

# Biblical Counseling FAQs

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People have a lot of questions about what makes biblical counseling truly biblical. The purpose of these brief FAQs or Q/A paragraphs is to provide relevant, biblical answers to basic questions about biblical counseling.

## 1. What is biblical counseling?

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

While no one person can provide the final definition, here is a working definition of what makes biblical counseling truly biblical:

Christ-centered, comprehensive, compassionate, and culturally-informed biblical counseling depends upon the **Holy Spirit** to relate **God’s inspired truth** about **people, problems, and solutions** to human **suffering** (through the Christian soul care arts of **sustaining** and **healing**) and **sin** (through the Christian spiritual direction arts of reconciling and guiding) to empower people to **exalt** and **enjoy God** and to **love others** (Matthew 22:35-40) by cultivating **conformity** to Christ and **communion** with Christ and the Body of Christ.

The rest of our FAQs will “flesh out” this definition.

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

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

Second, secular counseling, especially in our post-modern age, assumes that there is **no final answer**, no all-encompassing story that explains the meaning of life. Biblical counseling, while appreciating our human limitations and understanding our cultural diversity, believes that in the Bible God has given us all that we need for life and godliness. The Bible provides real answers for real people with real problems.

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

A biblical counselor will work with you **comprehensively**. You can expect your counselor to assist you **spiritually** to know God better, **socially** to love others more effectively, and **self-consciously** to understand and apply who you are in Christ. Your biblical counselor will help you **rationally** to renew your mind in Christ so that you see your life, God, others, and yourself from an eternal perspective. Your biblical counselor will work with you **volitionally** so that you understand why you do what you do and so that you find Christ’s resurrection power to live victoriously. Your biblical counselor will engage you

**emotionally** so that you learn to manage your moods, soothe your soul in your Savior, and help others with their emotions. Your biblical counselor will address who you are **physically** because the Bible teaches that we are a united body/soul being.

#### 4. How long does it take to see a change?

One current model of secular therapy is solution-focused brief therapy. As the title suggests, the goal is to spot a problem and as quickly as possible find a workable personal solution to that issue. If only life were so easy. Biblical counseling is **soul-u-tion-focused** therapy. It focuses you on working with God on matters of your soul: on heart issues.

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

#### 5. What are the benefits of biblical counseling?

The benefits of biblical counseling relate to our definition of biblical counseling. Biblical counseling will help you to face your **suffering** face-to-face with God. While this side of heaven we may not find an end to suffering, we can **find God** and His perspective, purpose, and power in our suffering. Biblical counseling **sustains** you so you know that *it's normal to hurt*, and it brings God's **healing** to you so that you know that *it's possible to hope*. You will experience **soul care** from your biblical counselor.

Biblical counseling will also help you to face your **sin** face-to-face with God. Instead of running, hiding, and covering up with layer upon layer of self-sufficiency (like Adam and Eve did), you will learn to “return home” like the prodigal son did. In returning home, your biblical counselor will help you to **reconcile** with God and others—repenting, asking forgiveness, and granting forgiveness. You will learn that *it's horrible to sin, but that it's wonderful to be forgiven*. In biblical counseling you will also find **guidance** so that you learn how to apply the truth that *it's supernatural to mature*. You will experience **spiritual direction** from your biblical counselor.

#### 6. When should I consider biblical counseling?

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

However, the Bible does teach that there is special gifting and can be special training for a more focused ministry of biblical counseling. When should you consider making an appointment for focused biblical counseling? You should see a counselor when you sense that your **relationships** with God, others, and yourself are spiraling downward despite your best efforts. You should see a counselor when you recognize that your **beliefs** about life are colored by earthly perspectives and foolish judgments that you can't seem to correct on your own. You should see a counselor when you find yourself yielding to **purposes and actions** that defy your core beliefs, but you can't seem to change. You should see a

counselor when you feel that you are less and less able to handle your **emotions** and manage your moods. In other words, you should see a biblical counselor when life's suffering and your sin are overwhelming.

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

We began to answer this question in the previous question. Of course, it all depends upon the close friend, doesn't it? If the close friend is a **spiritual friend** with biblical wisdom (**content**), Christlike love (**character**), relational power (**competence**), and knows how to connect deeply and honestly (**community**), then biblical counseling and talking to a close spiritual friend will be quite similar. In fact, a close friend is more readily available and more easily understands and empathizes with you.

A biblical counselor ought to be your spiritual friend who focuses all his or her energy on you to provide you with **soul care for your suffering** and offers you **spiritual direction for your struggle against sin**. Unlike your spiritual friend, the relationship is not "mutual." You are equals, but you are not there to counsel your counselor. Your counselor uses his or her content, character, competence, and community to empower you to connect with Christ and the Body of Christ. It is more of a Paul-to-Timothy mentoring relationship than a David-and-Jonathan peer-to-peer relationship.

