

# Introduction to Biblical Counseling

## What are Five Basic Aspects of Biblical Counseling?

**Key Words:** Identification, Information, Application, Motivation, Affirmation

### Introduction

- A. What would an overview of Biblical counseling look like?
- B. Most people believe that counseling is just giving information to people. But biblical counseling involves at least five basic aspects.

### IDENTIFICATION

- I. **Identification: This has at least two aspects: identifying with them emotionally and identifying their needs.**
  - A. **Identify with compassionate understanding as the person tells their story or expresses their need. // This is the time to listen. Potentially, it also may be the starting time for their healing.**
    - 1. God emphasizes your need to listen (and understand) before you offer any advice.
      - a. Prov. 18:13, “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is a folly (a lack of understanding that promotes a foolish action or response) and shame to him.”
        - 1) God may have given us two ears because He knew listening was twice as hard as talking.
      - b. James 1:19, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”
      - c. Prov. 15:23, “A man has joy by the answer of his mouth and a word spoken in due season (in its time), how good it is.”
    - 2. Let God use your compassionate understanding to open the mind and heart of the hurting person to your counsel. // Listening is the most effective way of building a healing relationship which will open the person up to your counsel later.
      - a. Matthew 11:28,29, “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”
      - b. Notice the two qualities Jesus appealed to; to get them to listen to Him, He was gentle and lowly in heart (humble).

- c. Listening opens the door to issues that need to be addressed.
  - d. Ill.: Selwyn Hughes shares that as a young man he sat in church with a deep spiritual problem he could not resolve. Leaving the church sad and dejected, a man tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Can I have a word with you for a moment?" Selwyn said, "Never as long as I live, will I forget the impact he made on me as he said, "I could not help noticing that something is bothering you. I am not a counselor and I have not great experience in helping people with their problems. But I can promise you one thing – I am a good listener and I care!" Those two last words were just what I needed. Within minutes, I had shared my problem and although he was unable to fully unravel it and solve it, yet, Selwyn said he left that service walking on air – all because someone cared." (Hughes, Helping, p. 13).
3. Identify with their emotions appropriately.
- a. Multitudes of studies continue to demonstrate that it is empathy, or the ability to feel their emotions, that lays the groundwork for everything else that is to be done in the counseling setting.
    - 1) Most wounded people find healing through relationships.
  - b. Regardless how skillful or sophisticated a counselor you may be, it is the ability to connect with the counselee that is first and primary.
  - c. Counselors must grasp at some level what a counselee feels, then communicate this understanding in a way the counselee recognizes that the counselor does indeed connect with them.
    - 1) 2 Corinthians 11:29, "Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?"
    - 2) Galatians 4:19, "Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives."
  - d. We are instructed in scripture to "weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15), not to lecture those who weep. Do not add truth to pain. Biblical truth should be shared in an appropriate time.
    - 1) Many hurting people do not work through their grief (loss) because they may have been told to be strong, not to cry, or have had their emotions minimized, "You shouldn't feel that way". What they need most now is to have their emotions validated.
  - e. Give permission to express emotions. "It's okay to cry, grieve, outwardly hurt or feel angry at this time!" "It's okay to say, 'ouch.'"  
    - 1) Offer a Kleenex box to a hurting counselee as an indicator that it is normal to cry.
    - 2) Tell them to take their time. Grieving is a very important part of their healing.

