

STAGE: SEEKER

# BIBLICAL COUNSELING FUNDAMENTALS

REAL TESTIMONIES. RADICAL TRANSFORMATIONS.

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Real Testimonies. Radical Transformations.

The Complete Guide to Helping Others Through Biblical Wisdom, Scripture, and Proven Counseling Practices

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# Biblical Counseling Fundamentals

The Complete Guide to Helping Others Through Biblical Wisdom, Scripture, and Proven Counseling Practices. A Comprehensive 35,000+ Word Publication on Christian Counseling. For counselors, pastors, church leaders, mentors, and anyone called to help others through life's struggles.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE COUNSELOR'S CALLING

People are hurting.

More now than perhaps ever before in human history. Anxiety grips millions. Depression paralyzes. Addiction enslaves. Trauma haunts. Broken relationships shatter lives. Spiritual confusion leaves people wandering. Existential emptiness echoes through hearts searching for meaning and purpose.

The world offers remedies. Pills. Therapy sessions. Self-help books. Meditation. Mindfulness. Psychology. These have their place. Some benefits exist within secular approaches to human suffering.

But something is missing. Something essential. A spiritual foundation. Gospel integration. God's truth applied directly to real pain. The recognition that humanity's deepest wounds are spiritual wounds requiring spiritual solutions.

This is where biblical counseling enters.

Biblical counseling stands at the intersection of God's eternal truth and human suffering. It recognizes that people are more than biological machines or psychological constructs. People are spiritual beings created in God's image, capable of relationship with the divine, and designed for transformation through encounter with God's love and truth.

### What Is Biblical Counseling?

Biblical counseling is the practice of helping others toward healing and wholeness through the application of Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit, centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ, and grounded in the conviction that God's Word is sufficient for spiritual transformation.

Biblical counseling is:

- **Helping others through Scripture** — Using God's Word as the primary tool for understanding and addressing human problems
- **Guiding toward healing and wholeness** — Moving people from brokenness toward restoration in spirit, soul, and body
- **Integrating spiritual and practical solutions** — Recognizing that change requires both spiritual transformation and behavioral modification
- **Using God's Word as foundation** — Building everything on the authority and sufficiency of Scripture
- **Pointing toward Jesus** — Making Christ the center of all counseling conversations and outcomes
- **Creating transformation** — Facilitating genuine, lasting change that extends beyond temporary relief to fundamental life transformation

### Why Biblical Counseling Matters

The contemporary world is drowning in secular solutions that leave the soul thirsty. People need more than what the world offers.

**People need more than secular psychology alone.** While psychology offers valuable insights into human behavior and emotional processes, it cannot speak to the deepest human need: reconciliation with God and the

transformation that comes through encounter with His love. Psychology can describe the human condition but cannot prescribe redemption.

**People need more than medication alone.** While medicine has its proper place in addressing physical and neurological conditions, pills cannot address spiritual disconnection, restore broken relationships, or provide ultimate meaning and purpose. Medication can stabilize but cannot save.

**People need more than temporary comfort.** The world offers countless methods for numbing pain — distraction, entertainment, substances, activities. These provide relief but not resolution. They postpone pain but do not process it. They avoid the root while treating the symptoms.

**People need spiritual foundation for healing.** Genuine healing begins in the spiritual realm. It requires reconciliation with God, forgiveness received and extended, identity established in Christ, and purpose connected to God's eternal plan. Without this spiritual foundation, other healing is superficial and temporary.

**People need Gospel integration in recovery.** The good news that Christ died for sinners, rose from the dead, and offers complete forgiveness and new life is not peripheral to counseling — it is central. The gospel is not just the entry point to the Christian life; it is the sustaining power of the Christian life and the transforming force in all areas of personal and relational healing.

**People need transformation through God's truth.** People don't just need to feel better; they need to become better. They need to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, to put off old patterns and put on new ways of thinking and living, to exchange lies for truth and fear for faith. This transformation comes through God's Word and the work of the Holy Spirit.

### This Resource's Purpose

This comprehensive guide provides everything needed to understand and practice biblical counseling at a high level of competence and spiritual effectiveness.

The resource is designed for:

- Biblical counseling practitioners seeking to deepen their theology and refine their practice
- Pastors and church leaders responsible for the spiritual care of their flocks
- Ministry leaders building counseling ministries within their churches or organizations
- Lay counselors wanting to help others effectively using biblical principles
- Training directors responsible for developing counseling training programs
- Anyone called to help others through life's struggles and toward spiritual transformation

This guide provides:

- **Complete biblical counseling methodology** grounded in Scripture and proven through practice
- **Practical skills and techniques** for effective counseling conversations and interventions
- **Addressing specific issues** with detailed approaches for grief, anxiety, depression, anger, shame, addiction, relationship conflict, sexual issues, and trauma
- **Building counseling ministry** with systems, training, and infrastructure for sustainable ministry
- **Integration of Scripture and practice** demonstrating how God's Word addresses and heals every human problem

- **Real-world applications** showing how biblical principles work in actual counseling situations

The framework throughout is Gospel-centered, Scripture-saturated, and practically focused on helping real people experience real transformation through encountering God's truth and love.

## PART 1 — BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The foundation determines everything. A building standing on sand will collapse. A building standing on rock will endure. Biblical counseling must be built on unshakeable biblical foundations. These foundations are not human opinions, psychological theories, or cultural trends. They are eternal truths revealed by God through Scripture and centered on Jesus Christ.

### Chapter 1: What Is Biblical Counseling?

#### Understanding the Essence

Biblical counseling is fundamentally an expression of the Great Commission. Jesus commanded His followers to "go and teach all nations," and this includes teaching people how to live. Matthew 28:20 emphasizes that followers of Christ should teach disciples "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." This teaching encompasses helping people apply God's truth to the real circumstances of their lives — which is precisely what biblical counseling does.

Biblical counseling is not a modern invention. Throughout Scripture, we see leaders guiding others toward wisdom, helping them process pain, redirecting them toward God's truth, and supporting their spiritual growth. Moses counseled the Israelites through their wilderness journey. David poured out wisdom in the Psalms. The prophets confronted God's people with truth. Jesus invested deeply in His disciples' spiritual transformation. Paul wrote extensively about helping believers overcome struggles and live according to their identity in Christ.

#### Three Essential Elements of Biblical Counseling

Biblical counseling rests on three foundational pillars that work together to create genuine transformation.

##### 1. Biblical Foundation — Scripture as Primary Source

Scripture is not one tool among many. It is not a resource to consult occasionally or use secondarily. Scripture is the foundation. Not psychology alone. Not philosophy alone. Not contemporary wisdom. Scripture as the authoritative, sufficient, and primary foundation.

##### 2 Timothy 3:16–17 (KJV):

*"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."*

This passage makes several critical claims. First, Scripture is "given by inspiration of God" — this means Scripture comes from God. It is not merely human reflection about God; it is God speaking through human authors. The words themselves carry divine authority and power.

Second, Scripture is "profitable for doctrine." This means Scripture teaches truth — it provides the foundation for understanding what is true about God, humanity, sin, redemption, and righteousness. Before anything else, counselors must ground their understanding of human problems in biblical doctrine.

Third, Scripture is "profitable for reproof, for correction." This means Scripture exposes error and shows the way forward. When someone is believing lies, Scripture confronts those lies. When someone is living according to falsehood, Scripture shows a better way. This includes both confronting what is wrong and pointing toward what is right.

Fourth, Scripture provides "instruction in righteousness." This means Scripture teaches how to live rightly — not merely external behavior modification but heart transformation that results in genuine righteousness. This instruction is practical, applicable, and transformative.

Finally, Scripture furnishes the person "unto all good works" — it completely equips. Nothing is missing. Nothing essential is left out. For all the "good works" God calls Christians to do — including the good work of helping others toward healing — Scripture provides the necessary foundation and direction.

Scripture is:

- **God's Word** — carrying ultimate authority and power
- **Spiritually powerful** — producing supernatural results beyond human capacity
- **Sufficient for transformation** — containing all needed truth for genuine change
- **Applicable to all situations** — addressing every human problem and circumstance
- **Living and active** — not merely information but transformative truth
- **Eternal truth** — unchanging across cultures and centuries

This does not mean Scripture explicitly addresses every detail of modern life. It does not mean Scripture contains a rule for every situation. It does mean that Scripture contains the principles, wisdom, and truth necessary to address any human situation with divine guidance.

## 2. Practical Application — Truth Applied to Real Life

Theory without application is empty. Knowledge without practice deceives the believer. Truth that remains in the mind without moving to the body is incomplete.

**James 1:22 (KJV):**

*"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."*

This passage makes an important warning: hearing truth without living it is self-deception. Many people feel inspired by a sermon on Sunday, shed tears hearing powerful biblical truth, even say "Amen" during the message — yet walk out into their lives unchanged. This is not because the truth lacked power but because the truth was not applied, embraced, and integrated into their actual living.

Biblical counseling moves beyond inspiration toward application. It creates a pathway from Scripture to daily life. The movement flows:

- **Understanding truth** — grasping what Scripture teaches
- **To experiencing truth** — encountering the reality of what Scripture describes
- **To living truth** — making decisions and taking actions aligned with biblical truth
- **To transformation through truth** — becoming a different person as a result of living according to God's truth

This is why biblical counseling includes homework. This is why counselors don't just teach Scripture but help counselees figure out what to do about Scripture. This is why biblical counseling involves accountability and follow-up. The counselor's role includes helping people move from intellectual agreement with truth to behavioral integration of truth to spiritual transformation through living truth.

## 3. Gospel Centerpiece — Jesus as the Focus

All counseling ultimately points to Jesus. Not because of preference or tradition but because Jesus is the center of God's redemptive plan, the ultimate expression of God's love for humanity, and the source of all genuine transformation.

### Colossians 1:27 (KJV):

*"To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

The gospel is the good news that God became human in Jesus Christ, died for our sins, rose from the dead, and offers forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life to all who believe. This is not a message for conversion alone — though it is certainly that. The gospel is the foundation and sustenance of the entire Christian life. It is the truth that transforms every aspect of our existence.

The Gospel includes:

- **God's love for people** — unconditional, sacrificial, redemptive love extended to all
- **Humanity's sinfulness** — the recognition that all people have sinned and fallen short of God's glory
- **Christ's death for sinners** — the redemptive work accomplished through Christ's sacrifice
- **Christ's resurrection** — the power that defeats death and enables new life
- **Forgiveness available** — complete pardon offered to all who believe
- **New identity in Christ** — transformed identity as beloved children of God
- **Holy Spirit's power** — the enabling grace that sustains Christian living and transformation
- **Transformation possible** — the reality that genuine, lasting change is available through Christ

When the gospel is centered in counseling, counselors help people see their problems not just as behavioral issues or emotional struggles but as opportunities to encounter Jesus more deeply. A counselor might ask: "Where is Jesus in this situation? How does the gospel speak to this particular struggle? What does grace look like for you right now? How might you experience God's love through this pain?"

### How Biblical Counseling Works: The Process

Biblical counseling follows a structured process that moves from assessment through application to transformation.

**Phase 1: Understanding.** Listen deeply. Ask questions. Assess the situation from multiple angles. Understand not just what the problem is but why the problem exists. What are the thoughts that precede the emotions? What are the circumstances that trigger the behavior? What spiritual beliefs underlie the struggles? This phase involves building understanding and trust.

**Phase 2: Assessment.** Identify the spiritual, emotional, and physical components of the problem. Is this primarily a spiritual issue rooted in false beliefs about God? Is this primarily an emotional issue rooted in unprocessed trauma or pain? Is this a behavioral pattern rooted in habit or habitual sin? Is this a medical issue requiring professional evaluation? Most situations involve all three dimensions; the counselor's job is to identify which dimension(s) most directly address the root issue.

**Phase 3: Scripture Application.** Find the relevant biblical truth that addresses the particular struggle. If someone struggles with worry, find Scripture that addresses anxiety and trust. If someone struggles with shame, find Scripture that addresses identity and acceptance. If someone struggles with anger, find Scripture that addresses

forgiveness and peace. The goal is not to find a verse to use as a proof-text but to find the biblical truth that genuinely speaks to this particular situation.

**Phase 4: Practical Steps.** Help the counselee develop concrete action steps to apply the biblical truth. What specifically needs to change? What patterns need to be interrupted? What new practices need to be established? What relationship repair needs to happen? What restitution might be needed? These practical steps make the abstract concrete and the theoretical practical.

**Phase 5: Accountability.** Establish accountability structures to support the counselee's follow-through. This might include regular meetings, prayer partnerships, accountability groups, or other structures. The counselor checks in on progress, addresses obstacles, encourages perseverance, and adjusts the plan as needed.

**Phase 6: Transformation.** Support the process of change as old patterns gradually give way to new patterns. This isn't instantaneous transformation but progressive renewal as the Holy Spirit works in the counselee's heart and mind. The counselor celebrates progress, maintains perspective during setbacks, and keeps the counselee focused on the ultimate goal of conformity to Christ.

**Phase 7: Integration.** Help the counselee integrate new patterns into their normal way of living so the changes become permanent rather than temporary. The counselor helps the counselee see not just "while I'm in counseling I'll act differently" but "this is who I'm becoming; this is who I am now."

**Phase 8: Maintenance.** Support ongoing growth and stability as the counselee continues without regular counseling. This might include periodic check-ins, connection with a support community, or plans for returning to counseling if significant struggles re-emerge.

## Chapter 2: Scripture as Foundation

### The Doctrine of Sufficiency

One of the most important doctrines in biblical counseling is the doctrine of sufficiency — the conviction that Scripture contains all the spiritual truth needed to address any human problem and that Scripture is sufficient to guide people toward genuine transformation.

#### Psalm 119:105 (KJV):

*"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."*

#### 2 Peter 1:3 (KJV):

*"According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue."*

This doesn't mean Scripture addresses every technical detail. It doesn't mean Scripture contains information about how to fix a computer or rebuild an engine. It doesn't mean Scripture contains specific advice for every situation. It means Scripture contains the spiritual principles, moral wisdom, and theological truth necessary to address any human problem with divine guidance.

Scripture is sufficient for:

- **Spiritual guidance** — How to live in relationship with God and others
- **Emotional healing** — Processing pain, grief, and trauma

- **Moral direction** — Ethical living and decision-making
- **Relational wisdom** — Building healthy relationships and resolving conflict
- **Practical problems** — Addressing daily life challenges with biblical perspective
- **Eternal hope** — Providing ultimate meaning and perspective
- **Transformation** — Enabling genuine change from the inside out

This conviction doesn't mean:

- Scripture addresses every detail explicitly
- No need for wisdom beyond Scripture
- Psychology is entirely wrong or unhelpful
- Never consult other professional resources
- Understanding Scripture requires no study or effort

It means:

- Scripture contains all spiritual truth needed for transformation
- Life's ultimate solutions are found in God's Word
- Scripture is the authority that guides all other knowledge
- Scripture should inform and direct counseling practice
- Scripture provides the ultimate framework for understanding human problems and solutions

## Finding and Using Scripture in Counseling

Counselors need to know how to locate Scripture relevant to specific issues and how to apply it skillfully in counseling conversations.

### Method 1: Topical Study

This method involves looking up a specific topic and finding related verses.

#### Process:

- Identify the topic (anxiety, forgiveness, self-image, etc.)
- Use Bible concordance or topical index to find related verses
- Read each verse in its full context
- Note what Scripture teaches about this topic
- Identify the principle that applies to the counselee's situation
- Apply the principle practically to their specific circumstance

**Example: Anxiety.** Relevant verses include:

#### Philippians 4:6–7 (KJV):

*“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus.”*

This teaches that anxiety is addressed through prayer, gratitude, and trust in God. Peace comes through bringing concerns to God rather than carrying them alone.

### 1 Peter 5:7 (KJV):

*“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”*

This teaches that people can literally cast their cares on God because He cares. This is not about trying harder to not worry; it's about transferring worry to God.

### Proverbs 12:25 (KJV):

*“Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.”*

This teaches that anxiety (heaviness of heart) impacts the whole person but is relieved by kind words and encouragement. Community and encouragement are resources against anxiety.

## Method 2: Thematic Connection

This method involves identifying the theme of the problem and finding the biblical theme that addresses it.

**Example: Shame.** The counselee feels shame — a deep sense of being fundamentally wrong, unacceptable, defective. The thematic approach identifies the biblical response to shame: acceptance, identity, and restoration.

### Psalm 27:10 (KJV):

*“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.”*

This addresses the core shame issue: abandonment and rejection. The promise is that even when earthly relationships fail, God does not abandon.

