

WHAT IS BIBLICAL COUNSELING?

Whether formal, informal, professional, paraprofessional, or casually conversational, it is important for us to have a working definition and basic paradigm for understanding Biblical Counseling as we move forward.

1. Biblical Counseling is a “coming-alongside” of one redeemed sinner with another sinner (not always redeemed) to grow in his or her identity in Christ, his or her understanding of the nature and character of God, and his or her walk with Christ. This is done through the practical application of God’s Word to specific areas of breakdown, while strengthening areas of success.
2. Biblical Counseling is the Christ-centered, Holy Spirit empowered, practical and therapeutic [restorative] application of Biblical truths to a person’s life through nurture, instruction, correction, and prayer, with the goal of personal maturity and fruitfulness.
3. Biblical Counseling is targeted discipleship in a problem area of a person’s life for a season.

We see several examples of this in Scripture:

- Jesus and his disciples shared this simple understanding of the relationship between teacher and disciple. Thus, to follow Jesus meant to do what Jesus did (replicate his ministry; for example, **Mark 6:7-13, 30; Luke 10:1-20**) and to believe what Jesus taught (obey His word; for example, **John 8:31-32; John 17:6**).
- The “Great Commission” in **Matthew 28:18-20** uses command language for Christ’s followers to “make disciples.”

- Believers have been directed to be invested in “one-anothering,” the self-sacrificial investing in the lives of other believers (**John 13:34-35; Galatians 6:1-2**)

- **1 Thessalonians 5:11,14** is a perfect description of Biblical Counseling as discipleship.
 - Encourage [*parakaleite*] one another (come alongside one another)
 - Admonish [*noutheteō*] the disorderly/undisciplined (warn the rebellious)
 - Comfort¹ [*paramytheomai*] the discouraged
 - Strengthen/help² [*antechō*] the weak
 - Be patient toward all

We are called to become well-tuned instruments of Christ’s grace and truth to the out-of-control and rebellious, the fearful and needy, and the confused and unable.

It is in these ways that we fulfill the great commission given by Jesus as His parting command to His disciples and those who would be disciples of Christ after them:

Then Jesus came up and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

¹ to exercise a gentle influence by words; to soothe, comfort, console

² to exercise a zealous care for

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

In 1970, Jay Adams, a Presbyterian minister, launched an anti-psychiatry movement among American, conservative Protestants. Partly inspired by O. H. Mowrer and Thomas Szasz, Adams made a threefold claim:

- First, modern psychological theories are bad theology, misinterpreting the cause and cure for functional problems in living.
- Second, psychotherapeutic professions are a false pastorate, interlopers on tasks that properly belonged to pastors.
- Third, the Bible, as interpreted by Reformed Protestants, teaches pastors the matters necessary to counsel competently.

The church surrendered its purview incrementally over the last two centuries, walking away in earnest in the late 19th century with the advent of Modern Psychological Theory.

Then, in the 1940s, psychology took over more and more in seminaries, eventually replacing the New Testament model of poimenics.

The rationale for Adams' system contained six main components:

- 1) First, his epistemology arose from Reformed Protestantism and featured the Bible as the centerpiece.
- 2) Second, he defined problems in living morally upright as expressions of sin.
- 3) Third, he treated physiological and social constraints as the context of personal problems, not their cause.
- 4) Fourth, he proclaimed the grace of Christ as the comprehensive solution to life's problems.
- 5) Fifth, he defined counseling as pastoral and church-based.
- 6) Sixth, he subjected secular psychologies to a rigorous program of suspicion, debunking their intellectual and professional claims.

Adams gained followers among pastors and their parishioners but largely lost the interprofessional conflict.

In the 1980s evangelical psychotherapists successfully asserted their self-claim to cultural authority over all problems in living life, extending their institutional power in higher education, publishing, and the provision of care.

Today, as more and more believers experience little to no help from the psychology model, and more and more find true freedom through the nouthetic counseling approach, the Biblical Counseling movement now has not only greater credibility, it has also gone to great lengths to ensure that its practitioners are properly educated and trained.

There are training and certifying organizations that, though they differ in some ways, have the same foundational principles in common. An ever-increasing number of clergy and laymen are becoming trained and equipped to provide authentic Biblical Counseling to those in need of “soul care.”

“May the Lord Jesus, our chief Shepherd and Bishop, grant us such elders and carers of souls as will seek his lambs which are still lost, bring back those which have wandered, heal those which are wounded, strengthen those which are sickly, and guard and feed in the right way those which are healthy...”

– Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*

WHY BIBLICAL COUNSELING?

Rebellious sinners in relationship with rebellious sinners wreak havoc in one another's lives. Even for the redeemed, the sinful nature of fallen humanity makes selfish self-centeredness one of the easiest ways to live.