4. Identify personally with their weakness and share appropriately past failures or hurts and losses when possible. // This can free them up to process their own issues.
  - a. The Apostle Paul continued to identify with his sinful, abusive past in order to help others to deal with their sin in the present.
    - 1) I Tim.1:13, "Even though I was formerly a blasphemer...persecutor...violent aggressor..."
  - b. Paul still publicly pictured himself as a major sinner.
    - 1) I Tim. 1:15, "...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all"
      - a) The verb "I am" is a present continuous verb, "I am being the foremost of all."
      - b) He knew he was forgiven but the memories remained fresh in his mind.
  - c. Your own past is the picture frame around your present counseling ministry.
    - 1) Your past does not define you. It "disciplined" you to be who you are today...helping people. Chuck's dad was an alcoholic and God used that experience to prepare him to help others.
    - 2) II Cor. 1:3,4, "All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. <sup>4</sup> He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us."
      - a) "That we may be able 'in ability and resources' to comfort others by strengthening them and giving them hope that we received when we went through a difficult time or conflict."
5. One of the purposes of the body of Christ is to demonstrate compassion to those who are hurting.
  - a. I Cor. 12:26, "And if one member suffers, all members suffer with it. // if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.
6. Focus on listening and understanding; avoid judging, criticizing or condemning, evaluating and planning your response.
  - a. The Old Testament Hebrew word for "understanding" is "hearing." This is reflected in King Solomon's prayer as he began his reign as the new king.
    - 1) I Kings 3:9, "So give Your servant an understanding (hearing) heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"
  - b. Remember, God says it is a source of shame to speak before you hear and understand.

- 1) Prov. 18:13, "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him."
  - 2) Prov. 29:20, "Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him."
7. Mirror back to them what you hear them saying. // Repeat it in similar words without evaluating or interpreting them.
- a. "Am I hearing you say..."
  - b. Again, do not judge, evaluate, criticize, interpret, just reflect.
  - c. Your goal here is just to understand and confirm that you understand by reflecting back what you heard. A mirror reflects back the exact image placed in front of it. It does not alter it.
    - 1) Prov. 15:28, "The heart of the righteous studies how to answer..."
  - d. This will allow them to correct any misunderstanding and confirm to them you did hear and understand.
8. Listen with an open, accepting facial expression like God does when we go to Him.
- a. Open your eyes wide, don't squint, smile faintly. If appropriate, reflect back the same sense of grief you are hearing expressed.
  - b. At the heart of the Old Testament priests' blessing is a hope that God's face will be open (shine) and reflect love, acceptance and favor.
    - 1) Num. 6:24-26, "The Lord bless you and keep you; (25) the Lord make His face shine (smile) upon you, and be gracious to you; (26) the Lord lift up His countenance upon you (turn His face toward you), and give you peace."
  - c. People want to know you are safe to express their emotions to without you reacting negatively.
9. Utilize at least three ways of identifying with your counselee.
- a. Acknowledge you are or have been where they are now when appropriate but do not start telling them your story.
    - 1) Secular psychological training is now encouraging therapists to share personal struggles with clients when appropriate.
    - 2) This honest sharing with discretion can be a real source of strength as the counselee continues on their journey toward healing. The apostle Paul role modeled this practice.
      - a) I Cor. 2:3, "I was with you in weakness, in fear and in much trembling."

b) Philippians 3:12, “I don’t mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.”

b. Admit you have needs, too.

1) Spiritual leaders have sometimes given the impression they have no needs and therefore something must be wrong with you if you have needs that they never had or do not have now.

a) “If you were spiritual like me, you would not have problems.”

2) God is critical of those who convey to Him or others they have no needs.

a) Rev. 3:17, “Because you say, ‘ I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

c. Affirm their feelings as valid. // Even if it is anger. “That had to hurt.”

1) This affirmation is a deep desire of one in emotional pain or in a troubling conflict.

2) People who are afraid of other’s emotions tend to shame or minimize their emotions such as “Real men don’t cry,” or “You shouldn’t feel that way.” Does this statement include Jesus? (John 11:35)

3) If their pain gets in touch with your unprocessed pain, you may want to seek further healing for yourself. We are all wounded warriors. You may need to refer them to someone else.

## **B. Identify the basic needs or issues that need to be worked through.**

1. There are four reasons this may be difficult to do.

a. There may be a truth (or reality) they do not want to acknowledge.

1) About themselves or others

b. There may be a feeling they do not want to feel (i.e. guilt, shame, fear).

c. There may be a responsibility they may not want to assume (forgive an offender).

d. There may be a motive they don’t want to acknowledge (selfishness, greed, jealousy).

2. God only gives healing grace for the truth or reality.

a. John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

b. Jesus did not give just truth or just grace.