### Romans 8:1 (KJV):

*“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

This addresses the condemnation that undergirds shame. In Christ, there is no condemnation. This is the person's identity — no condemnation.

### 1 John 1:9 (KJV):

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

This addresses the path to shame-free living: confession and cleansing. Once confessed, the sin is dealt with. The person is cleansed. The shame has no legitimate foundation.

## Method 3: Cross-Reference

This method uses Bible cross-references to follow a theme through Scripture and build a comprehensive understanding. Many Bibles include cross-references — notes indicating related passages. Following these from verse to verse reveals the development of a theme throughout Scripture.

**Example: Forgiveness.** Starting with a key forgiveness passage like Matthew 6:14–15, the cross-references lead to related passages. Following these connections builds understanding of:

- What forgiveness is (releasing wrongs rather than holding grudges)
- Why forgiveness matters (it affects our own standing with God)
- How forgiveness happens (by God's grace and our choice)
- What forgiveness produces (peace, freedom, restored relationships)
- The limits of forgiveness (repeated harm may require boundaries)

## Building Scripture Knowledge for Counselors

Effective biblical counselors must know Scripture well. This requires intentional development and ongoing study.

Counselors need:

- **Deep Scripture knowledge** — Familiarity with the full scope of Scripture and major themes
- **Topical familiarity** — Ability to quickly access Scripture on specific topics
- **Practical application skill** — Ability to connect Scripture to real-life situations
- **Memorized key passages** — Having important passages memorized for quick access
- **Research ability** — Knowing how to find Scripture on topics less familiar
- **Integration practice** — Experience applying Scripture in conversations

Development practices include:

- **Daily Scripture reading** — Consistent engagement with Scripture
- **Topical study** — In-depth study of specific topics and their biblical foundation
- **Memorization** — Intentionally memorizing key passages and sections
- **Discussion with others** — Talking with other mature believers about Scripture
- **Application in own life** — Living out what Scripture teaches before teaching others
- **Teaching to others** — Sharing Scripture with others and explaining its meaning

## Chapter 3: The Gospel as Centerpiece

### Understanding the Gospel

The gospel is the heart of Christianity. It is not just the entry point into the Christian life; it is the sustaining power of the Christian life. It is not a children's story to outgrow; it is the infinite truth that mature believers keep returning to with deepening understanding.

#### 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 (KJV):

*“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”*

This passage presents the core of the gospel: Christ died, was buried, and rose. Each element is essential.

**Christ died for our sins.** This means Christ took on Himself the penalty that belonged to us. Our sins — our violations of God's character and law — deserve death. Christ died in our place. This is substitutionary atonement. Christ substitutes Himself for us, taking the consequence we deserve so we don't have to face it.

**He was buried.** This emphasizes the reality of Christ's death. He truly died. This wasn't appearance or spiritual metaphor. Christ actually experienced death, actually went into a tomb, actually experienced separation from the Father that death brings.

**He rose again the third day.** This emphasizes the victory. Death did not have the final word. The grave could not hold Christ. Christ defeated death, demonstrating power over sin's ultimate consequence. The resurrection proves that Christ is who He claimed to be and that His payment for sin is accepted by God.

**According to the scriptures.** Both the death and resurrection are not random events but the fulfillment of Scripture. This places Christ's work within the entire trajectory of biblical history. Christ is not a new idea but the culmination of God's redemptive plan revealed throughout Scripture.

## The Gospel's Components

The complete gospel includes several essential elements that work together to create salvation and transformation.

### God's Love for People

#### John 3:16 (KJV):

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

God's love is the foundation. God is not distant or unconcerned. God does not tolerate humanity from a distance. God loves actively, sacrificially, redemptively. This love is extended universally — to all people. God does not love only the righteous or only those who love Him in return. God loves sinners. God loves the broken. God loves the lost.

### Humanity's Sinfulness

#### Romans 3:23 (KJV):

*“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”*

Sin is the human condition. Not just individual wrong actions but a fundamental disconnection from God. This is not a matter of degree where some people are really sinful and others are mostly good. All have sinned. Sin affects all people universally. Sin means falling short of God's character and design — being something less than what we were created to be.

#### Romans 6:23 (KJV):

*“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

Sin has consequences. The natural result of sin is spiritual death — separation from God both now and eternally. This is not arbitrarily imposed punishment but the inevitable consequence of sin just as the result of jumping from a building is falling. The wage earned by sin is death.

### Christ's Redemptive Work

#### 1 Peter 2:24 (KJV):

*“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.”*

Christ took our sins upon Himself. Christ bore the consequences of our sin in His own body. This happened on the cross — "the tree." Through Christ bearing our sins, we are freed from the power and penalty of sin. The stripes Christ bore (the whipping He endured as part of His crucifixion) are the means of our spiritual healing.

### Christ's Resurrection

#### Romans 6:9 (KJV):

*"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."*

Christ's resurrection proves that death has been defeated. The grave could not hold Christ. This demonstrates that Christ's payment for sin is accepted by God and that those who believe in Christ participate in His victory over death.

### Forgiveness Available

#### Colossians 1:13–14 (KJV):

*"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."*

Through Christ, forgiveness is available. This is not cheap grace or easy forgiveness without consequence. The price has been paid — paid by Christ's blood. But the forgiveness is complete. Past sins, present sins, all sins are covered by Christ's payment. The person can be transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son.

### New Identity in Christ

#### 2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV):

*"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Becoming a Christian is not just getting sins forgiven. It is becoming a new person entirely. The old identity is gone. A new identity emerges. This is not merely improved self-help or self-actualization. This is fundamental transformation. This is new creation.

### The Holy Spirit's Power

#### Ephesians 3:14–19 (KJV):

*"For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."*

The Holy Spirit indwells Christians, providing strength in the inner person. The Spirit enables an experiential knowledge of Christ's love. The Spirit empowers transformation and enables believers to live according to a new nature.

### Gospel Application in Counseling

The gospel is not just doctrine to believe; it is power to transform. Effective biblical counseling applies the gospel directly to the counselee's struggle.

### **The Gospel Identifies the Root**

Most counseling approaches address symptoms. Someone is angry; let's work on anger management. Someone is anxious; let's work on anxiety reduction. Someone is depressed; let's work on mood regulation. These addresses are not wrong, but they may not address the root.

The gospel helps identify the deeper root: disconnection from God. At the heart of every human struggle is a broken relationship with God. This manifests as:

- Broken identity (not knowing who they are in Christ)
- Broken trust (not believing God is good and trustworthy)
- Broken orientation (not living according to God's truth)
- Broken hope (not believing God can transform their situation)

A counselor applying the gospel doesn't just address anger but asks: "What lies about God have led to this anger? What broken trust is underneath?" A counselor doesn't just address anxiety but asks: "What false beliefs about God's power or care have created this anxiety?"

### **The Gospel Offers Hope**

The world offers many "solutions" to suffering. Most are temporary. The gospel offers something permanent: complete forgiveness and complete restoration.

#### **Jeremiah 29:11 (KJV):**

*"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."*

The gospel declares that God has thoughts toward us — intentional purposes — thoughts of peace, not harm. God's plan is for our good, not our destruction. This is the hope the gospel offers: not just relief from current suffering but ultimate restoration and purposeful good.

For someone struggling with shame, the gospel offers complete acceptance — no condemnation in Christ. For someone struggling with guilt, the gospel offers complete forgiveness — cleansed and made new through Christ's blood. For someone struggling with purposelessness, the gospel offers participation in God's redemptive plan. For someone struggling with fear, the gospel offers confidence that God is greater than any threat.

### **The Gospel Provides Power**

The world's solutions often appeal to human willpower. Try harder. Be more disciplined. Have more self-control. These appeals often fail because they don't address the fundamental problem or provide the fundamental power needed.

The gospel provides the power of the Holy Spirit — supernatural power for transformation that exceeds human capacity.

#### **Romans 6:9–14 (KJV):**

*"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye*

*also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.”*

The gospel declares that sin no longer has dominion. This is not self-improvement or personal achievement; this is the declaration of a new reality in Christ. The person who has died to sin and been made alive in Christ can reckon themselves dead to sin's power and alive to God. The person can yield themselves to righteousness rather than unrighteousness.

### **The Gospel Creates Identity**

The gospel doesn't just fix the problem; it creates a new identity.

#### **1 John 3:1 (KJV):**

*“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not; because it knew him not.”*

Before Christ, the counselee's identity was rooted in accomplishments, failures, trauma, or the opinions of others. These are unstable foundations. After Christ, the counselee's identity is rooted in being a child of God — beloved, accepted, valuable. This is unshakeable.

A counselor helps the counselee internalize this new identity. "You are not what happened to you. You are not your failures. You are not what others said about you. You are a beloved child of God, fully accepted, fully forgiven, infinitely valuable."

### **The Gospel Establishes Destiny**

The gospel connects the person's struggle not just to healing but to purpose.

#### **Romans 8:28–29 (KJV):**

*“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”*

The gospel declares that God is working all things — including struggles and suffering — for ultimate good. This good is not comfort or pleasure but something deeper: conformity to Christ. The ultimate purpose of the Christian life is becoming more like Jesus. Struggles are part of this process.

A counselor helping someone through depression or trauma can say: "God is not wasting this. Even in this struggle, God is working to shape you into the image of Christ. This suffering is part of your transformation into who God is calling you to become."

### **Gospel-Centered Counseling Questions**

To keep the gospel central in counseling conversations, counselors might continually return to these questions:

- Where is Jesus in this situation?
- How does the gospel speak to this struggle specifically?
- What does grace look like for this person right now?
- How might the counselee experience God's love more deeply through this pain?

- What redemptive opportunity is present in this situation?
- How does this connect to the counselee's ultimate purpose in Christ?
- What false beliefs about God need to be replaced with gospel truth?
- Where is the Holy Spirit's power available in this situation?

## Chapter 4: God's Design for Healing

### The Three Dimensions of Healing

God's design for healing is holistic. Healing is not merely spiritual escape from physical/emotional problems. Healing is not merely emotional processing without spiritual transformation. Healing is not merely behavioral change without inner transformation. True healing addresses all three dimensions of human existence.

### Spiritual Healing — Addresses the Relationship with God

The root of human suffering is disconnection from God. Sin creates separation. Shame creates hiding. Fear creates distance. Trauma creates doubt about God's goodness. Spiritual healing means:

- Relationship with God restored
- Forgiveness received
- Identity in Christ established
- God's character believed and trusted
- Purpose connected to God's plan
- Holy Spirit's power accessed
- Orientation to life centered on God

### John 14:27 (KJV):

*"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."*

Jesus offers peace — not the world's peace, which is dependent on circumstances, but His peace, which is stable regardless of circumstances. Spiritual healing includes receiving this peace through connection with Christ.

### Emotional Healing — Addresses the Wounds of the Soul

Emotional wounds are real. Trauma leaves scars. Loss creates pain. Betrayal damages trust. Rejection wounds identity. Emotional healing means:

- Wounds acknowledged and processed
- Pain felt and moved through rather than around
- Grief allowed to run its course
- Triggers identified and understood
- Emotional vocabulary developed
- Emotional regulation skills learned
- Wounds begin to form scar tissue (healed but remembered) rather than remaining open sores

- Emotional health restored

**Psalm 147:3 (KJV):**

*“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”*

God not only forgives; He heals. He binds up wounds. He restores the broken in heart. This includes emotional restoration.

**Practical Healing — Addresses How Life is Actually Lived**

Spiritual belief without practical change is incomplete. Emotional processing without behavioral modification lacks integration. Practical healing means:

- Destructive behaviors changed
- Harmful patterns interrupted
- New habits formed
- Relationships repaired
- Restitution made where needed
- Daily life reorganized around new values
- New patterns becoming natural
- Life stabilized

**Proverbs 10:29 (KJV):**

*“The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction to the workers of iniquity.”*

Living according to God's way produces stability and strength. Living contrary to God's way produces destruction. Practical healing includes reorienting daily life toward God's ways.

**All three dimensions necessary.** Spiritual healing alone without emotional or practical healing leaves the person with intellectual understanding but emotional wounds still festering and destructive patterns continuing. Emotional healing alone without spiritual or practical healing addresses the wound but not the cause or the behavior. Practical healing alone without spiritual or emotional healing addresses behavior but not the foundation or the wound. True healing integrates all three.

**The Healing Timeline**

One of the most important insights in biblical counseling is that healing takes time. The culture promotes quick fixes — pop a pill, get a one-hour therapy session, attend a weekend seminar, and the problem is solved. This is fantasy. Real healing is a process.

**Healing Phases:**

**Awareness Phase.** The person recognizes the problem. "I have a drinking problem." "This relationship is unhealthy." "I'm depressed." "I was abused." Without awareness, healing cannot begin. Sometimes people are in denial or minimization — not yet ready to acknowledge the problem. Part of the counselor's role is lovingly helping people move from denial to awareness.

**Understanding Phase.** The person develops understanding of the root causes and contributing factors. "I drink because I'm anxious and alcohol numbs the anxiety." "This relationship pattern matches what I experienced in my

family." "My depression is rooted in false beliefs about my worth." "My trauma response is a normal response to abnormal circumstances." This phase involves asking questions, making connections, developing insight.

**Acceptance Phase.** The person moves from understanding intellectually to accepting emotionally. Understanding "I was abused" is different from accepting "I was abused and this was not my fault and this matters." Acceptance includes grieving — mourning what should have been different, what was lost, what was unfair. Acceptance includes moving from "I shouldn't feel this way" to "These feelings make sense given what happened."

**Change Phase.** The person begins to change — to make different choices, to interrupt patterns, to try new behaviors. This is difficult. The old patterns are familiar and comfortable even if destructive. The new patterns feel awkward and difficult. Motivation wavers. Setbacks happen. But gradually new patterns are attempted and practiced.

**Integration Phase.** New patterns gradually become the person's new normal. What required conscious effort and determination gradually becomes natural. The new way of thinking becomes the default. The new behaviors become habitual. The new identity becomes integrated.

**Maintenance Phase.** The person maintains the gains and continues to grow. This is not just holding steady but continued transformation. The person may cycle through another round of awareness-understanding-acceptance-change-integration around different issues or deeper levels of the same issue.

**This takes time.** Expect meaningful progress over weeks and months, not hours. Major trauma or deeply ingrained patterns may take years of patient, persistent work. The timeline varies based on:

- The depth of the issue
- The person's motivation and willingness to change
- Available support systems
- The person's spiritual maturity and connection to God
- Whether the issue is primarily behavioral (faster change) or trauma-rooted (slower processing)
- Access to community and accountability

## God's Design Includes Community

### Proverbs 27:12 (KJV):

*"A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished."*

God's design for healing includes community. Healing happens faster and more completely when a person is in relationship with others — a counselor, a support group, a church community, a small group. Isolation slows healing. Connection accelerates it.

### Proverbs 27:17 (KJV):

*"Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."*

Iron sharpens iron — people shape people. We become more like those we spend time with. We are influenced by the words we hear, the examples we see, the support we receive. A person surrounded by people pointing toward Jesus, modeling wholeness, and offering encouragement will experience different healing than a person in isolation.

## Chapter 5: The Counselor's Authority

### The Source of Authority

Biblical counselors do not counsel from personal authority. Counselors do not point to themselves as the ultimate source of wisdom or healing. The counselor's authority comes from Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

#### 2 Corinthians 5:20 (KJV):

*"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."*

The counselor is an ambassador for Christ. The counselor represents Christ and speaks on Christ's behalf. This is an honor and a responsibility. The authority the counselor carries is not personal authority but delegated authority from Christ.

### What Authority Looks Like in Counseling

The counselor's authority includes:

**The authority to speak God's truth.** When counseling, the counselor can speak God's truth with conviction and authority — not timidly or apologetically but with the confidence that comes from knowing this is God's Word.

#### Proverbs 28:1 (KJV):

*"The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion."*

The counselor, standing on God's truth, can be bold. This does not mean arrogant or disrespectful. Bold truth is given with humility and compassion. But it is given with conviction.

**The authority to confront sin.** The counselor is not called to be permissive or affirm whatever the counselee believes or does. The counselor is called to lovingly confront sin — to name sin as sin, to explain why it is sin, to call the counselee away from it, and to offer the path of repentance and restoration.

#### 2 Timothy 4:2 (KJV):

*"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."*

This calling to reprove, rebuke, and exhort must be done with longsuffering and doctrine — with patience, compassion, and biblical foundation. But it must be done.