The result? We humans carry the relics of the death and decay of the sins we have committed, the evils we have suffered, and the lies we have believed.

God's Word tells us there is but one remedy: to “be transformed by the renewing of [y]our mind[s].”

We must exchange the lies for the truth. We must learn to believe in (totally trust in, depend on, and rely upon) the nature and character of God as revealed in the life and finished work of Jesus Christ. We must allow the Holy Spirit to help us learn and apply the living Word of God to every area and aspect of our lives—even the deepest and darkest debris from our past. And we must daily surrender ourselves to the reality of the indwelling Christ within us.

How does this happen, and where do we come in?

We do this in one-anothering, discipling relationships.

Scripture commends: All of God's people are called to be competent to provide solid Biblical counseling to other believers;

“But I myself am fully convinced about you, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able to instruct one another.” *Romans 15:14*

We are to be proficient in the Scriptures;

“Make every effort to present yourself before God as a proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately.” *2 Timothy 2:15*

For they are fully authoritative and sufficient for every aspect of life and faith, including Biblical counseling;

“All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.” *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

“I can pray this because his divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence. Through these things he has bestowed on us his precious and most magnificent promises, so that by means of what was promised you may become partakers of the

divine nature, after escaping the worldly corruption that is produced by evil desire." *2 Peter 1:3-4*

And we are commended to be invested in personal soul-care;

"Brothers and sisters, if a person is discovered in some sin, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness. Pay close attention to yourselves, so that you are not tempted too. **Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.**" *Galatians 6:1-2*

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING?

Biblical Counseling starts and ends with God and His Word as the primary and ultimate authority regarding all matters of life and faith. Prayer is an ever-present component. Properly interpreted Scripture is the primary tool. The Holy Spirit is allowed to be the primary Counselor in the relationship.

Psychological Counseling does not incorporate the application of God's Word as the primary source and authority for truth in the life of an individual. Neither prayer nor the Holy Spirit are regular or principal components of this approach to counseling.

In **Biblical Counseling**, sin, idolatry, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation to God through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ are key principles that underlie all authentic Biblical Counseling.

In **Psychological Counseling**, sin is sickness, idolatry is addiction, repentance is what others must do, forgiveness is for the offended, and reconciliation to God through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ is rarely, if ever, spoken of.

Biblical Counseling focuses on using Biblical categories for understanding and bringing God's remedy to the underlying root causes of the troubles a person faces. The counselee is taught the truth from God's Word, then disciplined and held accountable for living that out faithfully and fruitfully.

Psychological Counseling uniformly addresses the symptoms and effects of the problems a person is troubled by. The counselor makes suggestions but does not instruct the client/patient on what they ought to do.

Biblical Counseling holds that every believer is capable of being effective to some degree in discipling relationships with other believers. Neither a seminary nor a college degree are required. No state licensure is required or even necessary.

Psychological Counseling holds that, without specific undergraduate and graduate level education requirements being met—along with having and maintaining state licensure—one cannot “properly” provide counseling to others, especially in the areas of deepest need.

Psychology points man to self. The Bible points man to God.

ARE CHRISTIANS DIFFERENT FROM UNBELIEVERS?

Apart from the obvious difference of Christians having had a conversion experience and surrendered their heart and life to Christ versus unbelievers *not* having done so, there are a few other key differences that are helpful for us to understand:

1. Christians have Christ indwelling them by the power of the Holy Spirit and are no longer slaves to sin (Colossians 1:26-27); unbelievers are still lost in their sinfulness and rebellion and will remain slaves to sin unless and until they are converted (Romans 8).

2. Christians are able to understand the Word of God, learning from and applying it to their lives (John 14:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13); unbelievers consider the truth of God's Word as mostly myth, legend, and archaic foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14)—although there are some useful things to be found there from time to time.

3. Christians believe in God as Creator and Sustainer of all life, and that both reality and truth are rooted in God Himself; unbelievers think that the realities found in life and in the world are best explained in terms of purely natural events and factors.

4. Christians believe that God personally and powerfully answers the ardent prayers of those whom he loves (James 5:13-16); unbelievers see prayer as the desperate and pointless attempt of the hopeless to find a reason to hope, but there is no God to hear or to answer.

5. Christians believe that, apart from Christ, there is no hope, but in Christ there is every reason to hope; unbelievers are convinced that they can find the answers they need within themselves, if only they can discover how and where to look.

These factors show us why we need to daily remember: Every Biblical counseling relationship, and every Biblical counseling conversation, is redemptive in nature. We are steadily bringing people to a Person—Jesus Christ; we are *not* “solving their problems.”

