

# "The College Pastor—A Ministry in the Campus Marketplace"

Interview with Charlie Baker  
Pastor of University Heights Baptist Church

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Interviewed by Neal Schooley, Editor

**Schooley:** Charlie, you serve as pastor here in Stillwater and to students of Oklahoma State University; I understand you have found pre-marital counseling to be a major aspect of your ministry to college students?

**Baker:** Yes. It is a major part of my ministry. When I came here I did not think of it as being a major aspect in time. Yet out of seeing the failure of marriages—not just divorce, but the failure of people getting the most out of two being brought together by the Father—I have become convinced there is a great need for better pre-marital preparation.

**Schooley:** So your experience has led you to see that this is a major ministry for persons involved in a campus ministry to students.

**Baker:** Yes. Along with good preparation and continuing growth for all of us.

**Schooley:** What are some of the major concerns that students express to you or that you perceive when they come to you for counseling?

**Baker:** One of the greatest concerns is the fear of failure. I don't like to see anyone enter a commitment or agreement afraid of failure. It is not a good way to get started. Yet, because of the openness of our society now and the failure of marriage, both in numbers and the attempt to just stay together, there is real evidence of failure being displayed inside the home. I see a lot of students that have been raised in this kind of situation and they know what they don't want in a marriage instead of what they do want. Their problem is that they are reacting instead of responding. They sense they want to be married, but they don't want to go through a lot of hell here on earth inside their marriage.

**Schooley:** As you begin the counseling process, what are some of your major objectives?

**Baker:** First of all, I want them to sense that the Father wants them together. In other words, that they are trying to live through the will of God and that the Father is trying to bring them together. I also want them to face up to the realistic joys and tensions of marriage. So I would say that my objectives would be to help them discover and to affirm that they are in the Father's will in getting married; as they go about their marriage there will be some great joys, but there will also be some difficult times and tensions they will need to work through.

**Schooley:** In terms of counseling style and trying to help students meet some of these objectives, describe for us the counseling process that you go about with students?

**Baker:** I begin my very first session by talking with them about the purpose of marriage—how God brings them together to be helpmeets for each other. We talk about their background; I go into a little detail here; for example, I'll ask how do their parents handle tensions inside the marriage? I try to discover immediately if either one of them come from families where there has been physical violence. I try to find out what has been modeled in front of them.

**Schooley:** I believe you do some testing.

**Baker:** I use the **Taylor-Johnson Temperment Analysis**. Neal, there are a lot of excellent tests out that are available to those who are into this kind of counseling and this is simply one that I use. I am not for sure it is the best. It has helped me. It is a test that measures their temperment background, so I will know whether they are hostile or tolerant, whether impulsive or self-disciplined, whether they are nervous or light hearted, whether they are very active socially or very withdrawn. It measures eleven different areas like this and this helps me to know three things. First of all, it helps me to find out where they are on the scale. Second, in taking the test they discover how well they know each other in the temperment areas. And a third thing it does is to cause them to discuss differences after we have discussed the test. Usually they find out that they don't know each other as well as

they thought they did. The test opens up communication and enables them to talk about things that previously they never even thought about—issues that are really important.

**Schooley:** So this is the greatest value that you can find in using a test like Taylor-Johnson?

**Baker:** Yes. It gives them some discussion points, but it gives me a framework of knowing what to prescribe in the way of homework. For example, if you have two real impulsive people you may want to work on real detailed budget. I would say if two impulsive people came to me and they were not formally engaged yet, but were just about ready to announce it, I would ask them to put off the announcement and let it wear a while and make sure they haven't jumped into this overnight or responded quickly to a feeling. But if you have two very self-disciplined people on the opposite end of the scale then I wouldn't work very long on a budget. I would introduce them to a budget and say this will help you; usually they have already worked through a budget. So in the first session I give them the test and in the second session I give them a read-back on the test and then it really varies. We may spend 10 hours after that or we may spend two hours together. It really depends on how they do on the test and how well adjusted they are or how many things I sense we need to work through.

