

Biblical Counseling FAQs

People have legitimate questions about what makes biblical counseling truly biblical. The following FAQs provide relevant answers to basic questions about Christian counseling.

1. What is biblical counseling?

Biblical counseling is *not* “beating people over the head with the Bible.” *Nor* is it saying, “take two verses and call me in the morning.” And it is *not* one problem, one verse, or one quick solution.

While it may be difficult to provide a final definitive statement, here is a working definition of what makes biblical counseling truly biblical: Biblical counseling depends upon the *Holy Spirit* to relate *God’s inspired truth* about *people, problems, and solutions* to human *suffering* (through the Christian soulcare arts of *sustaining and healing*) and *sin* (through the Christian spiritual direction arts of *reconciling and guiding*) to empower people to *exalt and enjoy God* and *love others* (Matthew 22:35-40) by cultivating *conformity* to Christ and *communion* with Christ and the Body of Christ.

2. What is the difference between biblical counseling and secular counseling?

While there are multiple secular approaches to counseling, they all have two central features in common. First, secular counseling depends upon *human* reason and research to answer life questions about *people, problems, and solutions*. Biblical counseling depends on *scriptural revelation* to build a comprehensive, compassionate, and culturally-informed approach to who we are, what went wrong, and how to solve the issues of the soul.

Second, secular counseling, especially in our post-modern age, assumes that there is *no final answer*, no

all-encompassing story that explains the meaning of life. Biblical counseling, while appreciating our human limitations and understanding our cultural diversity, believes that in the Bible, God has given us all that we need for life and godliness. His Word provides real answers for real people with real problems.

3. What can people expect to change when working with a biblical counselor?

Biblical counselors work *comprehensively*. Clients can expect their counselors to assist them *spiritually* to know God, better, *socially* to love others more effectively, and in *self* to understand and apply who they are in Christ. Biblical counselors help clients *rationally* to renew their minds in Christ so they see their lives, God, others, and themselves from an eternal perspective. Biblical counselors work with clients *volitionally* so they understand why they do what they do and incorporate Christ’s resurrection power to live victoriously. Biblical counselors engage people *emotionally* so they learn to manage their moods, soothe their souls in the Savior, and help others with their emotions. Biblical counselors address who people are *physically* because the Bible teaches that we are united body-soul beings.

4. How long does it take to see a change in biblical counseling?

Solution-focused therapy is one current model of secular therapy. As the title suggests, the goal is to spot a problem and find a workable personal solution to that issue as quickly as possible. If only life were so easy. By contrast, biblical counseling is *soul-ution*-focused therapy. It focuses people on working with God on matters of their souls—on heart issues.

Relationally (with God, others and self), mentally, volitionally, and emotionally, change can *begin* immediately if change means loving better, thinking more wisely, choosing/acting more unselfishly, and managing moods more effectively. However, soul change is a *lifelong process of progressive sanctification*... of little-by-little coming to live and love more and more like Jesus.

5. What are the benefits of biblical counseling?

Biblical counseling helps people to confront their *suffering* face-to-face with God. While on this side of heaven, we may not find an end to suffering but we can *find God* and His perspective, purpose, and power in our suffering. Biblical counseling *sustains* people so they know that *it’s normal to hurt*, and it brings God’s *healing* to people so they know that *it’s possible to hope*.

Biblical counseling also helps people confront their *sin* face-to-face with God. Instead of running, hiding, and covering up with layer upon layer of self-sufficiency (like Adam and Eve), clients learn to “return home” like the prodigal son. In returning home, biblical counselors help people *reconcile* with God and others—repenting, asking forgiveness, and granting forgiveness. Clients learn that *it’s horrible to sin, but it’s wonderful to be forgiven*. In biblical counseling, clients also find *guidance* so they learn how to apply the truth that *it’s supernatural to mature*.