### 8. What happens in a biblical counseling session? What can I expect in session?

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

You should expect your biblical counselor to **empathize** with your hurts, to **encourage** you with Christian hope, to **exhort** you with biblical truth that **exposes** heart issues, and to **empower** you with biblical principles that **equip** you to be a better lover of God and others. You should expect the "process" to be "real and raw." Like the Apostle Paul, the biblical counselor will give you not only the Scriptures, but his or her own soul—caring and connecting deeply.

### 9. Are there issues that I can try to address prior to counseling? If so, what steps can I take?

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

Once you've made this step, you should continue to fellowship and worship with your church family. You should join a pertinent small group where you can talk honestly about your life. You should maintain your spiritual disciplines that connect you to Christ.

You also should state very clearly why you are coming to counseling. And you should be able to explain how you will know that counseling has been successful. What inner life goals are you pursuing?

By the way, once counseling begins, don't think for a moment that the fifty minutes when you meet are the only time you "work." You should be constantly applying to your life what you are learning when you are in counseling.

### 10. What can I do if I can't afford biblical counseling?

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

### 11. What is biblical marriage counseling?

In *biblical* marriage counseling, the purpose of counseling is God-focused—to help the couple to **glorify God by enjoying one another and empowering one another to be more like Jesus**. Yes, the counselor wants to help the couple to resolve conflicts, to communicate, to improve their sexual relationship. But if all that is done *apart from* the purpose of marriage, then it is simply creating more self-sufficient manipulators.

In biblical marriage counseling, the counselor helps the couple to identify and repent of spiritual heart issues that are leading them to selfishly manipulate ("You *will* meet *my* need!") and retaliate ("If you hurt me, then I will hurt *you!*"). **Problems in the home begin with problems in the heart.** Once selfishness is faced, then biblical marriage counseling seeks to help the couple to *work together* toward the common goal of exalting God by enjoying and empowering one another to reflect Christ.

### 12. How do I know if I need biblical marriage counseling?

A couple should consider biblical marriage counseling when they find that their efforts to stop manipulating and retaliating are unsuccessful. When you find that selfishness rules, that you are not enjoying one another, that you are not empowering one another, and that you are not helping one another to grow in Christ, then it is time. **Symptoms** of these deeper heart issues include poor communication, inability to handle conflict, lack of sexual and relational intimacy, and unmanaged moods.

Biblical marriage counseling helps couples to **understand** God's pattern for husband-wife relationships, **diagnoses** unbiblical patterns and their root causes, and **prescribes** God's solutions for soul change that leads to relational growth. Biblical marriage counseling should result in enhanced relationship: closeness with Christ, intimacy with your spouse, and a sense of greater peace (shalom) in each person's soul.

### 13. What is biblical family counseling?

In *biblical* family counseling, the focus is soul-u-tions, not simply external solutions. Your counselor will help you to understand God's design for **healthy family living**, will assist you to assess unhealthy and

unbiblical ways of relating as parents and children, and will equip you to reconcile and grow in your family relationships. The Bible presents at least five healthy keys to family living (dedication, discernment, devotion, discipline, and discipleship), identifies at least three common sinful family ways of relating (Pharisaical, neglectful, possessive), and prescribes how each of the types of families can return to healthy functioning.

#### **14. How do I know that I need biblical family counseling?**

When children are consistently **dishonoring and distancing** themselves from their parents, then family counseling is needed. When parents are consistently **failing to balance devotion and discipline** (holiness and love), then family counseling is needed. Biblical family counselors will help family members to understand and apply the principles of dedication to God, devotion to one another, discernment of biblical principles, discipline of heart foolishness, and discipleship toward heart wisdom.

As with marriage counseling, the end goal of family counseling is not simply the resolution of surface symptoms. The desire is increased honoring love from children to parents, and increased holy love from parents to children *so that* the family enjoys one another and empowers one another thus exalting God.

#### **15. In marriage and family counseling, what if a spouse, parent, or child does not want counseling?**

No one can force another person to open his or her heart to help. While a parent can “force” a child to attend counseling, the child still can choose whether or not to engage in the counseling process. While a spouse can “guilt” a spouse into going to marriage counseling, the spouse can still choose whether or not to receive counsel.

So what do you do? You **pray for your desires and you work for your goals**. In other words, pray that your spouse, child, or parent will go to counseling and be receptive. But leave that to God. Then work toward your goals—go to counseling even if you must go alone or work alone. Open yourself to God changing you—your relationships, thoughts, attitudes, motivations, goals, actions, behaviors, and emotional responses. Many times it is these very changes that God uses to soften the heart of other family members.