3. Be sure there is agreement on what the real issues and needs are before you proceed.
  - a. Often the presenting issue may not be the real issue.
  - b. If the counselee does not agree on the need or issue, they will tend to resist your counsel.
    - 1) If they don't believe their arm is broken, they will resist all efforts to place a cast on their arm.
  - c. Your goal is to help, not argue with them!
  - d. Help them determine where they are (their needs) and where the need to be.
    - 1) This is called getting an honest x-ray of their need or of their conflict.
  - e. After they tell you a story or describe a situation, ask them specifically if they have a question. It forces them to think through themselves what their issue is.

## INFORMATION

### II. Information (insight, clarification) // How to go from where they are to where they should be.

#### A. Information (insights, clarification) may need to precede change.

1. Eleven chapters of information preceded this exhortation to change in Romans 12:1, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."
2. Many problems result from a counselee's attempt to deal with life out of their old perspective and understanding.
3. Your task may be to give them new information or perspective before they are ready to make a significant change in their thinking and behavior. The decision is theirs.

#### B. Ask for permission first before you share the information.

1. Asking permission opens the door of their mind. Sharing information without permission may result in reaction, resistance and outright rejection.
2. Asking permission demonstrates your respect for the counselee.
  - a. Some may react when you ask and say, "Sure, that's why I came to you."
  - b. It is a myth that everyone seeking help really wants help.
3. The following are some suggested ways to ask permission.
  - a. "May I offer a suggestion?"
  - b. "Would you be open to a suggestion?"
  - c. "May I share something with you?"

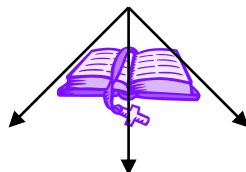
**C. (Your primary task is to) Clarify any misinformation (mis-beliefs) or correct wrong core beliefs of the heart. // All behavior and responses come from the heart (core belief system) Prov. 23:7; 4:23)**



1. Paul asked Timothy to correct the core beliefs of the elders at Ephesus in order to correct their behavior.
  - a. I Tim. 1:3-4, “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia – remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, (4) nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.”
2. Paul had to clarify the misinformation between issues like sin and grace to the Church of Rome.
  - a. Rom. 6:1-2, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2) Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?”
3. The doctrine of forgiveness is an illustration of wrong beliefs that result in further spiritual pain.
  - a. Often people are counseled to “forgive and forget.” It is impossible to forgive and forget entirely. Instead you are to forgive and refuse to bring it up again against the offender. The offender is now responsible to rebuild trust. Forgiveness is what you grant and trust is what they earn. The doctrines of men would have you think (believe) that if you really did forgive, you would not remember the person’s sin against you. This fails to take into account that a Christian brain still functions physically like an unbeliever’s brain.

**D. Remove doctrines (beliefs, opinions) of men and cultural traditions that are contrary to scripture and are resulting in wrong beliefs and responses. Then you are to replace them with biblical truth and reality.**

1. Scripture must be established as the plumb line (standard) of truth. All personal, religious, cultural beliefs and practices must be judged by the standard of truth based on Scripture if the counsel is going to be biblical.



2. Portions of all cultures are off center biblically because all people are sinners (Rom. 3:23). The word “sin” means “to miss the target” (of truth).
  - a. Ill.: In one culture the mother tends to have the authority in the family instead of the husband who may not want that responsibility.