**Schooley:** Do you have a set number of sessions?

**Baker:** No. The average couple takes around six sessions. I make assignments at each session, such as to read the book **Tough and Tender** by Joyce Landroff.

Sometimes I refer them to professional help. We have some professional counselors in our church who help. I work with a professional counselor in and through those situations.

One area of general interest to all is their in-laws and family traditions. I have them write down where they are going to spend Christmas, New Years, Easter, Thanksgiving the first year of marriage. Then I have them send that to both sides of the family. This really helps if they come from two families that have strong traditions. You don't want them coming to the first Thanksgiving and both families thinking they are coming home. I deal with them about money and

about going into debt, especially during their first year of marriage. I have a way of saying if you manage your money in your first year it probably won't manage you in your married life.

**Schooley:** What are some other areas you deal with?

**Baker:** About two weeks before they get married they listen to some tapes that deal with sex. These are Dr. Ed Wheat's tapes on sex and sex techniques. I used to instruct myself and then I found that the tape can do a much better job than I can. So I recommend that tape and then if they want to ask questions, they are encouraged to check back in. If the young lady would like to ask questions, but would feel embarrassed to ask me, then she may talk with my wife or one of the women in the church. We talk about children—what are their thoughts about children, how many and what is the timing of children? We talk about insurance and finally we have a session when we plan the wedding. They may want to ask questions about that. I have a policy—it is their wedding not mine, but I do think certain things ought to take place in any wedding I perform.

**Schooley:** I suppose your ministry with them continues after the wedding.

**Baker:** After they have been married about three months, I have what I call a three month check up. In this session I ask them, "How is it going?" We just check base again. When they come in for their three month check up they are usually very open. If they are having some difficulty, they often will talk about it.

Then I ask, and a lot of my counseling has changed through this, "how do you wish somebody had helped you to get ready for marriage; what should I have said or what should have happened that you would recommend?"

**Schooley:** So you've made some changes in how you prepare students for marriage?

**Baker:** One of the things we do here in our fellowship that helps our church and these couples is that I will assign a couple for them to get with during their marriage counseling. One of our church couples will ask them over for a meal. I

have trained these church couples and I have spent time with them personally. They have taken the Taylor-Johnson. They have gone through the counseling just like they were in pre-marital counseling. Their one assignment during the meal is to share some tension area where they had to make an adjustment in marriage. I have discovered a lot of times when a marriage is in trouble they wait until it is too late to come and talk to a pastor. They wait until their marriage is in such bad shape that it is hard to recover. Yet they will go and talk to some lay person in the church. So this has opened up some areas and has formed some great lay counseling in our church and has been very, very helpful. This was not my idea; this was a young couple who said, "I wish we had gone to another married couple here in the church."

**Schooley:** What is the major concern that surfaces during the follow-up session?

**Baker:** The major thing is they say how easy it was to talk before they got married and then now they have to make time for it. They found themselves having communication problems. Also, they discover the tensions of marriage. Even though you tell them and you have another couple from the church share about their difficulty, most couples are surprised about having to adjust and how much adjustment has to take place.

**Schooley:** Is there anything else that you would like to add about your process of pre-marital counseling?

**Baker:** I like to start, Neal, at least six months ahead of time, because if you are dealing with major emotional problems you have some time to deal with it. Also, very few people will call off a marriage one month before, but some will call it off four months ahead of time. I did pre-marital counseling with 42 couples last year and 35 of those couples ended up getting married. So seven of them backed out or delayed their marriage. If you begin counseling far enough ahead of time and see that they need some more time, it gives them time to work out problems.

**Schooley:** Is there ever a time when a student comes to you without enough lead time and you say, "Unless you change the date I cannot help you. How do you handle it?"

**Baker:** Yes, I have said that to couples. I have said I cannot do the ceremony. Sometimes I have told them why. Other times I have said, "I just cannot honestly participate in this and feel good about it; I wish you would give me more time to counsel."