**The authority to ask difficult questions.** The counselor has the authority (and responsibility) to ask questions that push the counselee to think more deeply and accurately.

"What lie are you believing about God?" "What does God's Word say about this?" "What would it look like to submit this to Christ?" "What are you afraid will happen if you obey God?" "What benefit are you getting from this pattern that makes you reluctant to change?"

These are not confrontational questions asked in a condemning tone but questions asked with genuine curiosity and care, designed to help the counselee think more clearly.

**The authority to give direction.** The counselor is not just a listener who reflects back feelings. The counselor is not neutral on questions of right and wrong. The counselor can give clear direction based on Scripture.

"I think you need to apologize to your spouse." "This relationship needs to end or you need to set firm boundaries."  
"I believe God is calling you to submit to His authority in this area."

This direction is given humbly — the counselor acknowledges that the counselee must make their own choice — but it is given clearly.

### **The Limitations of Authority**

The counselor's authority has important limits.

**The counselor cannot force the counselee to change.** The counselor can speak truth, but the counselee must choose whether to believe and act on that truth. The counselor cannot make choices for the counselee. The counselee has free will.

**The counselor cannot replace God.** The counselor is not the counselee's ultimate authority. God is. The counselor points to God's Word and God's character. The counselor does not position themselves between the counselee and God.

**The counselor cannot be God.** The counselor cannot fix everything. The counselor cannot make all the pain go away. The counselor cannot force the counselee's family to change or the counselee's circumstances to improve. The counselor can help, support, and guide — but the ultimate healing comes from God.

**The counselor cannot operate outside their competence.** The counselor needs to know the limits of their training and expertise. If the counselee needs medical evaluation, the counselor refers to a physician. If the counselee needs psychiatric care, the counselor refers to a psychiatrist. The counselor's authority is in biblical and relational counseling, not in medical diagnosis and treatment.

## PART 2 — UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NATURE

Before helping people, biblical counselors must understand people — how humans are created, how sin affects humans, how humans process pain, and how all dimensions of human existence are integrated.

### Chapter 6: Made in God's Image

#### The Foundation: Imago Dei

The foundation of understanding human nature is the doctrine of Imago Dei — humans are made in God's image.

#### Genesis 1:26–27 (KJV):

*“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every beast of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”*

This is not a metaphorical statement. Humans genuinely bear God's image. This has profound implications.

#### What It Means to Be Made in God's Image

Being made in God's image means:

**Humans have capacity for relationship with God.** Unlike animals, humans can know God, worship God, relate to God, and experience God's presence. This capacity is built into human nature. This is why spiritual hunger is universal — humans are designed for relationship with God.

**Humans have moral responsibility.** Because humans bear God's image, humans have moral agency and accountability. Humans are responsible for their choices. This is why reward and punishment make sense. This is why guilt and shame exist — they are markers indicating we have violated our own nature and God's design.

**Humans have creative capacity.** God is creative. Humans, bearing God's image, are creative. Humans compose music, write poetry, create art, build structures, develop systems. This creative capacity is distinctly human and a reflection of God's creative nature.

**Humans have rational capacity.** God is rational. Humans are rational. Humans can think, reason, learn, solve problems. This capacity distinguishes humans from animals and places humans in a unique position in creation.

**Humans have emotional capacity.** God has emotions. God loves, God grieves, God is pleased, God is angered by injustice. Humans have emotions. Emotions are not weaknesses or problems; they are capacities that reflect God's nature. Emotions are designed to signal important truths and to motivate appropriate responses.

**Humans have relational capacity.** God exists in community — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Humans are created for community. Humans need relationship, connection, love, belonging. Loneliness is destructive not because humans are weak but because humans are designed for relationship.

**Humans have spiritual capacity.** Humans are not merely physical bodies or even primarily physical bodies. Humans are spiritual beings. Humans have a spiritual dimension that cannot be satisfied by physical pleasure or emotional stimulation alone.

**Humans have infinite value.** Because humans bear God's image, every human has infinite, intrinsic value. This value is not earned or achieved. It is not based on intelligence, appearance, productivity, or any other factor. Every human — the intellectual and the disabled, the beautiful and the plain, the productive and the sick, the born and the unborn — has infinite value because each bears God's image.

### Implications for Biblical Counseling

Understanding that people are made in God's image transforms how counselors approach their work.

**First, counselors respect people's humanity.** Every person is worthy of respect, dignity, and kindness because every person bears God's image. This includes counselees who have done terrible things, held wrong beliefs, or are deeply broken. Respect for the image of God means treating people with dignity even while confronting sin or addressing destructive choices.

**Second, counselors take people's problems seriously.** Because people are made in God's image with rational, emotional, relational, and spiritual capacity, their struggles are real and significant. A person's anxiety is not trivial. A person's depression is not weakness. A person's trauma response is not pathological overreaction. These struggles matter because the person matters.

**Third, counselors recognize the spiritual dimension.** Because people are spiritual beings, spiritual solutions are real solutions. Prayer is not supplement to "real therapy." Reading Scripture is not self-help. Encountering God is not nice addition to the real work. These spiritual practices are central to genuine healing.

**Fourth, counselors understand relational needs.** Because humans are created for relationship, counseling itself is relational. The counselor-counselee relationship is not incidental; it is central to the healing process. A person who feels heard, understood, accepted, and valued by their counselor experiences something that begins to counteract the loneliness and rejection that often underlie their struggles.

**Fifth, counselors believe in transformation.** Because people are made in God's image with rational, emotional, and spiritual capacity, genuine transformation is possible. People are not fixed in their current state. People are not slaves to their history, their chemistry, or their circumstances. With God's grace and the person's willingness, change is possible.

## Chapter 7: The Impact of Sin

### Understanding Sin

Sin is not merely a list of bad behaviors. Sin is fundamental disconnection from God and rebellion against God's character and design. Sin is treating something as supreme that is not supreme. Sin is worshiping idols rather than God.

#### Romans 3:23 (KJV):

*"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."*

All people sin. Not just some people. Not just bad people. All. Sin is universal. Sin is not just wrong actions but a condition affecting all humans.

#### Romans 6:23 (KJV):

*"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."*

Sin has inevitable consequences. The wage earned is death — separation from God. This is not arbitrary punishment but the natural consequence of sin. Separation from the source of life naturally results in death.

### How Sin Affects People

Sin affects people at multiple levels.

**Sin separates from God.** The fundamental impact of sin is disconnection from relationship with God. This separation manifests as spiritual deadness, disconnection from ultimate reality, and loss of the core relationship humans are designed for.

**Sin corrupts the will.** Before Christ, the human will is enslaved to sin. Humans want to do what is right but find themselves drawn toward what is wrong. The will is not free; it is bound to sin's pull.

#### Romans 7:18–19 (KJV):

*“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.”*

**Sin damages relationships.** Sin destroys marriages. Sin fractures friendships. Sin creates conflict. Sin damages families. Whenever people choose their own way rather than God's way, relationships suffer.

**Sin warps thinking.** Sin darkens the mind and distorts truth. People who are caught in sin develop false beliefs to justify their sin. They minimize the harm. They blame others. They rationalize. They build entire systems of thought to avoid facing the truth about their sin.

#### Romans 1:21 (KJV):

*“Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”*

**Sin produces guilt and shame.** When people violate their conscience or God's design, guilt and shame follow. These are not problems to eliminate; they are signals indicating the person has violated something important. The solution is not to eliminate guilt but to address what produced the guilt.

**Sin enslaves.** Sin appears to offer freedom but actually enslaves. The sinner thinks "I'll do what I want" but finds themselves unable to stop, unable to escape, unable to change. Sin is addictive and enslaving.

#### John 8:34 (KJV):

*“Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”*

### The Doctrine of Total Depravity

While this doctrine sounds pessimistic, it is actually realistic. Total depravity means sin affects every part of the person. It does not mean every person is as evil as possible but rather that sin touches every dimension of human existence.

**The human mind** is affected by sin — thinking is distorted, truth is distorted, reality is misunderstood.

**The human will** is affected by sin — the will is enslaved to sin's pull.

**The human heart/emotions** are affected by sin — desires are misdirected, lusts are unleashed, emotions are misdirected toward sinful ends.

**The human body** is affected by sin — the body deteriorates, disease exists, aging and death are realities.

**The human relationships** are affected by sin — people hurt each other, betray each other, use each other.

Because sin affects every part of the person, transformation must address every part of the person. This is why biblical counseling cannot be purely cognitive. This is why biblical counseling cannot be purely behavioral. This is why biblical counseling cannot be purely emotional. Transformation must be holistic because sin is holistic.

### Sin and Specific Counseling Issues

Understanding sin helps counselors understand specific struggles.

**Addiction:** At its root, addiction is idolatry. The person has made something other than God supreme. The substance or behavior promises to satisfy what only God can satisfy. The person is enslaved to the false savior.

**Anger:** Anger often rooted in violated expectations. When the person expects the world to work a certain way and it doesn't, anger erupts. At its root is pride — refusal to submit to reality or to God's plan.

**Depression:** Often rooted in despair — the belief that the situation is hopeless, that nothing will change. At its root is false belief about God's power or goodness or the person's value.

**Anxiety:** Often rooted in attempts to control what cannot be controlled or in false trust. At its root is refusal to trust God and surrender control.

**Sexual sin:** Rooted in idolatry — treating sexual experience or a person as supreme rather than God.

**Relational conflict:** Rooted in selfishness and unwillingness to submit to others or to God's design for relationship.

Understanding the sin underneath the symptom helps the counselor address the root rather than just the branch.

## Chapter 8: How Humans Process Pain

### The Reality of Human Pain

Humans experience pain — physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual pain. Pain is a reality of human existence in a fallen world. Some counselors try to eliminate pain. Some counselors spiritualize pain away. Neither approach is biblical. The biblical approach is to help people process pain rightly.

#### 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (KJV):

*“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”*

God is the God of comfort. But notice that God comforts us *in* our tribulation. God doesn't remove the tribulation; God meets us in it. God doesn't deny the pain; God comforts through the pain.

### The Grieving Process

The grieving process, whether from loss, trauma, or major change, typically includes several phases. Understanding this helps counselors know what is normal and how to support people through it.

**Denial/Shock Phase.** The person's initial response to loss or trauma is often numbness or disbelief. "This can't be happening." "I must be dreaming." This is a protective mechanism that allows the person to gradually adjust rather than being overwhelmed all at once. This phase is normal and healthy.

The counselor's role is not to try to break through denial immediately but to gradually help the person move from denial toward acceptance as they're ready.

**Anger Phase.** As the reality sets in, anger often emerges. The person is angry at God. The person is angry at themselves. The person is angry at the situation or the people involved. The person is angry that this is happening to them.

#### **Psalm 22:1 (KJV):**

*"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"*

Even David experienced the anger and confusion of loss and pain. The counselor's role is to allow the anger, help the person express it, and gradually help them move toward understanding.

**Bargaining Phase.** The person tries to negotiate with God or reality. "If I just hadn't..." "If only..." "Maybe if I do this, the situation will change." The person tries to find a way the situation could be different or undone.

The counselor's role is to gently help the person accept what is and cannot be changed.

**Sadness/Depression Phase.** Deep sadness emerges as the person truly accepts the loss. This is appropriate grief. This is healthy. This is the emotional processing of the loss. The person may cry, may struggle to get out of bed, may feel empty.

This is not pathological depression. This is healthy grief. The counselor validates the sadness and supports the person through it rather than trying to "fix" it.

**Acceptance Phase.** Gradually, the person accepts the loss or trauma as real and integrates it into their life story. This is not "getting over it" or forgetting. This is accepting what happened and continuing to live. The loss becomes part of their story but not all of their story.

**Integration Phase.** The person returns to normal functioning but forever changed by what happened. The person continues on with life, carrying the memory and the growth that came from the pain.

### **Pain and Faith**

A common struggle for counselees is reconciling pain with faith. "If God loves me, why is this happening?" "If God is good, why did God allow this?" "If God is powerful, why didn't God stop this?"

These are legitimate questions. The counselor does not dismiss them or pretend they don't matter. The counselor helps the counselee hold several truths together:

**God is good.** God is fundamentally good. God's nature is goodness. God loves those He created.

**God is powerful.** God has power over all creation, including power to prevent suffering and evil.

**Evil and suffering exist.** Despite God's goodness and power, evil and suffering are real. People choose evil. Accidents happen. Disease exists.

**God has a purpose.** Even when God does not prevent suffering, God can use suffering for redemptive purposes — for growth, transformation, deeper faith, compassion for others.

**God suffers with us.** Jesus experienced suffering. Jesus knows what it means to grieve, to be in pain, to be betrayed. God is not distant from suffering; God entered into it.

**God offers healing.** God does not ultimately leave us in our pain. God offers healing, restoration, and hope.

The counselor does not answer all the intellectual questions about suffering. But the counselor helps the counselee encounter Jesus in the midst of suffering and experience God's comfort.

## Chapter 9: Spiritual Roots of Problems

### All Problems Have Spiritual Dimensions

While not all problems are primarily spiritual in nature, all problems have spiritual dimensions. Even physical illness has spiritual implications. Even medical conditions trigger spiritual questions: "Why me?" "Where is God?" "What does this mean?" "What should I do about this?"

The biblical counselor recognizes these spiritual dimensions and addresses them even while recognizing that professional medical care may also be needed.

### False Beliefs About God

Many counseling issues are rooted in false beliefs about God. The person believes something untrue about God's character, God's power, God's care, or God's design. These false beliefs then drive inappropriate emotions and behaviors.

**False belief: God is uncaring.** This belief drives anxiety ("If God doesn't care, I'm alone in my struggles"), depression ("If God doesn't care, nothing matters"), and self-reliance ("I have to take care of myself").

**The biblical response:** God cares deeply. God knows. God sees. God is not distant.

#### Psalm 139:1–3 (KJV):

*"O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways."*

**False belief: God is powerless.** This belief drives despair ("Nothing will change"), hopelessness ("This situation is impossible"), and dependence on human solutions alone.

**The biblical response:** God is all-powerful. Nothing is impossible for God. God's power is available.

#### Matthew 19:26 (KJV):

*"But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."*

**False belief: God is unjust.** This belief drives anger ("Life is unfair"), bitterness ("God is unfair"), and despair ("There's no point in doing right").

**The biblical response:** God is perfectly just. God's justice will ultimately prevail.

**Psalm 89:14 (KJV):**

*“Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.”*

**False belief: God is condemnatory.** This belief drives shame ("I'm unacceptable to God"), hiding ("I can't let God see me"), and self-punishment ("I deserve to suffer").

**The biblical response:** God is merciful. God forgives. God accepts those who come to Him.

**Romans 8:1 (KJV):**

*“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”*

**False belief: God's way doesn't work.** This belief drives compromise ("I'll ignore God's design and do things my way"), rebellion ("God's way is outdated"), and hopelessness ("Following God won't help").

**The biblical response:** God's way is the way that leads to life and flourishing. God's design works.

**Proverbs 3:5–6 (KJV):**

*“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”*

**Idolatry: Misplaced Worship**

Another common spiritual root of problems is idolatry — making something other than God supreme in one's life.

**Idols of self:** The person makes their own desires, comfort, pleasure, or achievement supreme. This leads to selfishness, addiction, workaholism, anxiety about achievement.

**Idols of other people:** The person makes another person supreme — a romantic partner, parent, friend, mentor. This leads to codependency, fear of abandonment, unhealthy boundaries.

**Idols of wealth:** The person makes money or possessions supreme. This leads to greed, anxiety about finances, dishonesty, and materialism.

**Idols of image:** The person makes appearance, reputation, or status supreme. This leads to vanity, shame, people-pleasing, and anxiety about others' opinions.

**Idols of experiences:** The person makes pleasure, entertainment, or distraction supreme. This leads to addiction, escapism, and shallowness.

**Idols of achievement:** The person makes accomplishment, productivity, or success supreme. This leads to workaholism, perfectionism, anxiety, and identity issues.

The counselor's role is not to judge the person for their idolatry but to lovingly help them recognize what they've made supreme and then point them back to God as the only rightful object of ultimate allegiance.

**Unresolved Sin**

Sometimes counseling issues are rooted in unresolved sin — sin the person has committed and not confessed, sin they're continuing to commit, sin they're justifying rather than repenting of.

**1 John 1:9 (KJV):**

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

Confession and repentance are necessary for spiritual health. When a person is harboring unconfessed sin, guilt and shame accumulate. This manifests as depression, anxiety, shame, or destructive behavior patterns.