A solid grasp of one's identity in Christ and maturing in one's fruitfulness based in that reality are essential to successful discipleship and soul-care.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELORS

A. Broad and

B. Divine Wisdom – Colossians 3:16

A. Biblical Experience - Hebrews 5:12-14

B. Proverbial Common Sense - Proverbs 1:1-7

C. Under Direction of Holy Spirit Through the Word - 1 John 2:27

C. Goodness (Consistent, Righteous Lifestyle, with Humility) – 1 Peter 5:5

D. Ability to Relate to Others – Ephesians 4:29-32

E. Ability to Communicate Clearly – Titus 2:7-8

F. Genuine Desire to Help Others Grow in Christ – 1 Thessalonians 5:14

G. Plank Free (No Glaring Sins) – Matthew 7:1-5

MOTIVATIONS FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELORS

There are motivations that are good and right, and there are those that are not good and not right. They seem obvious, on the surface, but we want to shy away from making assumptions. It is important that we partner with God on examining our hearts and motivations (Psalm 139:23-24; 2 Corinthians 13:5).

A. Good Motivations – 2 Corinthians 1:12, 24

For our reason for confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that with pure motives and sincerity which are from God – not by human wisdom but by the grace of God – we conducted ourselves in the world, and all the more toward you. . I do not mean that we rule over your faith, but we are workers with you for your joy, because by faith you stand firm.

1. To Reflect God's Grace and Glorify
2. To Help Others to Grow in Their Walk with God
3. To Help Families and Marriages to Heal
4. To Help Free People from Life-Dominating Sin (Hebrews 12:1-2)
5. To Serve Christ and the Church

B. Poor Motivations – 1 Peter 5:2-3

Give a shepherd's care to God's flock among you, exercising oversight not merely as a duty but willingly under God's direction, not for shameful profit but eagerly. And do not lord it over those entrusted to you, but be examples to the flock.

1. To Understand Oneself – Jeremiah 17:9
2. To Feel Authoritative and Superior

1 Corinthians 8:1-3

We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.

3. To Gather Personal Followers
4. To Benefit Financially
5. To Nurture One's Own Pride

RESOURCES FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

There are quite a few resources for those involved in Biblical Counseling. The following is our recommended "Basic Library" of materials for helping with counseling God's people.

General Resources (Resources marked with † are "must-haves"; those marked with * are excellent for use with counselees)

Counseling Basics

†*How to Counsel God's Way*; Bob Hoekstra

A concise yet easy-to-follow treatise on Christian counseling from a non-integrationist perspective.

†**Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*; Jerry Bridges

Peels back the layers of "respectability" from the "minor" sins and ungodliness that go unnoticed and undiscussed most of the time.

†*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*; Paul David Tripp

Effectively unfolds biblical principles for how "people in need of change" can help "people in need of change".

†*How People Change*; Timothy S. Lane, Paul David Tripp

Brings a vibrant theological and practical perspective to sharing how the Christian life works and how Biblical change happens.

**Why Biblical Counseling?* Vancouver Bible Institute

Compares and contrasts the foundations of psychology and Biblical counseling.

Marriage & Family

†**Intimate Allies: Rediscovering God's Design for Marriage and Becoming Soul Mates for Life (2nd Ed.)*; Dan Allender and Tremper Longman, III

Strips away cultural expectations and takes a refreshed look at God's design for the marriage relationship.

†**Shepherding a Child's Heart*; Tedd Tripp

Returns the focus of childrearing to discipleship rather than behavior modification.

Addictions/Besetting Sins

†**Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel*; Ed Welch

Begins with the premise that "Addiction is a worship disorder," then fleshes out the theme in practical and dynamic ways.

**Unbound*; Truth in Love Biblical Counseling Center
Intensive counseling and discipleship tool with systematic Scripture saturation as the linchpin for life transformation.

The Useful Lie; William Playfair and George Bryson
Examines the history of the AA (and the recovery industry it has spawned) in light of Scripture and the Christian Faith.

The Myth of Sex Addiction; David J. Ley
Presents the history and (questionable) science underlying this alleged disorder.

†**Your Drug May Be Your Problem, Revised Edition: How and Why to Stop Taking Psychiatric Medications*; Peter Breggin and David Cohen
Provides an uncensored description of the dangers involved in taking every kind of psychiatric medication and how to safely stop taking them.

Crisis & Trauma

†*Crisis Counseling: A Guide for Pastors and Professionals*; Scott Floyd
Provides a road map for understanding crisis and trauma biblically, and for providing effective soul care for those so troubled.

Death, Dying & Grief

* *Tell Me About Heaven*; Randy Alcorn and Ron DiCianni
Written to help children understand the loss of a loved one, also useful for the counselor looking for best ways to discuss death with anyone.

