

**GATHERING DATA/DISCERNING THE PROBLEMS BIBLICALLY**  
**DR. JOHN D. STREET**

**III. Gathering Data**

A. Why Gather Data

1. Which one? (I Thessalonians 5:14)
2. Which approach? (John 3, 4)
3. What is the true issue? (Jeremiah 6:14)

B. What Kind of Data to Gather<sup>1</sup>

1. **P** – Physical - sleep patterns; medications; diet; activity level; illness
2. **R** - Resources and Relationships - job situation; school; intellectual; social; spiritual
3. **E** – Emotions (feelings) - extremes; “feelings oriented”
4. **A** – Actions - behavior; sins of commission and omission
5. **C** - Conceptual (thinking) - goals; values; desires; motives
6. **H** – Historical - good and bad in past context; present context; failures; school/job problems

C. How To Gather Data

1. P.D.I. (Personal Data Inventory) — More formal
2. Asking proper questions

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<sup>1</sup>PREACH acronym developed by Wayne Mack. See Appendix 8 for a list of Data Gathering Questions

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- a) Extensive and intensive
    - (1) Extensive - asking a little about a lot
    - (2) Intensive - asking a lot about a little
  
  - b) Relevant questions
  
  - c) Questions that find facts
    - (1) What?
    - (2) How?
    - (3) Where?
    - (4) When?
    - (5) What for?
    - (6) How often?
  
  - d) Open ended - Be careful about using “yes or no” questions
    - (1) Provides flexibility for the response
    - (2) Determines what is important to the counselee
    - (3) Helps you to better understand
    - (4) Example
      - (a) Closed: “Do you want to get married?”
      - (b) Open: “What are your thoughts about marriage?”
  
  - e) Specific - Avoid “fuzzy” questions. Also, don’t settle for vague or general answers.
  
  - f) Withhold judgment (Prov. 18:13, 17)
  
  - g) Mark important areas for further questioning - record patterns, significant statements, habits
  
  - h) Observe “countenance”
    - (1) Non-verbal communication; “halo data”
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(2) Be careful - can be misread

3. Other Methods

- a) Information from others
- b) Giving counselee your perspective and inviting feedback
- c) Observation of counselee outside session
- d) Record conversations at home
- e) Listen to their prayers
- f) Data gathering homework

D. Importance of Listening

- 1. Necessary (Prov. 20:25)
  - 2. Requires self-control
  - 3. Listen for:
    - a) Blameshifting
    - b) “Can’t”, “unable”, “too much”
    - c) Victim mentality
    - d) Calling sin sickness
    - e) “Rabbit trails”
    - f) What counselee doesn’t say
    - g) Hopelessness
    - h) Evasiveness
    - i) Exaggerations
    - j) Defensiveness
    - k) Judging another’s motives
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- l) Willingness to accept responsibility
4. Listening habits to avoid:
    - a) Don't interrupt.
    - b) Don't jump to conclusions.
    - c) Don't let your mind wander.
    - d) Don't do distracting things.
    - e) Don't allow the person to waste time.
    - f) Don't hesitate to ask if you don't understand.

## VI. INTERPRETING DATA

### A. Illustrations of Interpretation

1. Biblical
    - a) 1 Samuel 1:12-18 — Eli & Hannah
    - b) Mark 6:45-52 — Disciples fearful yet heart is hard
    - c) Mark 10:17-23 — Rich young ruler, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”
    - d) Luke 10:38-41 — Mary & Martha – priorities
    - e) 2 Timothy 4:10 — Demas – “deserted,” loved this present world (age)
    - f) 3 John 9, 10 — Diotrophes – “Protector of the Church”
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2. Case Study (#20 – *The Christian Counselor's Casebook*, 162)

**"I Just Can't"**

Feelings of inferiority have made me sick physically and generally impotent as a person," says Gus. "I've tried to do as you said, but I just can't." At a previous session you asked Gus to seek the forgiveness of his father for several admitted offenses against him. Gus is not in his fourth session and the one assignment that has been given for the past two weeks still remains incompleting [sic]. "You 'can't,' really means you 'won't,' doesn't it?" is your reply. "No, I just can't do anything," he responds. "I'm not a quitter or anything, but I can't do *that*. I want to; I know I should and if I had more ego strength, I might be able to do so."

- a) What is Gus' interpretation of his problem?
- b) What will the counselor have to do?

B. The Process of Interpretation

1. Take data and prayerfully compare what is going on with the standard of God's Word. (Is.8:19-20)
    - a) Compare the person's behavioral responses.
    - b) Compare the person's thoughts, attitudes, and interpretations.
    - c) Compare the person's desires, values, expectations, and motivations.
  2. Take data and look for themes and patterns.
    - a) Are there typical behavioral responses in certain situations?
    - b) Are there typical thoughts, attitudes, or interpretations?
    - c) Are there typical expectations, desires, longings, or demands that the person has in certain situations?
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3. Take data and make sure you are labeling and describing the problems in a biblical way.
    - a) Use biblical words and categories. (e.g. Gal.5:19-21; Mk.7:21-22; Eph.5:3-5; Col.3:4-11; 1 Cor.6:9-11; 2 Cor.2:12-16)
    - b) Avoid psychological labels. (1 Cor.2:12-13)
      - (1) Personality disorder
      - (2) Codependency
      - (3) Dysfunctional family
      - (4) Schizophrenia
      - (5) Damaged emotions
      - (6) Low self-esteem
      - (7) Unmet needs
      - (8) Perfectionism
      - (9) Workaholism
      - (10) Mental illness
      - (11) Addictions (gambling, sex, etc.)
      - (12) Multiple personalities
      - (13) Eating disorders
  4. Take data and put it on the witness stand
    - a) What biblical categories could be used to describe the person I'm counseling? (1 Cor.2:14,15; 1 Thes.5:14)
    - b) What does the person understand about biblical change?
    - c) What about complicating factors?
    - d) What is the best way to approach the counselee? (John 3 & 4)
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- e) What is the counselee's greatest need?
  - f) What does the data indicate about why the counselee has not resolved the problem?
  - g) What is the reason the counselee has come for help at this time? (Luke 15:14-21)
  - h) What does the counselee expect out of counseling?
  - i) What does the data indicate about possible organic factors?  
Remember that we don't practice medicine or law.
5. Take the data and prayerfully study it to identify what may be going on in the person's heart. (I John 2:15-17)
- a) Lust of the flesh
  - b) Lust of the eyes
  - c) Pride of life
  - d) IDOLATRY (Ruling Motives = worshipping self-made gods)
6. Begin formulating interpretations of the nature and causes of the person's problems.
- a) Use Scripture to identify the different possibilities.
    - (1) Lying
    - (2) Being critical
    - (3) Depression
    - (4) Anxiety
    - (5) Fear
    - (6) Difficulty handling trials
    - (7) Bizarre, weird behavior
  - b) Use your own experience. (Be careful.)
    - (1) Proverbs 14:10
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(2) 1 Corinthians 10:13

- c) Use your experience with other people.
7. Test the validity of your tentative interpretations.
- a) Review the data to see which possibilities have the least/most support.
  - b) Pray again.
  - c) Continue to seek more information.
  - d) Seek input from another counselor.
  - e) Explain your interpretation to the counselee and ask for feedback.
8. Having tested and proven the validity of your interpretation, go on to formulate a strategy for helping the person overcome his problems.
- a) Includes clarifying the issues with which you will deal
  - b) Includes prioritizing the order in which you will deal with these issues
  - c) Includes deciding the manner and method you will use in providing help to this person
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