**Schooley:** Charlie, what are the other special problems that you encounter in pre-marital counseling?

**Baker:** In the early sessions, I will raise the question about their sexual preparation. "Have you both talked about birth control?"—and most of them have. Then I require or recommend very strongly that both of them get good physicals. If they haven't decided about different methods of birth control, then I suggest they talk to their physician.

After we have touched on birth control, I ask them if they have had pre-marital intercourse. If they haven't, I talk to them honestly about the tension they are going to have in the engagement and the closer they get to marriage. I think it is a very healthy tension personally, but it is a tension to be acknowledged. I don't think a good way to deal with that tension is to push it down; that is to act like it is dirty. If you create that kind of problem you have got some major problems after marriage. Many times after they have intercourse they feel dirty or bad about it, and that is not healthy. In fact, I would say about half of the marriages that are postponed or canceled for that reason. They have had intercourse and, in one couple's case, just one time, and they thought they had to get married. And yet, neither one of them felt good about the marriage. So we went to the Bible and looked at forgiveness. They saw that they needed to re-evaluate their plans. This has happened a number of times in the past year. I think we need to deal with this area very openly.

**Schooley:** How do you counsel with students about guilt and forgiveness?

**Baker:** I do not try to make them feel guilty, but I deal with them very openly at this point. I talk about guilt, whether they are feeling guilty or not. It is just a fact we deal with, so we talk about it. It doesn't mean they can't get married or that they can't have a good marriage; but I try to help them

to come to an agreement on how they are going to handle the guilt. I think as they enter into marriage they are going to feel better having dealt with the problem.

**Schooley:** Do you see the incidence of pre-marital intercourse increasing?

**Baker:** Well, I don't have anything to measure it against; but, there are surveys out and they indicate it is increasing.

**Schooley:** In dealing with what must be a very delicate subject with these couples, you have developed a trust with them that apparently allows them to share their sexual history with you. Do you find that by leading them to share that with you that it increases their confidence with you or do you find some backing off after that.

**Baker:** I have sensed that a few have backed off. It is a problem, especially if the girl has felt very guilty. It has been very difficult to be prophetic out of the pulpit because some times they read judgment into everything you're saying.

**Schooley:** In dealing in these areas I get the impression that much of your counseling is pedantic.

**Baker:** Yes.

**Schooley:** By the same token if we can talk about your preaching just a little bit. Do you deal quite frequently with the issues surrounding pre-marital relationship in your preaching?

**Baker:** Yes, I am trying to think how often I do that. Probably something is said maybe one time a month about pre-marital relationships and I am not talking about the sexual aspect, even though the sexual aspect is mentioned at times. And by the way, when I do mention the sexual aspect I try to be very straight forward without being crude. I use the word intercourse. I don't talk about "doing it". Every once in a while, maybe one or two times a year, I'll remind our church that if anybody has the freedom to talk about sex openly it ought to be the church since God is the Creator of this great area of life.

**Schooley:** Charlie, what kind of patterns are you seeing developed?

**Baker:** I see a pattern developing in that the church is becoming more aware of the need of good pre-marital counseling as preventive medicine. I see the seminary students coming out better prepared to do good pre-marital counseling. Let me add one other thing: I think we are going to find ourselves offering counseling to more people that have been divorced and going into their second or third marriage. Now we are going to face this whether we want to or not and, of course, some have policies that say "I will not marry a person that has been divorced". I respect that. Personally I do not require that. People still need counseling because they are going to go ahead and get married whether that preacher will marry them or not. They may go down to the justice of the peace or some other place to get married, but they still need marital preparation.

**Schooley:** Do you see younger students coming to you that have been divorced?

**Baker:** Yes, yes. I find them getting married and getting divorced earlier than ever before.

**Schooley:** One issue we ought to deal with is not so much the fact that couples have been divorced, but the relationship and attitudes that have developed in that divorce. Would you agree with that?

**Baker:** I ask them if they have talked about the why; why did they get the divorce? What is the reason? I don't want to know, but I want to know if they know. They usually will say, "yes we have talked about it and here is what we discovered." They have usually thought through it quite well. Then they will talk about what the real reason was and what the real tension was in their marriage. I find out what their attitude is currently and how they are handling their past failure in marriage.