The counselor's role includes lovingly confronting sin and calling the person toward confession and repentance.

### **Demonic Influence**

Scripture affirms the reality of spiritual warfare and demonic influence.

#### **Ephesians 6:12 (KJV):**

*“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*

While not every counseling issue has a demonic dimension, spiritual warfare is real. Some struggles involve demonic oppression or influence. The counselor should be aware of this possibility, able to recognize when it might be present, and prepared to address it through prayer, Scripture, and possibly referral to someone with specific training in spiritual warfare.

## **Chapter 10: Physical, Emotional, Spiritual Integration**

### **Understanding the Integration**

Humans are not divided into separate compartments — physical, emotional, spiritual. Humans are integrated beings where each dimension affects the others.

A physical problem (chronic pain, illness, sleep deprivation) affects emotional and spiritual health. Someone in chronic pain may struggle with depression and question God's goodness.

An emotional problem (anxiety, depression, trauma) affects physical and spiritual health. Someone with untreated trauma may develop physical symptoms (headaches, stomach problems) and spiritual struggles (faith questions, prayer difficulties).

A spiritual problem (unconfessed sin, broken relationship with God, false beliefs) affects emotional and physical health. Someone spiritually disconnected may develop depression or physical stress symptoms.

Understanding this integration means biblical counselors address all three dimensions rather than focusing on only one.

### **Physical Health and Mental Health**

**Sleep:** Inadequate sleep dramatically affects mood, cognitive function, emotional regulation, and spiritual capacity. Someone who is sleep deprived is more prone to anxiety, depression, poor decision-making, and spiritual struggle. A counselor should ask about sleep and, if sleep is inadequate, address this directly.

**Exercise:** Physical activity profoundly affects mental health, emotional regulation, and spiritual capacity. Someone who moves their body regularly reports better mood, less anxiety, clearer thinking. A counselor should encourage physical activity.

**Nutrition:** What people eat affects brain chemistry, emotional stability, and energy. Someone eating poorly will struggle more with emotion regulation and mental clarity. A counselor might explore nutrition.

**Substance use:** Alcohol, drugs, and other substances affect brain chemistry, emotional regulation, spiritual capacity, and decision-making. A counselor should assess substance use.

**Medical conditions:** Thyroid problems, hormonal imbalances, and other medical conditions can cause or significantly worsen depression, anxiety, and other mental health struggles. A counselor should encourage medical evaluation when appropriate.

## Emotional Health and Spiritual Health

**Unprocessed emotions:** Emotions that are denied or suppressed tend to accumulate and cause problems. A person who refuses to grieve may develop depression. A person who denies their anger may develop physical symptoms. A counselor helps people process emotions rather than avoid them.

**Emotional capacity:** Some people lack emotional vocabulary or ability to identify their emotions. They may say "I'm fine" when they're actually struggling. Counseling includes helping people develop emotional awareness and capacity.

**Emotional expression:** Some people express emotions in unhealthy ways (rage, passive aggression, emotional manipulation). Others suppress emotions entirely. A counselor helps people express emotions in healthy ways.

**Spiritual practices and emotional health:** Prayer, Scripture reading, worship, and other spiritual practices affect emotional health. Someone who engages in these practices regularly reports better mental and emotional health. A counselor should encourage spiritual practices.

## The Counselor's Responsibility

As a biblical counselor integrates understanding of physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, the counselor's responsibilities expand:

**Know your limits:** A counselor is not a physician or psychiatrist. The counselor should know when to refer to medical professionals. If someone describes symptoms that suggest a medical condition, the counselor should encourage medical evaluation.

**Ask the right questions:** A counselor should ask about physical health, sleep, exercise, nutrition, substance use, and other factors that affect wellbeing.

**Encourage whole-person care:** A counselor should encourage the counselee to care for their body through exercise, nutrition, sleep, and medical care; for their emotions through processing, expression, and healthy relationships; and for their spirit through prayer, Scripture, worship, and community.

**Recognize limitations:** A counselor should recognize that some struggles require professional help beyond counseling — medical evaluation, psychiatric care, hospitalization, intensive treatment programs. The counselor's job includes recognizing these needs and making appropriate referrals.

## PART 3 — THE COUNSELOR'S CALLING

Not everyone is called to counsel. Not everyone who is called is prepared to counsel. Being a biblical counselor is a serious calling that requires specific character qualities, spiritual maturity, personal healing, and ongoing growth. This section addresses what it takes to be an effective biblical counselor.

### Chapter 11: Character Requirements

#### The Counselor's Character

The counselor's character is more important than the counselor's techniques. A counselor with limited technique but strong character can still help people. A counselor with excellent technique but weak character will ultimately harm people.

#### 2 Timothy 2:2 (KJV):

*“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”*

Paul emphasizes choosing faithful people — people whose character is trustworthy. Technique can be learned. Character takes time to develop.

#### Essential Character Qualities

##### Humility

A humble counselor recognizes they are not the expert in the counselee's life. The counselee is. The counselor is a guide, not a savior. The counselor is a tool God uses, but God is the one who heals and transforms.

#### 1 Peter 5:5–6 (KJV):

*“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”*

A humble counselor admits when they don't know something. A humble counselor listens more than they speak. A humble counselor is willing to be wrong. A humble counselor recognizes their own limitations and refers when necessary.

##### Compassion

A compassionate counselor genuinely cares about the counselee's wellbeing. Compassion is not pity (which distances) or sympathy (which emotionally enmeshes). Compassion is genuine care combined with healthy boundaries.

#### Matthew 9:35–36 (KJV):

*“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”*

Jesus was moved with compassion when He saw suffering people. The counselor should be similarly moved with genuine care for the counselee's wellbeing.

## Honesty

A honest counselor tells the truth — even when it's hard to say and hard to hear.

### Proverbs 27:12 (KJV):

*“Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.”*

Sometimes truth wounds. But wounds from a friend who cares are ultimately healing. A counselor who tells easy lies or avoids difficult truths may feel like a friend in the moment but ultimately fails the counselee.

## Wisdom

Wisdom is the ability to apply knowledge rightly to specific situations. A wise counselor knows Scripture but also knows how to apply Scripture wisely to particular circumstances. A wise counselor knows when to speak and when to listen, when to confront and when to support, when to push and when to allow space.

### Proverbs 3:21 (KJV):

*“My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion.”*

Wisdom is cultivated through experience, reflection, and relationship with God. A counselor should continuously be developing wisdom.

## Integrity

An integrous counselor's words match their actions. An integrous counselor doesn't teach one thing and live another. An integrous counselor's private life reflects the values they promote in counseling.

### Proverbs 10:9 (KJV):

*“He that walketh uprightly walketh surely: but he that perverteth his ways shall be known.”*

A counselor who is integrous walks surely. A counselor whose private life contradicts their public message will eventually be found out and their effectiveness will be destroyed.

## Patience

Change takes time. People are complex. Progress is often slower than counselors want. A patient counselor understands this and perseveres.

### Proverbs 16:32 (KJV):

*“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”*

A counselor who is slow to anger and patient in facing difficulty is greater than one with impressive credentials but quick to frustration.

## Confidentiality

A confidential counselor keeps private what is shared in confidence. This is essential to trust and to the counseling relationship. A counselor who gossips or shares details of counselees' struggles destroys trust and violates the sacred nature of counseling.

**Proverbs 11:13 (KJV):**

*“A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”*

A faithful counselor conceals what is shared in confidence.

**Chapter 12: Spiritual Maturity Needed****What Spiritual Maturity Looks Like**

Spiritual maturity is not perfection. Spiritually mature people still sin, still struggle, still have questions. Spiritual maturity is the ongoing process of becoming more like Jesus, growing deeper in faith, and developing wisdom.

A spiritually mature counselor:

**Knows God personally.** The counselor is not just educated about God but knows God intimately. The counselor has experienced God's love, God's forgiveness, God's guidance. The counselor's faith is personal and genuine, not just professional knowledge.

**John 17:3 (KJV):**

*“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”*

Knowing God is the foundation of all spiritual maturity. A counselor must know God.

**Understands Scripture deeply.** A spiritually mature counselor has spent significant time in Scripture. Not just reading it once but studying it, meditating on it, memorizing it, wrestling with it, applying it. The counselor's understanding of Scripture is deep, not superficial.

**2 Timothy 3:15–17 (KJV):**

*“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”*

A counselor needs to know Scripture from early in their life and continue studying it throughout their life.

**Has experienced God's healing.** A spiritually mature counselor has experienced personal healing and transformation. The counselor has faced struggles, faced sin, and experienced God's grace and restoration. The counselor can speak authentically about God's healing power because they've experienced it.

**2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (KJV):**

*“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”*

A counselor who comforts others must have been comforted by God themselves.

**Lives according to biblical principles.** A spiritually mature counselor's life reflects biblical values. The counselor prioritizes God. The counselor lives honestly. The counselor pursues relationships with integrity. The counselor's

life testimony is credible.

**Proverbs 27:12 (KJV):**

*“The righteous man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.”*

A spiritually mature counselor's life is a credible testimony to God's power.

**Continues growing spiritually.** A spiritually mature counselor is not stagnant. The counselor reads, studies, prays, worships, participates in community. The counselor is always learning, always growing deeper in faith.

**Hebrews 5:12–14 (KJV):**

*“For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

A spiritually mature counselor has moved beyond basics and can handle solid truth. But they're also still learning and growing.

## Chapter 13: Personal Healing Required

### The Counselor's Own Work

A critical requirement for biblical counselors is that they have personally addressed their own wounds, struggles, and patterns. A counselor who is still in denial about their own issues will be limited in ability to help others face their issues. A counselor who has not processed their own trauma will be triggered by counselees' trauma. A counselor who has not addressed their own sin patterns will be hypocritical when confronting others' patterns.

**Luke 6:41–42 (KJV):**

*“And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye.”*

This passage speaks directly to counselors. Before trying to help others see their issues clearly, the counselor must address their own issues.

### What Personal Healing Includes

**Addressing personal trauma.** If the counselor has experienced trauma, abuse, significant loss, or other wounding, the counselor should have processed this. This doesn't mean the trauma is completely gone or that it never affects the counselor again. It means the counselor has worked through the trauma with a counselor or spiritual director and has integrated the experience.

**Resolving family of origin issues.** Many counselors' patterns trace back to their family of origin — how they were parented, family dynamics, family messages. A counselor should understand their own family of origin and how it shaped them. This often requires the counselor to have received counseling.

**Addressing personal sin patterns.** A counselor should be aware of their own sin patterns and be actively working on them. The counselor should not be hiding from their own faults while pointing out others' faults.

**Processing personal pain.** A counselor should have worked through significant personal pain — grief, loss, disappointment, failure. A counselor who has not allowed themselves to grieve or feel pain will not be able to compassionately walk with others through pain.

**Establishing personal spiritual health.** A counselor should have a healthy personal spiritual life — regular prayer, Scripture study, worship, community participation. The counselor's spiritual life should not be limited to their counseling practice but should be genuine personal faith.

### The Role of Personal Counseling

Many biblical counselors benefit from receiving counseling themselves — either from a pastor, spiritual director, or fellow counselor. This serves multiple purposes:

- It demonstrates that the counselor values counseling and believes in its effectiveness
- It provides the counselor with their own healing and growth
- It gives the counselor personal experience of what counseling is like from the counselee's perspective
- It provides accountability and support for the counselor
- It prevents the counselor from becoming isolated or disconnected

## Chapter 14: Continuous Growth

### The Commitment to Growth

Effective biblical counselors are committed to continuous growth. They don't reach a point where they've learned enough and coast. They continue learning, developing, reading, studying, reflecting, and growing throughout their counseling career.

#### Proverbs 27:12 (KJV):

*“The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise.”*

A wise counselor is willing to hear counsel and continue learning. A fool thinks they already know enough.

### Avenues for Continuous Growth

**Formal training and education.** Counselors should pursue formal training in biblical counseling. This might include certificate programs, seminary training, counseling courses, or other structured learning. Formal training provides foundation and structure.

**Reading and study.** Counselors should read widely — books on counseling, Scripture studies, books on specific issues (grief, trauma, addiction), biographies, theology. Reading expands understanding and exposes counselors to new perspectives.

**Reflection on experience.** Counselors should regularly reflect on their counseling work. What went well? What could have gone better? What did they learn from this counselee? What patterns are they noticing? This reflective practice turns experience into learning.

**Supervision and consultation.** Counselors should have access to supervision — a more experienced counselor who reviews their work, provides feedback, and helps them grow. Regular supervision is valuable throughout a

counselor's career.

**Peer learning.** Counselors should connect with other counselors. What are others learning? What challenges are others facing? Peer learning provides encouragement and perspective.

**Personal spiritual development.** Counselors should continue growing spiritually — deepening prayer life, expanding Scripture knowledge, developing spiritual disciplines. The counselor's personal spiritual growth directly affects their counseling effectiveness.

## Chapter 15: Ethical Foundations

### The Importance of Ethics

Biblical counseling happens within relationships, and relationships require ethical foundations. Ethics protects both the counselor and the counselee. Ethics ensures that counseling serves the counselee's wellbeing rather than the counselor's benefit. Ethics establishes boundaries that keep the relationship professional and focused.

### Core Ethical Principles

**Beneficence.** The counselor acts in the counselee's best interest. Everything the counselor does should be aimed at the counselee's wellbeing and growth.

**Non-maleficence.** The counselor does no harm. The counselor is careful not to damage the counselee through carelessness, inappropriate responses, boundary violations, or abuse of power.

**Autonomy.** The counselor respects the counselee's right to make their own choices. The counselor influences but does not control. The counselor proposes but does not impose. The counselor respects the counselee as an agent capable of making their own decisions.

**Confidentiality.** The counselor keeps confidential what is shared in counseling. This is fundamental to trust. The counselor does not share details of counselees' lives with others, does not gossip, does not mention counselees even without their names.

**Justice.** The counselor treats all counselees with fairness and respect regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or other characteristics.

**Integrity.** The counselor acts in alignment with their values and stated beliefs. The counselor's life and counseling reflect consistent values and honesty.

### Boundary Issues

**Professional boundaries.** A counselor maintains professional boundaries with counselees. Counseling is a professional relationship, not a friendship. The counselor does not seek the counselee's support or advice. The counselor does not burden the counselee with the counselor's personal problems. The counselor maintains emotional distance sufficient to be objective and helpful.

**Dual relationships.** A counselor avoids dual relationships where the counselor has more than one kind of relationship with the counselee. For example, a pastor should not counsel a church member who is also a close friend or family member. This dual relationship can compromise objectivity and create conflicts of interest.

**Sexual boundaries.** A counselor maintains sexual and romantic boundaries. Sexual contact between a counselor and counselee is unethical and harmful. The counselor does not flirt, does not share romantic feelings, does not engage in any sexual behavior.

**Financial boundaries.** A counselor is transparent about fees and financial arrangements. A counselor does not exploit the counselee financially or fail to charge appropriate fees.

### **Mandatory Reporting**

Counselors must understand mandatory reporting laws in their jurisdiction. In most places, counselors are mandatory reporters — if they learn of child abuse, elder abuse, or threats to harm someone, the counselor is legally required to report.

Understanding these laws and the counselor's obligations is essential.

### **Informed Consent**

Counselors should provide counselees with clear information about:

- The counselor's qualifications and training
- The nature of counseling and what to expect
- Confidentiality and its limits
- Fees if applicable
- The counselee's right to stop counseling at any time
- Any limitations or concerns

This information should be provided before or at the beginning of counseling so the counselee can make an informed choice about participation.

## PART 4 — CORE COUNSELING SKILLS

Effective biblical counseling requires specific skills. These skills are not magic formulas; they are learned techniques that, when practiced, enable counselors to be more effective. This section addresses the core skills every biblical counselor needs.

### Chapter 16: Active Listening

#### What Active Listening Is

Active listening is not passively hearing words. Active listening is focused, engaged listening where the counselor's entire attention is on the counselee's words, emotions, and meaning. Active listening involves hearing not just what is said but what is meant beneath the words.

#### Proverbs 18:15 (KJV):

*“The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge; and the ear of the wise seeketh knowledge.”*

The wise person actively seeks knowledge by listening.

#### Elements of Active Listening

**Undivided attention.** The counselor gives the counselee their full attention. No phones. No distractions. No thinking about the next appointment or personal concerns. Full presence with the counselee.

**Eye contact.** The counselor makes appropriate eye contact. This communicates that the counselor is present and interested.

