **Notice what Paul tells fathers not to do as well as what to do.**
  - a. **Ephesians 6:4** — *And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition (nouthetic confrontation) of the Lord.*

**D.** These elements distinguish nouthetic counseling from secular therapy models that focus primarily on exploration, validation, or symptom management.

**III. Nouthetic Counseling was Expected to be Done by the Whole Church.**

**A. Colossians 3:16** - *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing (nouthetically confronting) one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*

---

<sup>7</sup> Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 50.

1. Paul teaches that nouthetic counseling is not reserved for pastors alone, but is a normal ministry of the whole church body, and it must flow from a heart saturated with Scripture (“the word of Christ dwelling richly”).
  2. What does it look like practically for a church to “admonish one another” without becoming judgmental or intrusive?
- B. Romans 15:14** - *Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*
1. **“I am confident concerning you, my brethren”**
    - a. “Confident” – (Gr. **Peitho**) which is a strong verb, carrying the components of confidence, reliance, and hope. It means to be so convinced that one puts confidence in something or someone.
  2. **“...that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge.”**
    - a. **Goodness** – (Gr. Agathosune) which speaks of being benevolent, seeking to benefit others. It finds its fullest and highest expression in that which is willingly and sacrificially done for others. It is moral and spiritual excellence manifested in active kindness.
    - b. Jay Adams: “Paul set forth goodness and knowledge as qualifications for good counselors. These qualities are essential; nothing less makes one “competent to counsel”<sup>8</sup>
    - c. **“filled with all knowledge”** (filled is in the present tense, “continually filled” with spiritual knowledge of the truth).
      - i. Notice Paul points out, because they were full of goodness and filled with knowledge, they could then counsel others.
      - ii. What does that tell us?
  3. **“able also to admonish one another.”**
    - a. Also, this word (noutheteo) is used by Paul in the “present tense,” which means it was to be a continued activity for the Church at Rome.
    - b. Did Paul believe the Christians in Rome were able to counsel one another?
- C. Galatians 6:1–2** - *Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*
1. How does Paul’s command to restore others “in a spirit of gentleness” guard nouthetic counseling from becoming harsh, self-righteous, or condemning?
  2. This passage teaches that biblical counseling is the responsibility of spiritually mature believers who must restore those caught in sin with gentleness and humility, recognizing their own vulnerability to temptation, and lovingly bearing burdens in a way that fulfills Christ’s command to love.
- D.** To be involved in Biblical nouthetic counseling is to fulfill the command of God as revealed in Scripture.

#### IV. The Danger of Avoiding Nouthetic Confrontation.

- A.** This same word (**noutheteo**) is used in the Septuagint in describing the failure of the priest “Eli” to rebuke his two wicked sons.
1. **1 Samuel 2:12** - *Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD.*

---

<sup>8</sup> Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 60.

- B. Listen to how Eli confronts his sons, who were involved in open sins before the people and who were causing them to sin as well.
1. **1 Samuel 2:23–24** - *So he (Eli) said to them, “Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. No, my sons! For it is not a good report that I hear. You make the LORD’s people transgress.*
  2. One problem Eli perhaps had in dealing with his sons was in asking them “why” they did the evil they did. It was not his responsibility to know “why” they did the evil, but to “stop” the evil they did.
  3. Instead of focusing on “why” they did the evil, he needed to focus on “what” they did.
    - **1 Samuel 3:13** - *For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knows, because his sons made themselves vile, **and he did not restrain (noutheteo) them.***
  4. Eli’s failure was not ignorance of his sons’ sin, but his unwillingness to restrain it; his passive, mild rebuke lacked decisive action, demonstrating that neglecting loving confrontation can make a leader complicit in the very sin he tolerates.
  5. Eli spoke words of concern, but he failed to exercise corrective authority, and God judged him for restraint that never happened.
  6. This is the difference between “mentioning” sin and “dealing” with sin.
- C. **Questions to consider:**
1. What are modern examples in churches today where leaders may “speak softly” about sin but fail to truly address it?
  2. Why do people avoid confrontation even when they know it is necessary?
  3. At what point does silence about sin become participation in sin?
  4. What difference do you see in Nathan and Eli’s response to sin?
- D. **Note:** Avoiding confrontation may feel merciful in the moment, but Scripture shows that passive leadership ultimately harms both the sinner and the community.
1. **Revelation 3:19 — 19;** *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.*
- E. Jay Adams – “Usual counseling methods recommend frequent long excursions back into the intricacies of the whys and wherefores of behavior. Instead, nouthetic counseling is largely committed to a discussion of the what. All the whys that a counselee needs to know can be clearly demonstrated in the what. What was done? What must be done to rectify it? What should future responses be? In nouthetic counseling, the stress falls upon the “what” rather than the “why” because the “why” is already known before counseling begins. The reason why people get into trouble in their relationships to God and others is because of their sinful natures. Men are born sinners. Much time is wasted by asking why. The question “why” may lead to speculation and blame-shifting; “what” leads to solutions to problems. **“What have you been doing?” is a very significant question to ask.** Having answered that question, counselors may then ask: **“What can be done about this situation? What does God say must be done?”** Because nouthetic counseling seeks to correct sinful behavior patterns by personal confrontation and repentance, the stress is upon “What”-what is wrong? and what needs to be done about it? People never understand the why more clearly than when the focus is upon the what.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 48.

## Conclusion

Nouthetic counseling is not merely a method or technique; it is a biblical responsibility rooted in the sufficiency of Scripture and the call to love one another enough to speak truth. God has commanded His people to admonish, restore, warn, and encourage one another for the purpose of sanctification and spiritual maturity. While the world often avoids confrontation and redefines love as acceptance without correction, Scripture teaches that genuine love warns, corrects, and restores.

Ultimately, nouthetic counseling is not about winning arguments or controlling others; it is about helping believers turn from sin, walk in obedience, and grow into Christlikeness. When done with humility, gentleness, and biblical conviction, it becomes a powerful means of grace within the church. To neglect this ministry is to fail in love, but to practice it faithfully is to fulfill the law of Christ and glorify God through the restoration of His people.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Jay Edward. *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling*. Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1986.
- Gilbrant, Thoralf. "Νουθεσία." In *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary*. WORDsearch, 1991.
- Hall, T. W., and P. C. Lewis. "Counseling and Psychotherapy: Biblical Themes." In *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, edited by David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
- Peters, D. W., and J. D. Carter. "Nouthetic Counseling." In *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology & Counseling*, edited by David G. Benner and Peter C. Hill, 798. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.