**Schooley:** I guess that is a pretty sensitive issue.

**Baker:** The question is, "How much do you talk about past marriages or past affairs?". I find some who recommend that you tell everything. I personally do not recommend that. Get up to date where you are right now. You are marrying the person right now, not 10 years ago. Let God's forgiveness help you forget the past.



**Schooley:** Do you find that students who are products of two very prosperous decades in our country have expectations that they can immediately achieve the same level of financial prosperity as their parents?

**Baker:** Yes. Especially those that have come to college out of middle or the upper-middle class homes. They expect to go out and buy a home and furnish it completely and never know any of the struggle of having to wait for any item. They know a great deal about how to use credit cards and how to borrow money. They get themselves into some real trouble. In fact one of the things that I recommend for couples is that they only use one credit line to establish credit the first year of marriage.

Some students are very wise and want to make sure that they are as well prepared as they possibly can be. I think we are going to need to talk about more the pressure of money and realistically face that.

**Schooley:** Charlie, earlier you talked about involving your congregation in the counseling process and, of course, you pastor a diverse congregation—all ages, the stable home, the new people moving in, the newly married, the single adult. Looking back on some of the marital problems that you deal with in your church—even the couples that become your resource persons—what implications do you see for students contemplating marriage?

**Baker:** The major implication is that we be openly honest and realistic and that we be involved in marital counseling, not just pre-marital counseling. We ought to be available all the way through, because marriages move through stages and there needs to be affirmation, encouragement and forgiveness in all of the stages of marriage. Those with teenagers have different adjustments, difficult tensions, and different problems. There are difficulties when both partners are working outside of the home.

Another implication is that we need to affirm that it is right to be single. Too many times we thought that it is only spiritual to get married. We should dwell realistically on how we can help build marriages, build families, build people and how a single life can be a rich life also.

**Schooley:** We are finding in our educational institutions that more and more students are continuing their education after becoming married. I suppose you have developed a special concern for married students since many do attend your church. What is the nature of your counseling to these students?

**Baker:** It seems like the more difficult the academic degree the more likely there is a problem. Usually the problem will fall into three or four stages. Let me just mention several. One is that physically they'll get involved with somebody else, a lab partner. I'm not talking about intercourse, but they get involved in emotional support with a lab partner and they start sharing details of their life; they are not doing that at home. They are not communicating their feelings to their spouse because they are doing that outside the home. I find that they take a lot of adventure out of their marriage. Everything has become routine because they are on such a strict schedule; there is hardly any adventure in their marriage such as taking off and going some place for a weekend or doing a project together.

**Schooley:** How do you see Baptist Student Unions and BSU directors contributing to college students who are preparing for marriage?

**Baker:** One of the things you can do in your community is offer the pastors an approach for pre-marital counseling. I think some pastors do not do it simply because they don't know how. I think our BSU directors are well trained and have a lot of expertise they could pass on to pastors. Offer a retreat or a one day seminar at the associational meeting and put together some ways to help the pastor in counseling. I personally think every pastor needs a tool of measurement—some kind of test instrument. I am not sold on any one test instrument. So, there are many tests out that are excellent. Somehow our pastors could be trained to use a tool of measurement that deals realistically with problems.

The BSU could have a retreat and take only engaged couples.

**Schooley:** What resources would you recommend for Baptist Student Union directors if they want to increase their

own expertise and, for that matter, for the pastor of the campus church if he wants to increase his skill.

**Baker:** If one has not been to a seminar I would recommend going to a seminar of some type that would offer some skill training. If it has been several years since you have been to a seminar, attend a refresher seminar. We do the same thing students do; we'll go to Glorieta or to Ridgecrest and attend our hobby horses. Consequently, we develop no new skills.

I think we ought to do our reading; students are going to be reading. They will pick up books and read them. Whether an author says what you want him to say or not, you ought to know what he is saying.