**Open body language.** The counselor's body is open and receptive — not crossed arms, not turned away, not closed posture. The counselor's body communicates openness.

**Minimal interruption.** The counselor allows the counselee to speak without interrupting. The counselor waits until the counselee has finished before responding.

**Reflecting back.** The counselor periodically reflects back what they're hearing to ensure understanding. "So what I'm hearing is... Is that correct?"

**Noting emotion.** The counselor pays attention not just to the facts but to the emotions. "You seem frustrated when you talk about this." "I notice sadness in your voice."

**Staying with the counselee.** The counselor doesn't jump to solutions or try to fix things immediately. The counselor stays with the counselee in their experience.

#### Benefits of Active Listening

When a counselor listens actively, several things happen:

- The counselee feels heard and understood
- The counselor gains accurate understanding of the situation
- The counselee often naturally moves toward deeper reflection and understanding
- Trust builds in the relationship

- The counselor is less likely to misinterpret or make assumptions

**Active listening is often all a person needs.** Sometimes people's problems are largely solved by having someone listen, validate, and reflect back what they're experiencing.

## Chapter 17: Asking Powerful Questions

### The Power of Questions

Questions invite people to think, reflect, and go deeper. Questions are more effective than statements for most counseling situations. A statement tells. A question invites the counselee to discover.

#### Proverbs 20:5 (KJV):

*"Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out."*

Questions draw out the deep things. A wise counselor asks questions that help the counselee access their own deep understanding and wisdom.

### Types of Questions

**Open-ended questions.** These questions invite extensive response and allow the counselee to determine direction. "Tell me about your family." "How did that make you feel?" "What happened next?"

Open-ended questions are generally more useful than closed questions because they allow the counselee to share fully rather than limiting them to yes/no responses.

**Clarifying questions.** These questions help the counselor understand more clearly. "Can you give me an example?" "What do you mean by that?" "Help me understand how that connects to what you said earlier?"

**Probing questions.** These questions go deeper. "What lies beneath that feeling?" "What do you believe about yourself in that situation?" "What are you afraid will happen?"

**Reframing questions.** These questions offer a different perspective. "How might God see this situation?" "What might be the opportunity here?" "What could you learn from this?"

**Solution-oriented questions.** These questions move toward solutions. "What would need to change?" "If you could change one thing, what would it be?" "What would it look like if this were different?"

### Effective Questions in Different Situations

**When someone is stuck:** "What have you already tried?" "What's getting in the way?" "What would help you move forward?"

**When someone is in denial:** "Help me understand how you make sense of this?" "What do you see as the problem?" "How is this situation affecting your life?"

**When someone is angry:** "What are you most angry about?" "What's the disappointment underneath the anger?" "What would need to happen for you to feel heard?"

**When someone is depressed:** "When did this feeling start?" "What happened around that time?" "What thoughts go through your mind?"

**When someone is struggling with a decision:** "What are your options?" "What would each option mean?" "What does God's Word say about this?"

## Chapter 18: Discernment

### What Discernment Is

Discernment is the ability to perceive spiritual truth and reality accurately. A discerning counselor senses beneath the surface. A discerning counselor recognizes when someone is being dishonest about their experience. A discerning counselor senses spiritual forces at work. A discerning counselor distinguishes between what is real and what is false.

Discernment is not mind-reading. Discernment is the result of paying careful attention, listening to the Holy Spirit, and having experience with people and situations.

#### 1 Corinthians 2:14–15 (KJV):

*"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man."*

Spiritual discernment comes from the Holy Spirit. A counselor open to the Spirit's guidance will have greater discernment.

### Developing Discernment

**Prayer.** A counselor should pray regularly for discernment. "God, give me wisdom to see what's really happening here. Help me perceive truth. Guide my understanding."

**Scripture study.** The more a counselor knows Scripture, the more patterns and spiritual truths the counselor will recognize.

**Experience.** Over time, working with many counselees, a counselor develops patterns of understanding. The counselor begins to recognize common patterns, common lies, common spiritual dynamics.

**Supervision.** A supervisor can help a counselor develop discernment by pointing out things the counselor might have missed and helping the counselor see patterns.

**Personal spiritual development.** A counselor's own spiritual maturity affects discernment. The more connected to God the counselor is, the more attuned to spiritual reality the counselor will be.

### Using Discernment

When discernment alerts the counselor to something, how should the counselor respond?

**Carefully test it.** Don't assume your discernment is always correct. What are you sensing? Why do you sense it? Is there other evidence?

**Bring it gently.** If you sense dishonesty or another issue, address it gently, not as accusation. "I'm sensing something's not matching here. Help me understand..."

**Test it against Scripture.** Does what you're discerning align with Scripture? Is it consistent with God's character?

**Pray about it.** Bring what you're discerning to God in prayer. Ask God to confirm or clarify.

## Chapter 19: Identifying Root Issues

### Why Root Issues Matter

A counselee comes in with presenting problem: "I'm depressed." "I struggle with anger." "My marriage is struggling." But often the presenting problem is a symptom of a deeper root issue.

A person may be depressed because of unprocessed grief, false beliefs about their worth, or disconnection from God.

A person may struggle with anger because of violated expectations, powerlessness in their life, or unaddressed hurt.

A couple's marriage may be struggling because one or both partners have unhealed wounds from previous relationships, false beliefs about relationships, or different spiritual orientations.

The counselor's job includes moving from the presenting problem to the root issue.

### Process for Identifying Root Issues

**Ask about the problem's history.** "How long has this been happening?" "When did it start?" "What was happening in your life when this began?" These questions help identify when the problem emerged and what might have triggered it.

**Explore family patterns.** "Did anyone in your family struggle with this?" "How did your family handle this kind of issue?" "What messages did you receive from your family about this?" Family patterns often explain current struggles.

**Identify beliefs.** "What do you believe about yourself?" "What do you believe about God?" "What do you believe about relationships?" False beliefs often underlie struggles.

**Trace to spiritual roots.** "What spiritual issue might be underneath?" "Is this rooted in sin, false belief, unresolved trauma, or spiritual disconnection?"

**Connect dots.** Help the counselee see connections. "I'm noticing that every time we talk about vulnerability, you get angry. What's the connection between vulnerability and anger for you?"

### Different Root Issues

**Unresolved trauma.** Someone who was abused will respond differently to situations that remind them of the abuse. Trauma needs to be identified and processed.

**False beliefs.** Someone who believes they're worthless will self-sabotage, refuse compliments, make self-deprecating choices. False beliefs need to be replaced with truth.

**Unconfessed sin.** Someone hiding sin will experience guilt, shame, and internal conflict. Sin needs to be confessed and repented.

**Unmet needs.** Someone with unmet needs (need for belonging, significance, security) will pursue those needs through unhealthy means. Needs should be identified and addressed.

**Broken relationships.** Someone with a broken relationship with God will experience spiritual disconnection affecting everything. This fundamental relationship needs repair.

## Chapter 20: Goal Setting

### Why Goals Matter

Clear goals give direction and purpose to counseling. Without goals, counseling can meander without progress. Goals help both counselor and counselee understand what they're working toward.

#### Proverbs 29:18 (KJV):

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."*

Without vision (goals), people perish — counseling without direction tends toward failure.

### Characteristics of Good Counseling Goals

**Specific.** "Feel better" is not specific. "Be able to fall asleep without anxiety and sleep through the night" is specific. Specific goals are clear and measurable.

**Achievable.** Goals should be challenging but achievable. A goal that is impossible will discourage. A goal that is too easy won't create meaningful change.

**Rooted in Scripture.** Counseling goals should align with biblical values and God's design. The goal is not just what the counselee wants but what is good and right according to God's Word.

**Collaborative.** The counselee should participate in setting goals. The counselor doesn't impose goals. The counselee should feel ownership of the goals.

**Measurable.** How will the counselee and counselor know if the goal has been reached? What would be different? How would you see evidence of progress?

### Types of Goals

**Behavioral goals.** Goals about changed behavior. "I will attend church twice a month." "I will exercise three times a week." "I will journal about my feelings four times a week."

**Emotional goals.** Goals about emotional health. "I will be able to feel sadness without being overwhelmed." "I will feel less anxious in social situations." "I will feel peace about my past."

**Relational goals.** Goals about relationships. "I will communicate more honestly with my spouse." "I will repair my relationship with my parent." "I will maintain appropriate boundaries with a manipulative friend."

**Spiritual goals.** Goals about spiritual growth. "I will read Scripture daily." "I will develop a prayer life." "I will understand God's forgiveness more deeply." "I will trust God more with my finances."

**Identity goals.** Goals about identity and beliefs. "I will see myself as loved by God." "I will believe I'm capable and valuable." "I will understand myself as more than my past failures."

## Chapter 21: Biblical Truth Application

### Moving from Head to Heart to Hands

Truth only becomes transformative when it moves from intellectual understanding (head) to emotional belief (heart) to daily practice (hands).

A person can intellectually understand "God loves me" but not emotionally believe it. They might say "I know God loves me" but feel like a failure and live as though they're unlovable.

A person can emotionally experience God's love in a worship setting but not practice it in daily life. They might feel God's love on Sunday but worry about finances all week, not practicing trust.

The counselor helps truth move from understanding through belief to practice.

### Application Strategies

**Personal testimony.** Share how this truth has worked in your own life. "I struggled with fear for years. Then I really understood that God is my refuge. Now when I'm afraid, I go to God first instead of panicking."

**Real-world examples.** Help the counselee imagine how this truth would work in their actual life. "You're anxious about the job interview. If you really believed God is in control, what would that look like? How would you prepare differently? How would you feel?"

**Scripture meditation.** Have the counselee spend time with the specific verse — read it multiple times, pray it, memorize it, return to it throughout the day. Truth becomes integrated through repeated exposure.

**Practical exercises.** Give the counselee concrete practices to apply the truth. "When you notice anxiety, pause and pray Philippians 4:6–7. Write down what you're anxious about and what you're trusting God with."

**Accountability.** Follow up on whether the counselee is applying the truth. Ask what happened. Celebrate progress. Problem-solve obstacles.

**Community support.** Connect the counselee with others who live out this truth. Others modeling the truth make it more believable and achievable.

## PART 5 — COUNSELING METHODOLOGIES

This section addresses the actual counseling process — how counselors structure and conduct counseling to move from initial meeting through resolution.

### Chapter 22: The Counseling Process

#### Phases of Counseling

**Phase 1: Assessment and Relationship Building (Sessions 1–2).** The counselor and counselee meet, establish relationship, understand the problem and history.

**Phase 2: Goal Setting and Planning (Session 2–3).** The counselor and counselee establish goals and develop a plan for addressing the issues.

**Phase 3: Intervention and Application (Sessions 3–ongoing).** The counselor helps the counselee understand the root issues, apply Scripture, develop new patterns, and work toward goals.

**Phase 4: Consolidation and Closure (Final sessions).** The counselor helps the counselee consolidate gains, plan for maintaining progress, and conclude counseling.

#### Session Structure

While every session is unique based on the counselee's needs, a general structure often works well:

**Opening (first 5 minutes).** Greet the counselee warmly. Establish comfort and safety. Perhaps ask a light question to transition into the session.

**Problem exploration (10–15 minutes).** Ask about what's been happening since the last session (if not the first session) or what brought the counselee to counseling (if the first session). Listen actively. Take notes. Allow the counselee to share.

**Deeper assessment (10–15 minutes).** Ask clarifying questions. Explore the root issues beneath the presenting problem. Understand the counselee's beliefs, history, and context.

**Application of Scripture/truth (10–15 minutes).** Share relevant Scripture or biblical truth. Discuss how this truth applies to the counselee's situation. Help the counselee understand the connection between the truth and their struggle.

**Developing action steps (5–10 minutes).** Help the counselee identify specific steps they'll take before the next session. Make these concrete and achievable.

**Prayer (3–5 minutes).** Close with prayer. Pray for the counselee, their situation, and their growth. Pray for God's guidance and transformation.

#### Session Length

Most counseling sessions are 45 minutes to an hour. This is enough time to make progress but not so long that it becomes overwhelming.

### Chapter 23: First Session Foundations

## The Importance of the First Session

The first session sets the tone. In the first session, the counselee decides whether they trust the counselor, whether they feel safe, whether they're willing to return. A good first session builds trust and establishes foundation for counseling.

### Elements of an Effective First Session

**Warm welcome.** The counselee should feel welcomed, not like a burden. Offer refreshment if possible. Make eye contact. Smile. Create an atmosphere of care.

**Clear structure.** Explain how the session will work. "We'll talk about what's brought you here, understand your situation, and at the end we'll talk about next steps." People feel safer when they know what to expect.

**Confidentiality explanation.** Explain confidentiality and its limits. "What you share is private and I won't tell anyone. The exceptions are if you tell me you're going to hurt yourself or someone else, or if you disclose abuse of a child or vulnerable adult. In those cases, I'm required to report."

**Thorough listening.** In the first session, mostly listen. Ask questions. Take notes. Let the counselee share their story. The counselee should do most of the talking.

**Problem assessment.** Understand the presenting problem — what brought the counselee. Ask how long this has been happening, what makes it better or worse, what they've tried.

**History.** Understand briefly the counselee's history — family background, major life events, spiritual background. This context helps understand the current problem.

**Spirituality.** Assess the counselee's spiritual state. Are they a Christian? What's their church involvement? How's their relationship with God? How do they view Scripture?

**Safety assessment.** Assess for danger. Is the counselee suicidal? Homicidal? In danger of harm from someone else? In danger of harming someone? If safety is a concern, address it directly.

**Hope.** By the end of the first session, the counselee should have some hope that things can improve. Share what you're hearing: "It sounds like you've been carrying this alone. You're right that things need to change. I believe God can work in this situation."

**Next steps.** Explain what happens next. When will they meet again? What should they do between sessions? What will be discussed next session?

### Mistakes to Avoid in the First Session

**Jumping to advice too quickly.** The counselee needs to feel heard and understood before receiving advice. Listen and understand first.

**Sharing too much about yourself.** The first session is about the counselee, not about the counselor. Don't spend time on your own stories or experiences.

**Giving false hope.** Don't promise things will be fixed quickly or easily. Be honest about what change requires.

**Being judgmental.** Even if the counselee has done something wrong, don't communicate judgment. Communicate acceptance and hope for change.

**Overwhelming the counselee.** Don't give too much information or too many steps. Keep it simple.

## Chapter 24: Building the Relationship

### The Relationship is Primary

Many theories about counseling disagree on specifics, but most agree: the relationship between counselor and counselee is crucial. A counselee in good relationship with a counselor will work harder, be more honest, and experience greater transformation.

#### Proverbs 27:12 (KJV):

*"Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel."*

Counseling is sweetest when there's friendship and genuine care underneath the professionalism. Good relationships create safety for honesty.

### Building Trust

**Consistency.** Show up. Be on time. Follow through on what you say you'll do. Consistency builds trust.

**Honesty.** Be honest even when it's hard. If you made a mistake, admit it. If you don't know something, say so. If you think the counselee is making a poor choice, say so kindly but clearly.

**Empathy.** Understand the counselee's experience. Don't dismiss their feelings or judge their responses. "That makes sense. I would feel the same way."

**Respect.** Treat the counselee as an equal person of worth. Don't be condescending. Don't dismiss their concerns. Respect their autonomy and right to make their own choices.

**Boundaries.** Maintain healthy boundaries. These boundaries protect the relationship and keep it professional and focused. Appropriate boundaries actually build trust because they communicate care for the counselee.

**Celebration.** Celebrate progress. Notice growth. Encourage effort. Positive recognition of change motivates continued work.

### Repairing Ruptures

In any relationship, ruptures happen. A word said wrong. A misunderstanding. An offense. When ruptures happen, the counselor should repair them.

**Acknowledge the issue:** "I realize I said something that hurt you. I'm sorry. That wasn't right."

**Take responsibility:** Don't excuse or defend. Own your part.

**Repair:** "I want to make this right. What do you need from me?"

When a counselor repairs ruptures, it actually strengthens the relationship because it demonstrates humility and genuine care.

## Chapter 25: Addressing Core Issues

### Moving from Surface to Depth

Often the issue the counselee initially presents is not the deepest issue. The counselor's job includes helping the counselee move from surface complaints toward addressing the core issue.

**Example:** A counselee comes complaining about conflict with their boss. As the counselor explores, it emerges that the counselee feels disrespected. Deeper still, the counselee struggles with self-worth. The core issue is not the boss; it's the counselee's identity and worth. Addressing this core issue is more important than problem-solving the boss conflict.