6. When should people consider biblical counseling?

Based on our definition, we should all be engaged in ongoing biblical counseling and spiritual friendship with *one another*. Biblical counseling is not just what we “do” for an hour with an “expert.” It is to be a natural part of our

normal experience within the dynamic of Christian community.

However, the Bible does teach that there is special gifting and there can be special training for a more focused ministry of biblical counseling. When should people consider making an appointment for focused biblical counseling? People should see a counselor when they sense that their *relationships* with God, others, and self are spiraling downward despite their best efforts. They should see a counselor when they recognize that their *beliefs* about life are colored by earthly perspectives and foolish judgments that they can't seem to correct on their own. People should see a counselor when they find themselves yielding to *purposes and actions* that defy their core beliefs, but are unable to change. People should see a counselor when they feel less and less able to handle their *emotions* and manage their moods. In other words, people should see a biblical counselor when life's suffering and their sin are overwhelming.

7. Is talking to a biblical counselor different from talking to a close friend?

Of course it all depends upon the close friend. If the close friend is a *spiritual friend* with biblical wisdom (*content*), Christlike love (*character*), relational power (*competence*), and knows how to connect deeply and honestly (*community*), then biblical counseling and talking to a close spiritual friend will be quite similar.

A biblical counselor ought to be a spiritual friend who focuses all his or her energy on others to provide them with *soul care for their suffering* and offers *spiritual direction for their struggle against sin*. Unlike with a close friend, the relationship is not "mutual." The biblical counselor and client are equals; however, the client is not there to counsel the counselor. The counselor uses his or her content, character, competence, and community to empower the counselee to connect with Christ and the Body of

Christ. Biblical counseling is more of a Paul to Timothy mentoring relationship, while spiritual friendship is more of a David and Jonathan peer-to-peer relationship.

8. What happens in a biblical counseling session?

To a large degree, that depends on the clients, their reasons for counseling, their counselor, and where they are in the counseling process (first meeting or last meeting, focused on hurts or focused on sin, etc.). Broadly speaking, people should expect a process of *speaking the truth in love*. That does not mean biblical counselors preach. It means that they engage in *dialogues* where the counselee, the counselor, and the Divine Counselor seek to apply biblical wisdom to life issues. Client and counselor will be involved in *spiritual conversations* where they think about life from a biblical perspective and are involved in *scriptural explorations* where they discuss relevant applications of pertinent passages to specific life situations and relationships.

Clients should expect biblical counselors to *empathize* with their hurts, *encourage* with Christian hope, *exhort* with biblical truth that *exposes* heart issues, and *empower* with biblical principles that *equip* them to be better lovers of God and others. Clients should also expect the "process" to be "real and raw." Like the Apostle Paul, the biblical counselor will offer not only the Scriptures, but also his or her own soul—caring and connecting deeply.

9. Are there issues that people can try to address prior to biblical counseling?

The very "step" of deciding to see a biblical counselor is a vital first step. It is an admission that the person needs others. This *humble admission* also automatically adds a new, powerful dimension to the situation—another person who cares and can bring wisdom principles to life issues.

Once clients make this step, they should continue to fellowship and worship with their church family. They should join a pertinent small group where they can talk honestly about their lives and maintain their spiritual disciplines that connect them to Christ.

Once they start biblical counseling, clients should be able to state very clearly why they are coming to counseling. They should be able to explain how they will know that counseling has been successful and define the inner life goals are they pursuing.

10. What can people do if they can't afford biblical counseling?

One of the beautiful aspects of biblical counseling is that it often does not have a fee, especially if it is done in the context of a local church. However, some biblical counseling is done in a para-church or professional setting where fees must be charged so the counselor can make a living. In this situation, clients should be honest with their counselor about their financial situation. They should ask if there is a sliding scale fee structure; see if their insurance will cover counseling; make a budget that prioritizes getting quality counseling help; ask their extended family for assistance; and seek help from their church family. *There is always a way.* ✕



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