†**A Grief Observed*; C.S. Lewis
Christian classic. C. S. Lewis' honest reflection on the fundamental issues of life, death, and faith in the midst of loss.

†*Please Be Patient, I'm Grieving: How to Care For and Support the Grieving Heart*; Gary Roe
Pastoral grief counselor shares insights into the world of loss and grieving, and provides practical information for how to help grievers.

†* *And Still She Laughs: Defiant Joy in the Depths of Suffering*; Kate Merrick

Combines insights from the Bible's stories of resilient women as well as the author's own journey to wholeness after losing a child to cancer.

Oppression & Abuse

†* *Mending the Soul; Understanding and Healing Abuse*; Steven R. Tracy
Provides help in understanding abuse and abandonment. Theologically sound, biblically robust, while utilizing the best of social science research.

†* *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*; Lundy Bancroft

Though not written from a Christian perspective, provides clarity, understanding, and help for those trapped in oppressive/abusive relationships.

Sexual Sin & Brokenness

†* *Homosexuality: A New Christian Ethic*; Elizabeth R. Moberly

Keystone work that has undergirded tens of thousands of SSA strugglers find freedom. Clearly explains the root causes of homosexuality and challenges Christians to love with understanding.

†* *The Complete Christian Guide to Understanding Homosexuality: A Biblical and Compassionate Response to Same-Sex Attraction*; Joe Dallas and Nancy Heche

Well-researched and highly readable guide for helping those impacted by homosexuality.

†* *My Daddy's Secret*; Denise Shick and Jerry Gramckow

True story of the effects on a family of a father's sexual brokenness, especially on his oldest daughter

†**Steering Clear: Avoiding the Slippery Slope to Moral Failure*; Earl D. Wilson

Provides help for proactively preventing the self-delusions and behaviors that fuel ethical compromise and result in moral failure.

†**Such Were Some of You: For Those Who Struggle with Homosexuality*; DVD available from Pure Passion Media and Mastering Life Ministries

Interviews with over two dozen former homosexuals who talk about how they developed homosexual attraction, what the gay lifestyle was really like, how they came to Christ, and what God has done since to bring healing and change to their lives.

†**Tranzformed: Finding Peace with Your God-Given Gender*; DVD available from Tranzformed.org

Fifteen ex-transgender individuals join with numerous experts to dispel the confusion and bear witness to what Jesus Christ can do for those who struggle with gender dysphoria.

Websites

CCEF.org

IABC.net

TILBCC.com

Training

IABC — International Association of Biblical Counselors

ABC — Association of Biblical Counselors

BCC — Biblical Counseling Coalition

CCEF — Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

VBI — Vancouver Bible Institute

WHY BIBLICAL COUNSELING BELONGS IN THE CHURCH

A. The Church is Where One-Anothering is Lived Out – John 13:34-35

- B. The Church is God's Chosen Vehicle of Spiritual Authority – Titus 2:15**

- C. The Local Congregation Has Means of Accountability – Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5**

- D. The Local Church Can Provide Actual Care – 1 Peter 1:22; 3:8**

- E. The Pastors and Elders Can Know the Counselee Better – Acts 20:28-32**

- F. The Church Can Apply Discipline – Titus 1:10-14**

- G. The Church Can Follow Up – 1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

- H. The Church Can Encourage – 1 Thessalonians 5:11**

- I. Examples of Godly Living are Found – Hebrews 10:24-25**

Biblical Counseling ought to be:

- Bible-based
- God-honoring

- Christ-centered
- Spirit-powered
- Church-located
- Elder-led
- Lay-involved

FORMAL VS. INFORMAL COUNSELING

Biblical Counseling can be formal or informal. It can be professional, paraprofessional, or casually conversational. There are strengths and weaknesses to each:

Formal, Can Be...

1. Professional/Paraprofessional
2. Less Personal (Notes, etc.)
3. "Inferior" Attitude
4. Financial Component
5. Trained and Experienced Counselor Treating Counselee as a Spiritual Sibling or as a Child
6. Church Can Provide Authority and Accountability

Informal

1. "Coffee Cup" Counseling
2. Quite Personal
3. Fellow Pilgrims Helping One Another

4. Freely Given
5. Less Training and Experience; Deeper Issues Not Addressed
6. Less Accountability

CLOSING THOUGHTS

“May the Lord Jesus, our chief Shepherd and Bishop, grant us such elders and carers of souls as will seek his lambs which are still lost, bring back those which have wandered, heal those which are wounded, strengthen those which are sickly, and guard and feed in the right way those which are healthy...” – Martin Bucer, *Concerning the True Care of Souls*