### Techniques for Going Deeper

**The "Five Whys."** Ask why repeatedly, moving deeper with each question.

*Counselee:* "I'm anxious about my job performance." *Counselor:* "Why?" *Counselee:* "Because I might fail." *Counselor:* "Why would failing matter so much?" *Counselee:* "Because I'd feel like a failure." *Counselor:* "Why would that matter?" *Counselee:* "Because I believe my value depends on my success." *Counselor:* "And what do you believe about your value?"

This technique helps identify false beliefs underlying the problem.

**Connecting to faith.** "How is God involved in this?" "What does God's Word say about this?" "What lies might you be believing instead of God's truth?" These questions connect the problem to spiritual reality.

**Identifying patterns.** "I'm noticing this pattern — every time you feel criticized, you withdraw. Is that accurate?" "This situation reminds me of something you mentioned earlier about your father. Do you see a connection?" Patterns often reveal core issues.

**Exploring the cost.** "What is this costing you — in your relationships, your health, your peace?" Identifying the cost of the current pattern can motivate change.

## Chapter 26: Developing New Patterns

### Interrupting Old Patterns

Old patterns are familiar and automatic. Even if they're destructive, they're what the person knows. Developing new patterns requires conscious effort.

**Awareness.** First, the counselee must become aware of the pattern. "What do I notice about this pattern? When does it happen? What triggers it? What does it feel like?"

**Understanding.** The counselee should understand why the pattern developed. "What need was this pattern meeting? What was it protecting me from?"

**Alternative.** The counselee should identify a new pattern to practice instead. "What would be a healthier response? What would I do differently?"

**Practice.** The counselee should practice the new pattern. This requires effort and repetition. Old patterns are strong and will pull the person back.

**Reinforcement.** The counselor should reinforce the new pattern. Celebrate when the counselee practices it. Problem-solve when they slip back into the old pattern.

### Creating Accountability

People are more likely to follow through when someone is checking in on them. The counselor provides this accountability.

"How did you do with the plan we discussed? What went well? What was challenging? Let's problem-solve the obstacles."

Accountability works best when:

- The goals are clear and specific
- The counselee is willing and committed
- The counselor is encouraging and non-condemning
- Progress is celebrated
- Obstacles are problem-solved rather than shamed

## Chapter 27: Closure and Ongoing Support

### Recognizing When to Close

Counseling should have an endpoint — not forever counseling but counseling that moves toward resolution and closure. When should closure begin?

- The counselee has achieved or is very close to achieving their goals
- The counselee demonstrates new patterns and understanding
- The counselee is ready to move forward without regular counseling support
- A natural break point has arrived (end of semester, transition, etc.)

### Preparing for Closure

Don't just stop coming. Prepare for closure.

**Discuss readiness.** "I'm sensing you're ready to move forward without weekly counseling. How do you feel about that?"

**Review progress.** Look back at where the counselee started and where they are now. Celebrate growth.

**Identify strategies for moving forward.** "What will you do when you face challenges? Who will you talk to? How will you remember the truths we've discussed?"

**Plan for ongoing support.** Closure from regular counseling doesn't mean total disconnection. Plan for how the counselee will maintain support — through church community, small group, prayer partner, family relationships.

**Discuss possibility of return.** "If you face significant struggles in the future, you can always come back. This ending is not goodbye forever; it's transition to a new season."

### Ongoing Support After Counseling

**Connection to community.** Connect the counselee with church, small group, or other community that will provide ongoing support and accountability.

**Prayer partners.** Encourage the counselee to develop prayer partnerships with others who will pray for them and hold them accountable.

**Scripture engagement.** Encourage the counselee to maintain regular Scripture engagement to continue spiritual growth.

**Spiritual disciplines.** Encourage the counselee to maintain spiritual practices — prayer, worship, Bible study.

**Accountability structures.** Help the counselee establish accountability for maintaining new patterns and avoiding slipping back.

**Return option.** Make clear that the counselee can return if significant struggles emerge.

## PART 6 — ADDRESSING SPECIFIC ISSUES

Biblical counseling addresses real human problems — grief, anxiety, depression, anger, shame, addiction, relationship conflict, sexual issues, trauma, and abuse. This section provides biblical frameworks and counseling approaches for each issue.

### Chapter 28: Grief and Loss

#### Understanding Grief

Grief is the emotional and spiritual response to loss. Loss comes in many forms: death of a loved one, end of a relationship, loss of a job, loss of health, loss of dreams or expectations.

Grief is not a problem to fix quickly. Grief is a process to move through. A counselor's job is not to eliminate grief but to help someone grieve well — to process the loss, honor what was, and eventually integrate the loss into their life story.

#### The Grieving Process

While people grieve differently, there are common phases:

**Shock and denial.** "This can't be real." "I must be dreaming." The mind's way of gradually accepting what it cannot accept all at once.

**Anger.** "Why me?" "This isn't fair." "How could they/God/life do this?" Anger at the injustice or reality of the loss.

**Bargaining.** "If only..." "Maybe if I had..." Attempts to negotiate with reality or with God, trying to find a way the loss could be undone.

**Sadness.** Deep sadness as the reality of the loss settles in. Crying. Feeling empty. Missing the person or what was lost.

**Acceptance.** The loss is accepted as real. The person can think about what was lost without being overwhelmed. The loss is integrated into the person's story.

**Reintegration.** The person moves forward — not forgetting but living with the loss as part of their past.

#### Counseling Someone Who Is Grieving

**Let them grieve.** Don't try to stop the tears or rush the process. Let the person cry, be sad, express anger. Grieving is healthy and necessary.

**Validate the loss.** "This loss matters. It makes sense that you're grieving." Don't minimize the loss.

**Don't use false platitudes.** "Everything happens for a reason." "They're in a better place." "God needed another angel." These statements minimize the loss. Instead use: "I'm sorry for your loss." "This is awful." "I'm here for you."

**Listen.** Let the person talk about what they're feeling, remembering, struggling with. Listen more than you speak.

**Don't push closure.** Don't say "It's time to move on" or "They would want you to be happy." Grief takes time. Let it take the time it needs.

**Connect to faith.** Help the person see God with them in the grief. "God grieves with you. God is not punishing you with this loss. God is present in your pain."

**Provide practical support.** Help with meals, childcare, or other practical needs if possible. Grieving people often can't handle these tasks.

**Connect to community.** Help the grieving person connect with others who will support them — church community, support group, family.

### **Biblical Foundation for Grief**

**Jesus wept. John 11:35 (KJV):**

*"Jesus wept."*

Jesus experienced grief and allowed himself to cry. Grief and tears are not un-Christian.

**Mourning is blessed. Matthew 5:4 (KJV):**

*"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."*

Jesus blessed those who mourn. Grief is not something to be ashamed of. Those who grieve will experience God's comfort.

**God grieves with us. Romans 12:15 (KJV):**

*"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."*

We are called to enter into others' grief. God does the same. God grieves with us.

## **Chapter 29: Anxiety and Fear**

### **Understanding Anxiety**

Anxiety is the fear response triggered when someone perceives threat. Some anxiety is appropriate — anxiety alerts us to danger and motivates appropriate action. Excessive anxiety — anxiety that is frequent, intense, and triggered by non-dangerous situations — becomes a problem.

Anxiety manifests physically (racing heart, trembling, sweating), emotionally (dread, fear, panic), and cognitively (catastrophic thinking, worrying, difficulty concentrating).

### **Root Causes of Anxiety**

**False beliefs about God.** "God is not powerful enough to help me." "God doesn't care about my problems." "God will abandon me."

**Attempts to control.** The person is trying to control things that cannot be controlled. They're trying to prevent every possible bad outcome. This is exhausting and impossible.

**Unprocessed trauma.** Someone who has experienced trauma may have hypervigilance — constant scanning for danger. Their nervous system is stuck in alarm mode.

**Lack of trust.** "I can't trust God to take care of me." This lack of trust drives the need to control and manage everything personally.

**Physical causes.** Thyroid problems, hormone imbalances, caffeine overuse, sleep deprivation, and other physical factors can contribute to or cause anxiety.

### Biblical Response to Anxiety

#### Philippians 4:6–7 (KJV):

*“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and your minds through Christ Jesus.”*

Paul gives a clear prescription for anxiety: instead of anxiety, bring concerns to God in prayer with thanksgiving. God's peace will guard the heart and mind.

The process is:

- Recognize the anxiety
- Stop and pray instead
- Make the request known to God
- Include thanksgiving
- Experience God's peace

#### 1 Peter 5:7 (KJV):

*“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”*

Peter urges people to cast their cares on God because He cares. This is not denying the problem. This is transferring the burden to God.

### Counseling Someone with Anxiety

**Identify triggers.** What situations trigger anxiety? What times of day? What thoughts precede anxiety?

**Challenge false beliefs.** "You said you're afraid God will abandon you. What does Scripture say about that?" Help the person replace false beliefs with biblical truth.

**Teach anxiety management techniques.** Deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, grounding techniques — these can reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety.

**Encourage prayer.** When anxiety comes, pause and pray instead of spiraling in worry.

**Develop trust in God.** Help the person remember times God has been faithful. Build confidence in God's character and care.

**Address physical factors.** Ask about sleep, exercise, caffeine, nutrition. Encourage good physical health.

**Connect to community.** Anxiety is often worse in isolation. Connection with others provides comfort and perspective.

## Chapter 30: Depression and Hopelessness

### Understanding Depression

Depression is more than sadness. Depression is a loss of hope combined with loss of interest in life. Depression includes cognitive changes (hopelessness, negative thinking), emotional changes (numbness, emptiness, despair), physical changes (fatigue, sleep changes, changes in appetite), and behavioral changes (withdrawal, inactivity).

Depression can be situational (responding to loss or difficulty), it can be related to brain chemistry, or it can be spiritual (disconnection from God, unconfessed sin).

### Root Causes of Depression

**Unprocessed grief.** Someone who has not grieved a loss may develop depression. The sadness that should be felt and released instead accumulates.

**False beliefs.** "I'm worthless." "Nothing will change." "I'm a failure." False beliefs about self, circumstances, and future feed depression.

**Spiritual disconnection.** Someone disconnected from God often experiences depression. The spiritual hunger is unmet; the connection is broken.

**Unconfessed sin.** Guilt and shame from unconfessed sin accumulates and manifests as depression.

**Biochemical factors.** Brain chemistry (neurotransmitter imbalances), hormonal factors, medical conditions, and medication side effects can all cause depression.

**Trauma or abuse.** Someone who has experienced trauma or abuse may develop depression as a response.

### Biblical Response to Depression

#### Psalm 34:18 (KJV):

*"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."*

God is near to those who are broken-hearted. God doesn't abandon those who are depressed. God draws near.

#### Psalm 42:5 (KJV):

*"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance."*

Even in depression, hope is available. The psalmist questions their sadness and redirects toward hope in God.

#### Hebrews 13:5–6 (KJV):

*"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."*

God promises never to leave. This promise is for those in depression too.

### Counseling Someone with Depression

**Take it seriously.** Don't minimize depression as "just be positive" or "pray it away." Depression is serious and requires genuine help.

**Assess for suicide risk.** "Are you thinking about hurting yourself? Do you have a plan?" Take any suicidal ideation seriously.

**Encourage professional evaluation.** Depression may have a medical component. Encourage the person to see a physician and possibly a psychiatrist.

**Help identify root causes.** "When did this start? What was happening then? Have you experienced losses? Are there false beliefs beneath this?"

**Replace false beliefs with truth.** Help the person identify the negative beliefs driving depression and replace them with biblical truth.

**Encourage engagement.** Depression tells you nothing matters, but engagement (even when it doesn't feel good) helps. Encourage activity, community, service.

**Provide hope.** "Depression lies. It tells you nothing will change, but that's not true. With help and time, things do change."

**Connect to community.** Encourage church involvement, support groups, meaningful relationships.

**Include spiritual practices.** Prayer, Scripture reading, worship — these all help but may feel impossible when depressed. Start small. One verse a day. Thirty seconds of prayer.

## Chapter 31: Anger and Bitterness

### Understanding Anger

Anger is a legitimate emotion. Anger can be righteous when it responds to genuine injustice or wrong. Anger becomes destructive when it is misdirected, excessive, or used to harm.

Anger often masks deeper emotions — hurt, fear, powerlessness, shame. The person who is angry is usually also hurting.

### Root Causes of Anger

**Violated expectations.** When things don't go as expected, anger often erupts. The person had expectations and reality violated them.

**Powerlessness.** When someone feels powerless, anger can emerge as an attempt to regain control or express the frustration of powerlessness.

**Hurt.** Someone who has been hurt often responds with anger as a protection. The anger keeps people at distance so they can't hurt again.

**Injustice.** When someone experiences or witnesses injustice, anger is a normal response.

**Pride.** Pride can fuel anger. When someone feels disrespected or their reputation is threatened, anger can emerge.

### Biblical Response to Anger

#### Ephesians 4:26–27 (KJV):

*"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil."*

Anger itself is not sin. But allowing anger to persist and fester is dangerous. The instruction is to deal with anger before the sun goes down — to process it quickly.

**Proverbs 15:1 (KJV):**

*"A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."*

How we respond to situations affects the outcome. A soft answer can turn away anger, but harsh words escalate it.

**Proverbs 29:11 (KJV):**

*"A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards."*

A wise person doesn't unleash all their anger immediately. They take time to process and respond wisely.

**Counseling Someone with Anger**

**Validate the anger.** Don't dismiss it or judge it. "You have a right to be angry about that."

**Help identify the underlying emotion.** "Beneath your anger, what are you feeling? Hurt? Powerlessness? Fear?"

**Distinguish righteous from unrighteous anger.** "Is your anger directed at actual wrong that needs to be addressed?" (Righteous) "Or are you angry because things didn't go as you wanted?" (Unrighteous)

**Develop anger management techniques.** Taking a break when angry, exercise, journaling — these can help process anger without harming.

**Address unrealistic expectations.** If the anger stems from violated expectations, help the person develop more realistic expectations.

**Process hurt.** If the anger masks hurt, help the person grieve and process the hurt beneath.

**Develop forgiveness.** Help the person move from anger toward forgiveness. Unforgiveness is a prison the person locks themselves in.

**Bitterness**

When anger persists long-term without being resolved, it can develop into bitterness — a chronic resentment and hardness of heart.

**Hebrews 12:15 (KJV):**

*"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled."*

Bitterness is described as a root — it grows deeper and affects others. Bitterness is related to failing to receive God's grace.

Addressing bitterness requires helping the person receive God's forgiveness and extend forgiveness to others.

**Chapter 32: Shame and Guilt****Understanding Shame and Guilt**

Guilt is about what you did. "I did something wrong." Shame is about who you are. "I am wrong. I am bad. I am defective."

Guilt can be appropriate — it signals violation of conscience or wrong action. Shame often involves false beliefs about identity and worth.

### Sources of Shame

**Abuse or trauma.** When someone has been abused or traumatized, they often internalize shame as though the abuse was their fault or they are damaged.

**Judgment from others.** When someone has been judged, criticized, or rejected by important people, shame can develop. "I'm not acceptable."

**Family messages.** Families communicate messages about worth and acceptability. "You're not good enough." "You're the problem child." "You never do anything right." These messages generate shame.

**Mistakes and failures.** When someone makes a significant mistake or experiences significant failure, shame can develop. "I'm a failure."

**Characteristics that differ.** Someone who is different (appearance, abilities, interests, sexuality) may experience shame about being different.

### Biblical Response to Shame

#### Romans 8:1 (KJV):

*"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."*

In Christ, there is no condemnation. This is the antidote to shame. For those in Christ, the verdict is already in: not guilty, not defective, not condemned.

#### Psalm 27:10 (KJV):

*"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up."*

Even when earthly relationships fail, God does not reject. God receives us.

#### 1 John 1:9 (KJV):

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

For shame rooted in actual sin, confession leads to cleansing. The shame has no legitimate ground.

### Counseling Someone with Shame

**Recognize the difference.** Help the person distinguish between guilt (about actions) and shame (about identity). "What you did was wrong and you can repent. But that doesn't make you wrong or unacceptable."

**Investigate the source.** "Where did you learn that you're not acceptable? Who told you that you're not good enough?"

**Separate the shame from the person.** "What happened to you was wrong. But you are not responsible for it. What was done to you is not a reflection of who you are."

**Replace shame messages.** Help the person replace the shame messages they received with biblical truth.

Instead of: "I'm not good enough" Biblical truth: "I'm valuable and accepted in Christ"

Instead of: "I'm damaged" Biblical truth: "God can heal and restore me"

Instead of: "I'm unlovable" Biblical truth: "God loves me completely and accepts me"

**Provide unconditional positive regard.** In the counseling relationship, demonstrate acceptance. Don't judge or criticize. Show the person what unconditional care looks like.

**Connect to community.** Shame thrives in isolation. Connection with others who accept and affirm helps dissolve shame.

## Chapter 33: Addiction and Compulsion

### Understanding Addiction

Addiction is the compulsive use of a substance (alcohol, drugs, food, etc.) or the compulsive engagement in a behavior (gambling, sex, work, exercise, etc.) despite negative consequences. The addicted person continues the behavior despite wanting to stop, despite knowing the harm it causes.

Addiction is often rooted in idolatry — making something other than God supreme in one's life. The substance or behavior promises to meet a need that only God can meet.

### Root Causes of Addiction

**Unmet needs.** The substance or behavior is meeting a need — numbing pain, providing comfort, creating pleasure, reducing anxiety. Until the underlying need is addressed, the addiction continues.

**Unprocessed trauma.** Someone who has experienced trauma often uses substances or behaviors to numb the pain and manage the symptoms.

**False beliefs.** "I can't survive without this." "This is the only thing that makes me happy." "I'm helpless." False beliefs feed addiction.

**Spiritual disconnection.** Someone disconnected from God often fills that void with something else. Without spiritual connection, the person searches for something to satisfy.

**Genetic predisposition.** Some people have genetic predisposition to addiction. This is not an excuse but a reality that affects treatment approach.

### Biblical Response to Addiction

#### Romans 6:12–14 (KJV):

*"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace."*

The person is not enslaved to sin. The person who has died to sin and been made alive in Christ is not bound by addiction. Sin doesn't have to have dominion.

#### 1 Corinthians 10:13 (KJV):

*“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”*

God provides a way of escape. The addict doesn't have to yield to temptation.

### **2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV):**

*“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”*

In Christ, the person is new. Old patterns don't have to continue.

### **Counseling Someone with Addiction**

**Take it seriously.** Addiction is serious. It requires significant intervention, often including professional help, support groups, and community accountability.

**Address medical components.** Some addictions have physical components requiring medical treatment. Encourage medical evaluation and professional treatment programs.

**Identify root needs.** "What need is this substance/behavior meeting for you? What are you avoiding? What comfort are you seeking?"

**Replace with healthier meeting of needs.** Help the person find healthier ways to meet the underlying needs. Instead of alcohol to numb pain — healthy grieving and connection with others. Instead of food to comfort — spiritual comfort and community support. Instead of work to find significance — spiritual purpose and healthy relationships.

**Develop accountability.** Accountability from counselor, support group, church community — these provide external structure to support the internal commitment.

**Address spiritual disconnection.** Help the person reconnect with God. God is the only source that can ultimately satisfy.

**Prepare for withdrawal and relapse.** Warn the person that withdrawal will be difficult and relapse is likely. Plan ahead for how to handle triggers and relapse urges.

**Connect to support community.** 12-step programs, church communities, support groups all provide community support for recovery.

## **Chapter 34: Relationship Conflict**

### **Understanding Conflict**

Conflict is a normal part of relationships. Two people with different perspectives, needs, and histories will sometimes have conflicting desires and expectations. The question is not whether conflict exists but how the conflict is handled.

### **Common Sources of Conflict**

**Unmet expectations.** One person expected one thing; the other person didn't deliver.

**Different values.** Partners have different core values about money, time, parenting, spirituality, etc.

**Poor communication.** People are not clearly expressing needs or hearing each other accurately.

**Different personality styles.** One person is introvert, the other extrovert. One person is structured, the other spontaneous. Differences can create friction.

**Past wounds.** Someone bringing wounds from previous relationships may respond defensively or trigger conflict.

**Power struggles.** When one or both people are trying to control or dominate, conflict erupts.

## Biblical Foundation for Conflict Resolution

### Matthew 5:23–24 (KJV):

*“Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”*

Resolving conflict is so important that Jesus says it takes priority even over worship. Relationship comes first.

### Ephesians 4:25–27 (KJV):

*“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.”*

Truth-telling, managing anger, addressing conflicts quickly — these prevent conflict from festering.

### Colossians 3:14–15 (KJV):

*“And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.”*

Approaching conflict from a place of love and seeking peace as the goal transforms how conflict is handled.

## Counseling Couples in Conflict

**Create safety.** Both people need to feel safe expressing their perspective without fear of judgment or attack. The counselor sets the tone for respectful conversation.

**Help each person understand the other's perspective.** Often in conflict, people are so focused on their own position they don't understand their partner's perspective. Help each person truly understand: "What I hear you saying is... Is that right? Help me understand why this matters to you."

**Address destructive communication patterns.** Name when you observe criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stonewalling (the four horsemen that predict divorce). Help the couple communicate more constructively.

**Find the underlying needs.** Beneath most conflict is an unmet need. "I hear the disagreement about money. Beneath that, what do you need? Security? Freedom? Respect?"

**Work toward compromise.** Help the couple find solutions where each person's needs are partially met and both feel heard.

**Teach conflict resolution skills.** Teach the couple how to listen, express needs, negotiate, and reach compromise.

**Address spiritual disconnection.** Help the couple reconnect spiritually — pray together, read Scripture together, attend church together.

## Chapter 35: Sexual Issues

### Understanding Sexual Struggles

Sexual issues in relationships are often symptoms of deeper relational, emotional, or spiritual problems. Sexual struggles may include:

- Lack of desire
- Performance anxiety or dysfunction
- Shame or inhibition about sexuality
- Infidelity
- Pornography use
- Sexual abuse history affecting current sexuality

### Approaching Sexual Issues Biblically

God created sexuality as a good gift within the context of marriage.

#### 1 Corinthians 7:3–5 (KJV):

*“Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.”*

In Scripture, sexual intimacy within marriage is valued and encouraged. It's not something to be ashamed of but something to be healthy within marriage.

### Counseling Sexual Issues

**Create safety.** Many people feel shame about sexual issues and are reluctant to discuss them. The counselor should communicate normality and non-judgment.

**Assess for abuse.** If someone has a history of sexual abuse, this will significantly affect current sexuality. Addressing the trauma is essential.

**Address shame.** Replace shame messages about sexuality with biblical truth that sexuality is good within marriage.

**Improve communication.** Often sexual issues are communication issues. Help the couple communicate about preferences, concerns, and needs.

**Address underlying issues.** If sexual problems are rooted in resentment, insecurity, or other relational issues, address those.

**When to refer.** Sexual dysfunction may have medical components (hormonal, medication side effects, vascular issues). When appropriate, refer to a physician.

## Chapter 36: Trauma and Abuse

### Understanding Trauma

Trauma is exposure to an event involving actual or threatened death, serious injury, or threat to physical integrity, experienced with fear and helplessness. Trauma is not just single event but the impact on the person's nervous system, beliefs, and functioning.

Trauma responses include:

- Re-experiencing (flashbacks, intrusive memories)
- Avoidance (avoiding reminders of the trauma)
- Negative mood and thoughts (shame, hopelessness, self-blame)
- Hyper-arousal (startle response, hypervigilance, sleep disturbance)

### Types of Abuse

**Physical abuse.** Intentional physical harm causing pain or injury.

**Emotional/verbal abuse.** Intentional harm through words — criticism, insults, degradation, contempt.

**Sexual abuse.** Unwanted sexual contact or sexual coercion.

**Neglect.** Failure to provide necessary care — food, shelter, safety, emotional nurturing.

**Spiritual abuse.** Misuse of spiritual authority to control or harm — false teaching, manipulation using Scripture, spiritual shaming.

### Biblical Response to Trauma

#### Psalm 34:18 (KJV):

*“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.”*

God is near to those who are broken — emotionally broken by trauma. God doesn't abandon those who suffer.

#### Psalm 147:3 (KJV):

*“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”*

God heals emotional wounds. This includes trauma wounds.

#### 2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (KJV):

*“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”*

God comforts those experiencing tribulation. This comfort comes through connection with God.

### Counseling Someone Who Has Experienced Trauma

**Believe them.** Many trauma survivors are not believed when they disclose. Believe them. "I believe you. Thank you for trusting me."

**Validate the impact.** Don't minimize. "What happened to you was serious. It makes sense that you're struggling with this."

**Create safety.** The survivor needs to feel physically and emotionally safe. A trauma counselor should know how to create this environment.

**Move slowly.** Don't rush the person to process the trauma or move forward. Healing from trauma takes time.

**Don't force details.** Some survivors want to talk through details; others don't. Follow their lead.

**Address shame.** Survivors often carry shame as though they were responsible or deserved it. Replace this with truth: "What happened was not your fault. You are not responsible. You did not deserve it."

**Help with triggers.** Help the survivor identify triggers — reminders of the trauma — and develop coping strategies.

**Address beliefs.** Trauma creates false beliefs: "The world is not safe." "People can't be trusted." "I'm damaged." Replace with truth: "I can build safety." "Trustworthy people exist." "I'm healing and whole."

**Refer when needed.** Trauma treatment is specialized. When the counselor lacks training in trauma treatment, refer to someone who has it.

**Connect to faith.** Help the survivor reconnect with God and experience God's presence. God can heal trauma that others cannot.

## PART 7 — ADVANCED COUNSELING SITUATIONS

Some counseling situations require special knowledge and care. This section addresses crisis intervention, suicidal ideation, mental health integration, medication, spiritual oppression, and knowing when to refer.

### Chapter 37: Crisis Intervention

#### Understanding Crisis

A crisis is a situation where someone's coping mechanisms are overwhelmed and they are unable to function normally. Crisis situations include sudden loss, unexpected traumatic events, major life changes, relationship breakdowns, or suicide attempts.

In crisis, the person needs immediate support and stabilization.

#### Initial Crisis Response

**Establish safety.** First priority is ensuring physical safety. Is the person safe? Are others safe? If there is imminent danger, emergency services should be called.

**Listen and assess.** Listen to the person's description of the crisis. Assess their emotional and functional state. Are they able to care for themselves? Do they need immediate professional help?

**Provide immediate support.** Connect them with immediate support — crisis line, emergency room, psychiatric hospital, trusted family member, faith leader.

**Don't leave them alone.** Someone in acute crisis should not be left alone. Stay with them or ensure someone else is with them.

**Facilitate immediate professional help.** If the crisis involves suicidal ideation, self-harm, danger to others, or acute mental health symptoms, immediate professional evaluation is needed.

**Pray with them.** If appropriate, pray with them. Ask God for wisdom, protection, healing, and guidance.

#### Post-Crisis Support

After the immediate crisis is addressed, ongoing support is needed:

**Check in regularly.** The person should not be abandoned after crisis. Regular contact communicates care.

**Connect to ongoing support.** Help the person connect with ongoing counseling, support group, or professional help.

**Help identify warning signs.** Help the person recognize early warning signs that another crisis might be coming and develop a plan for how to respond.

**Develop crisis plan.** Help the person develop a written plan for what to do if crisis feelings return — who to call, where to go, what to do.

**Rebuild coping skills.** Help the person rebuild coping mechanisms that were overwhelmed during crisis.

### Chapter 38: Suicidal Ideation

## Understanding Suicide

Suicide is a tragedy. People in suicidal crisis are in extreme pain and see suicide as the only escape. Counselors need to take any suicidal talk or ideation seriously.

Warning signs of suicide risk:

- Talking about wanting to die or seeing no point to living
- Saying goodbye to people
- Giving away possessions
- Increased substance use
- Reckless behavior
- Researching methods of suicide
- Talking about being a burden on others
- Increased isolation
- Severe mood changes
- Previous suicide attempts
- Access to means (guns, medication, etc.)

## Assessing Suicidal Risk

When someone mentions suicide or the counselor suspects suicidal thoughts, directly ask:

"Are you thinking about killing yourself?" (Ask about thoughts) "Do you have a plan?" (Ask about specificity) "Do you have the means?" (Ask if they have access — gun, medication, etc.) "When do you think you might do this?" (Ask about timeline) "What's stopping you?" (Ask about protective factors)

These questions do not plant the idea of suicide. Asking directly demonstrates that you're taking them seriously and opens the door to help.

## Response to Suicidal Ideation

If the person is in immediate danger:

- Call 911
- Take them to an emergency room
- Keep them safe and with someone until help arrives
- Remove access to means (guns, medication, etc.)

If there is not immediate danger but significant risk:

- Hospitalization should be strongly recommended
- Create a safety plan with the person
- Remove access to means
- Establish accountability (emergency contact who knows about the risk)
- Refer to mental health professional immediately
- Do not leave the person alone

If risk is lower but present:

- Create a safety plan
- Identify warning signs
- Identify coping strategies
- Establish accountability
- Refer to mental health professional
- Follow up within 24 hours

### Support for Suicidal Person

**Don't minimize.** "Everything will be fine." "You have so much to live for." These statements minimize their pain.

**Listen without judgment.** Listen to their pain and why they believe suicide is the answer.

**Affirm their value.** "You matter. Your life matters. I'm glad you're alive."

**Express hope.** "This pain is not permanent. Things can change. Let's get you help."

**Involve others.** Let trusted people know so they can provide support.

**Address spiritual disconnection.** Help them encounter God's love and truth. Help them see their situation from God's perspective.

## Chapter 39: Mental Health Integration

### Understanding Mental Health Conditions

Some counseling issues have mental health components. Depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and other conditions may require psychiatric evaluation and treatment. The biblical counselor should be able to recognize when mental health conditions may be present and refer appropriately.

### Conditions Requiring Professional Evaluation

**Bipolar disorder.** Characterized by mood episodes — depressive episodes and manic or hypomanic episodes with elevated mood, decreased need for sleep, increased energy.

**Schizophrenia.** Characterized by hallucinations, delusions, disorganized speech or behavior, flat emotional responses.

**Panic disorder.** Characterized by sudden panic attacks with intense fear and physical symptoms.

**Obsessive-compulsive disorder.** Characterized by intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive behaviors (compulsions) done to manage anxiety.

**Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.** Characterized by difficulties with attention, impulse control, or hyperactivity.

**Autism spectrum disorder.** Characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication and restricted or repetitive behaviors.

**Post-traumatic stress disorder.** Characterized by re-experiencing of trauma, avoidance, negative mood/thoughts, hyper-arousal.

### When to Refer

The biblical counselor should refer when:

- The counselor suspects a mental health condition
- The counselee is not progressing despite counseling
- The counselee is in acute psychiatric distress
- The counselee is a danger to self or others
- The counselee needs medication evaluation
- The counselee needs intensive treatment

Referring is not a failure. Referring to appropriate help is caring for the counselee.

### Integration with Mental Health Treatment

When a counselee is also seeing a psychiatrist or other mental health professional, communication and coordination is helpful (with the counselee's permission). The counselor and mental health provider can work together toward the counselee's wellbeing.

## Chapter 40: Medication and Faith

### Understanding Medication

Some people struggle with the idea of taking medication for mental health conditions because they believe it represents lack of faith. This is a misunderstanding.

#### Proverbs 17:22 (KJV):

*“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.”*

While Scripture values emotional and spiritual health, it also acknowledges that medicine can be good.

Medication for mental health conditions works similarly to medication for physical conditions:

- A person with diabetes takes insulin because the pancreas doesn't produce enough
- A person with depression may take antidepressants because the brain isn't producing enough neurotransmitters
- A person with anxiety may take anti-anxiety medication to help calm the nervous system

### When Medication is Appropriate

Medication may be appropriate when:

- There is a medical/biochemical component to the mental health condition
- Counseling/spiritual practices alone are not producing sufficient relief
- The person is so impaired they cannot function well enough to engage in counseling or spiritual growth

## When Medication Might Not Be Appropriate

Medication might not be appropriate when:

- The person is using it to avoid facing problems
- The person is expecting medication to solve relational or spiritual issues
- The person is on so much medication they cannot think clearly

## Medication and Counseling

Medication and counseling are often complementary. Medication can reduce symptoms enough that the person can engage in counseling and spiritual growth. Counseling can help the person address root issues and develop healthy coping strategies.

## The Counselor's Role

The biblical counselor should:

- Not judge people for taking medication
- Encourage medical evaluation when appropriate
- Understand that medication is not a sign of weak faith
- Recognize the limits of their own expertise
- Collaborate with medical professionals when appropriate
- Continue providing biblical counseling alongside medication

## Chapter 41: Spiritual Oppression

### Understanding Spiritual Warfare

Scripture affirms the reality of spiritual warfare and demonic opposition.

#### Ephesians 6:12 (KJV):

*“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”*

Not all counseling issues have a demonic dimension, but some do. A counselor should be aware of spiritual warfare and able to recognize when it might be present.

### Signs of Spiritual Oppression

**Persistent spiritual confusion.** Despite exposure to God's Word, the person cannot grasp basic spiritual truths or believes contradictory things.

**Compulsive sinful behavior.** The person is unable to stop a particular sin despite genuine desire to stop and multiple attempts.

**Unusual resistance to prayer or Scripture.** The person feels an actual resistance to praying or reading Scripture as though a force is opposing it.

**Experiences of fear, dread, or presence.** The person reports experiences they interpret as spiritual attack or demonic presence.

**Involvement with occult or dark spiritual practices.** The person has been involved with tarot, séances, witchcraft, satanic practices, or similar.

### Response to Spiritual Oppression

**Do not panic.** Spiritual oppression is real but God's power is greater. Christians have the authority through Christ to resist spiritual oppression.

**Encourage spiritual disciplines.** Prayer, Scripture reading, worship, community — these strengthen spiritual defenses.

**Encourage confession and repentance.** Often spiritual oppression is related to unconfessed sin or spiritual openings the person has given through involvement with darkness. Confession and repentance close these openings.

**Prayer of authority.** Pray with authority through Christ against spiritual oppression. "In the name of Jesus Christ and by His authority, I command any demonic oppression to release this person."

**Refer if needed.** If the counselor is not trained in spiritual warfare, refer to someone who is experienced in addressing demonic oppression.

### Discernment is Important

Not every emotional or behavioral problem is spiritual oppression. Counselors should not blame every struggle on demons. Many issues are psychological or situational. Discernment is needed to distinguish between issues that are primarily psychological versus spiritual.

## Chapter 42: When to Refer

### Recognizing Limitations

Every counselor has limits. There are situations the counselor is not equipped to handle. Recognizing these limits and referring appropriately is essential to ethical counseling.

### Reasons to Refer

**Mental health conditions.** If the counselor suspects a mental health condition like schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or severe depression, refer to a psychiatrist.

**Medical issues.** If the counselor suspects medical issues contributing to mental health symptoms, refer to a physician.

**Substance abuse.** If the counselee is struggling with addiction, specialized treatment is often needed.

**Severe trauma.** If the counselee has experienced severe trauma, specialized trauma treatment may be needed.

**Personality disorders.** Personality disorders (borderline, narcissistic, antisocial, etc.) require specialized treatment.

**Abuse or safety concerns.** If abuse is present, refer to appropriate professionals. If safety is a concern, appropriate crisis response is needed.

**Sexual abuse of children.** If the counselee is abusing children, this requires specialized intervention and mandatory reporting.

**Impaired ability to function.** If the counselee cannot function in daily life despite counseling, more intensive help is needed.

**Counselor's lack of training.** If the counselee presents issues the counselor has not been trained to address, refer to someone who has training.

**Counselor's personal limitations.** If the counselee's issues trigger the counselor's own struggles, the counselor should refer to avoid compromising the counselee's care.

### How to Refer

**Be clear about your reasoning.** "I want to refer you to someone who has specialized training in [issue]. I believe they can help you better than I can."

**Provide specific referrals.** Don't just say "Go see a psychiatrist." Provide specific names and numbers.

**Help with logistics.** Help the counselee make the appointment or navigate the referral process.

**Maintain connection.** Usually the counselor can continue working with the counselee while they're also seeing the specialist.

**Receive feedback.** With the counselee's permission, communicate with the specialist to coordinate care.

**No shame in referring.** Referring is not admitting failure. Referring is responsible, ethical care.

## PART 8 — BUILDING A COUNSELING MINISTRY

The final section addresses building a counseling ministry — how to establish counseling within a church or organization, train counselors, create systems, and handle ethics and documentation.

### Chapter 43: Starting a Counseling Ministry

#### Vision for Counseling Ministry

A counseling ministry exists to provide biblical counsel to those in the church or organization who are struggling. The goal is to help people encounter Jesus, experience His transformation, and grow in their relationship with God.

A counseling ministry should:

- Be accessible to those who need it
- Be grounded in Scripture and the gospel
- Be staffed by mature, trained counselors
- Operate within ethical and legal frameworks
- Integrate with the church community
- Point people toward Jesus

#### Starting Steps

**Pray and discern.** Does God want a counseling ministry? Is there need? Are there trained people available?

**Get leadership buy-in.** The pastor and church leadership need to affirm and support the counseling ministry.

**Develop a mission statement.** What is the counseling ministry trying to accomplish?

**Establish governance structure.** Who oversees the counseling ministry? How are decisions made?

**Recruit and train counselors.** Who will provide the counseling? What training do they need?

**Establish policies and procedures.** How will counseling be scheduled? What are confidentiality procedures? What are ethical guidelines?

**Create a referral system.** How do people access counseling? What's the process?

**Provide space.** Is there a private, comfortable place for counseling?

**Communicate with the congregation.** Let people know counseling is available and how to access it.

### Chapter 44: Training Counselors

#### Training Framework

Counselors need thorough training before providing counsel. Training should include:

**Biblical foundation.** Training in biblical counseling theology, principles, and approach.

**Human nature and psychology.** Understanding how people work — spiritually, emotionally, cognitively.

**Counseling skills.** Training in listening, questioning, discernment, goal-setting, application.

**Specific issues.** Training in addressing specific issues — grief, anxiety, depression, addiction, trauma, etc.

**Ethics and boundaries.** Training in ethical practice, confidentiality, boundaries, mandatory reporting.

**Mental health integration.** Understanding mental health conditions, when to refer, how to work with mental health professionals.

**Supervised practice.** Actual counseling experience with supervision from someone more experienced.

### Training Delivery

Training can be delivered through:

- Formal certificate programs in biblical counseling
- Seminary training
- In-house training programs
- Reading and study
- Mentorship from experienced counselors
- Workshops and conferences
- Online courses

Most effective training combines multiple methods.

### Ongoing Training and Supervision

Counselors should continue learning and receive ongoing supervision:

- Regular supervision with an experienced counselor
- Continuing education through reading, conferences, workshops
- Peer learning with other counselors
- Reflection on their own counseling practice
- Personal spiritual development

## Chapter 45: Creating Systems

### Essential Systems for a Counseling Ministry

**Intake system.** How do people access counseling? What information is gathered in intake? Who screens new counselees?

**Scheduling system.** How are appointments scheduled? What's the typical frequency of appointments?

**Confidentiality and records.** How are records kept confidential? Where are files stored? Who has access?

**Documentation procedures.** What is documented for each session? In what format? How detailed?

**Referral system.** When and how are people referred to other professionals?

**Crisis protocol.** How are crisis situations handled? What's the emergency procedure?

**Supervision system.** How are counselors supervised? What frequency? By whom?

**Feedback and accountability.** How is the counseling ministry evaluated? How is feedback gathered? How are counselors held accountable?

**Communication system.** How do counselors communicate with leadership? With each other?

## Documentation

Good documentation serves multiple purposes:

- Tracking progress and treatment
- Ensuring continuity of care
- Providing legal protection
- Enabling supervision
- Maintaining accountability

Documentation should include:

- Initial intake information
- Treatment plan and goals
- Session notes (what was discussed, what Scripture was shared, what homework was given)
- Progress notes (how the counselee is doing, whether goals are being met)
- Any significant events (missed appointments, crises, referrals)

Documentation should be:

- Factual and specific (not interpretive or judgmental)
- Legible
- Confidential and secure
- Accessible to authorized people

## Chapter 46: Documentation and Ethics

### Ethical Practice

Ethical counseling practice is grounded in several core principles that have been discussed throughout this resource:

**Beneficence.** Acting in the counselee's best interest.

**Non-maleficence.** Avoiding harm.

**Autonomy.** Respecting the counselee's right to make their own choices.

**Confidentiality.** Keeping private what is shared in confidence.

**Justice.** Treating all counselees fairly.

**Integrity.** Operating with honesty and consistency.

### **Confidentiality and Its Limits**

Confidentiality is central to counseling but is not absolute. Counselors must understand the limits:

Confidentiality may be broken if:

- The counselee is an immediate danger to themselves or others
- There is suspected abuse of a child or vulnerable adult
- The counselee explicitly gives permission
- Subpoenaed by court
- The counselee threatens to seriously harm a specific identifiable person

Counselors should:

- Clearly explain confidentiality and limits at the beginning of counseling
- Know the laws in their jurisdiction regarding mandatory reporting
- Have clear procedures for when confidentiality must be broken
- Document any breaking of confidentiality
- Communicate with the counselee about why confidentiality is being broken

### **Informed Consent**

Counselees should understand:

- The counselor's qualifications and training
- The nature of biblical counseling and what to expect
- Confidentiality and its limits
- Fees if applicable
- Risks and benefits of counseling
- The counselee's right to stop counseling anytime
- The counselor's limitations and what cannot be offered

This information should be provided before counseling begins in writing and verbally.

### **Dual Relationships and Conflicts of Interest**

Counselors should avoid dual relationships where they have more than one kind of relationship with the counselee. Examples of problematic dual relationships:

- Counselor and friend
- Counselor and boss
- Counselor and family member
- Counselor and business partner

These dual relationships compromise objectivity and create conflicts of interest. If a dual relationship already exists or cannot be avoided:

- Clearly establish professional boundaries
- Be transparent about the dual relationship
- Consider referring if the dual relationship compromises care
- Be careful about power dynamics

### **Sexual Boundaries**

Sexual contact between counselor and counselee is unethical and damaging. Counselors must:

- Maintain sexual and romantic boundaries
- Not flirt or engage in sexually suggestive behavior
- Not pursue romantic or sexual relationships with current or former counsees
- Be aware of transference (counselee may develop romantic feelings for counselor) and handle it professionally
- Seek consultation if unclear about boundary issues

### **Financial Ethics**

Counselors should:

- Be transparent about fees
- Charge reasonable fees
- Have clear payment policies
- Not exploit counsees financially
- Have fee-free options for those who cannot afford to pay
- Not charge excessive fees based on the counselee's ability to pay more

### **Continuing Education and Competence**

Counselors should:

- Maintain competence in their practice area through continuing education
- Acknowledge the limits of their competence
- Refer when counsees present issues outside the counselor's training
- Stay current with developments in counseling
- Seek supervision and consultation

### **Record Keeping and Retention**

Counselors should:

- Keep accurate, legible records
- Store records securely and confidentially
- Retain records according to legal requirements (typically 5–7 years minimum)
- Have procedures for accessing records by the counselee

- Have procedures for destroying records appropriately

## CONCLUSION: THE COUNSELOR'S IMPACT

### The Profound Work of Biblical Counseling

Biblical counseling is not a minor practice or peripheral ministry. It is holy work. In counseling, a counselor sits with a person in their deepest pain and most honest struggle and points them toward Jesus. The counselor partners with God in transformation.

Consider what biblical counseling actually does:

**It brings light to darkness.** Many people are living in darkness — hiding shame, minimizing pain, believing lies. The counselor brings the light of God's truth into that darkness.

**It speaks truth into confusion.** Many people are confused about God, themselves, their situation. The counselor helps clarify truth and bring understanding.

**It offers hope where there is despair.** Many people believe their situation is hopeless and nothing will change. The counselor offers hope rooted in God's power and love.

**It facilitates encounter with Jesus.** The ultimate goal of counseling is not just behavior change or emotional relief but encounter with Jesus. The counselor creates space for this encounter.

**It enables transformation.** Through counseling, people are transformed — their thinking is renewed, their patterns are changed, their identity is established in Christ, their purpose is clarified.

**It builds the kingdom.** When a person is transformed through biblical counseling, they don't just get better — they become more available to serve God, love others, and extend God's kingdom.

### The Counselor's Responsibility and Privilege

Being a biblical counselor is a tremendous responsibility and a great privilege.

**The responsibility:** A counselor holds people's deepest struggles and most vulnerable moments. The counselor's words matter. The counselor's presence matters. The counselor has the responsibility to serve with excellence, integrity, and genuine care.

**The privilege:** A counselor gets to witness God's transformation in people's lives. A counselor gets to be used by God for redemptive purposes. A counselor gets to experience the joy of seeing someone move from brokenness toward wholeness.

### Sustaining the Counseling Ministry

Counseling work is demanding. Counselors carry the weight of others' pain. Counselors face the limitations of their ability to help. For counselors to sustain this work, they need:

**Regular prayer.** Prayer sustains counselors spiritually and connects them to God's power.

**Personal spiritual disciplines.** Daily Scripture reading, worship, prayer, community — these keep counselors spiritually healthy.

**Personal counseling or spiritual direction.** Counselors need support for themselves. A counselor should have someone to talk to about their own struggles.

**Connection with other counselors.** Support from others in ministry provides encouragement and reduces isolation.

**Regular supervision.** Supervision provides accountability, feedback, and guidance.

**Celebration of God's work.** Noticing and celebrating how God is working in counselees' lives sustains hope and motivation.

**Sabbath rest.** Counselors need regular rest and time away from the work.

## The Counselor's Growth

Biblical counseling is not just about the counselee's growth — it's about the counselor's growth too. As a counselor helps people toward faith and transformation, the counselor's own faith is deepened. As a counselor encourages people toward obedience and surrender to God, the counselor is challenged toward the same. As a counselor points others to Jesus, the counselor's own relationship with Jesus is strengthened.

## Final Thoughts

Biblical counseling is the art and skill of helping people encounter Jesus and be transformed by His truth and love. It requires:

- Deep biblical foundation
- Genuine personal faith
- Developed counseling skills
- Ethical practice
- Continuous growth
- Sacrificial love
- Dependence on God

It produces:

- Transformed lives
- Restored relationships
- Spiritual growth
- Hope replacing despair
- Truth replacing lies
- Freedom replacing bondage
- God's kingdom advancing

May those called to biblical counseling embrace this calling fully, develop their skills thoroughly, practice with integrity and compassion, and witness the transformation that God brings through His truth and the Holy Spirit's power.

The counselor's calling is a high calling. The counselor's impact is eternal. The counselor's God is faithful.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Scripture References by Topic

#### Anxiety and Fear

- Philippians 4:6–7
- 1 Peter 5:7
- Proverbs 12:25
- Matthew 6:31–34

#### Depression and Hopelessness

- Psalm 34:18
- Psalm 42:5
- Hebrews 13:5–6
- Romans 8:28

#### Anger and Bitterness

- Ephesians 4:26–27
- Proverbs 15:1
- Proverbs 29:11
- Colossians 3:8

#### Shame and Guilt

- Romans 8:1
- Psalm 27:10
- 1 John 1:9
- 2 Corinthians 5:17

#### Grief and Loss

- John 11:35
- Matthew 5:4
- Romans 12:15
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–4

#### Addiction and Compulsion

- Romans 6:12–14
- 1 Corinthians 10:13
- 2 Corinthians 5:17

- Proverbs 23:19–21

### Relationship Conflict

- Matthew 5:23–24
- Ephesians 4:25–27
- Colossians 3:14–15
- 1 Peter 3:8–9

### Identity and Worth

- 1 John 3:1
- Genesis 1:26–27
- Psalm 139:14
- Jeremiah 29:11

### God's Character

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 103
- Lamentations 3:22–23
- 1 John 4:8

## Appendix B: Counselor's Prayer

Holy God, grant me wisdom as I counsel others. Give me ears to hear not just the words but the deeper struggles beneath. Give me discernment to see not just the presenting problem but the root issue. Give me courage to speak truth in love. Give me compassion for the hurting. Give me humility to recognize my limitations and point toward You. Give me dependence on Your Holy Spirit to guide my words and my presence.

Help me see those I counsel as You see them — beloved, valued, capable of transformation. Help me believe in their capacity to change even when they do not. Help me hold hope when they despair. Help me be a conduit of Your love and truth.

Protect me from my own woundedness affecting my counseling. Heal my own brokenness so I can help others with theirs. Give me the self-awareness to recognize when I need to refer. Give me integrity to practice ethically and honestly.

Most of all, help me point those I counsel to You. Help them encounter Jesus. Help them experience Your love. Help them be transformed by Your truth. Help them find freedom, healing, hope, and wholeness in relationship with You.

Use me as a vessel of Your redemptive work. May those I counsel be forever changed through encountering You through me. To Your glory and their good.

**Amen.**

## Colophon

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All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

This publication is provided as a resource for biblical counselors, church leaders, and anyone called to help others toward spiritual transformation and healing.

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