- b. Ill.: In another culture the oldest son has the same authority as the parents over his siblings, which is a parental responsibility, not a child's responsibility. This robs the child of his childhood and gives him a responsibility that he is not emotionally mature enough to handle.
  - c. Ill.: In still another culture the son is the king of the home which results in a lot of behavioral problems later in life when he realizes he is not the center of the universe.
  - d. Ill.: In most non Christian cultures, women have little or no value as compared to men. In Scripture, women are to be granted equal honor (I Peter 3:7).
3. Jesus alerted His hearers that some religious men teach their opinion as if they were the doctrines of God. (Forgive self, self acceptance, forget past.)
- a. Mark 7:7, "But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts (ideas) of men."
    - 1) Mariolatry (praying to Mary) totally contradicted Jesus' declaration that all believers have equal status as His family (Matt. 12:46-50). Praying to "saints" totally contradicts that all believers are saints and priests (Rev. 1:6). Believers are called saints 60 times in the New Testament. There is only one Person we pray to as a mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus (I Tim. 2:5).
4. The Apostle Paul referred to false doctrine as the doctrine of demons.
- a. I Tim. 4:1, "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons."
  - b. Mormons believe they will become a god. Their thinking is reversed. They believe Jesus was a man who became God, instead of God who became man (Phil. 2:5-11). So like Jesus, they too, will become a God like Jesus did.
5. Wrong thinking (or theology) from the heart belief system (the heart) can be at the root of personal problems and conflicts.
- a. Establish first what the person is thinking or believing. Is it biblical?
  - b. Sometimes you have to come from their feelings to their thinking.
    - 1) They may say, "I feel God does not love me." Then, ask them to substitute the word, "think" for "feel." Emotions are not subject to truth but thoughts can be. When they state they think God does not love them, then you have something concrete to deal with.
    - 2) You may need to allow them to feel the feelings (guilt, shame, fear). Then ask God to reveal to them in a prayer time the thoughts or events that are behind their feelings.
    - 3) God will reveal the events, hurts, myths or lies behind those feelings to be dealt with from Scripture.



- 4) Look for any lies that were embedded into their thinking as a result of past hurts (i.e. "I'm no good. I'm damaged goods. God can't forgive me. I'm not lovable"). Later these lies will need to be renounced and replaced with truth.
6. Establish what thoughts are true and what thoughts are inaccurate and erroneous.
    - a. First identify the feelings. It may be best to have them write them out because it helps them to see the reality of what they feel, that their reality may not be valid.
    - b. Next, have them write down next to their feelings what is truth and reality. Feelings must be tested by truth to determine reality.

### DRAWING

Feelings	Facts
I'm not lovable	God deeply loves me

- 1) We should test negative feelings with the truth of scripture and reality, just like we are to test false prophets with truth because their half truths conceal lies.
  - a) John 4:1, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

### APPLICATION

#### III. Application (Personal)

##### A. Many people may know the facts of Scripture but may not have applied them to themselves.

1. They may have a habit of ignoring them or always applying them to others.
2. They may not know how to apply the truth or insight to their particular situation. This is at least one place you can help.
3. They may know their Bible, but they are not applying it to their life. They confuse listening with doing.
  - a. James 1:23-24, "For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; (24) for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. (25) But one who looks intently at the perfect law,...and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does."
  - b. It is like seeing your dirty face in the mirror, then washing the mirror.
4. Your task is to practically apply biblical truth to their situation.

- a. Most preaching and teaching is more about “you should do this,” “you ought to do this,” “you must do this,” but they fail to tell them **how** to do it.

**B. The absence of practical application of Scripture results in people self-destructing and continuing to be dysfunctional.**

1. This is seen in the popular misapplication of a popular Old Testament verse.
  - a. Proverbs 29:18, “Where there is no vision the people perish.”
    - 1) “Vision” is not a burden for souls, goals, plans and strategies for future outreach. “Vision” is the revelation (Hazon) a prophet receives.
    - 2) “People perish” does not refer to unsaved people dying in sin (other verses say that).
      - a) Verb “para” means “to cast off restraint.” Application: so without a pictorial application of Scripture from God the people abandon themselves to their own sinful ways – God was speaking to Israel who already knew God.

**C. Christians who fail to apply God’s truth will get the same result that a non-Christian will get if he fails to apply the truth. God does not make allowance for Christians’ repeated disobedience – or failure to apply truth personally.**

1. Gal. 6:8, “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

## MOTIVATION

### IV. Motivation // At least four ways God motivates for change.

**A. By God's Word**

1. Heb. 4:12-13, "For the Word of God is living and active sharper than any two-edged sword..."
2. Rom 10:17, “So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”
3. II Timothy 3:16 “All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

**B. By God's Works**

1. When we do not listen to God’s Word, He sends His works. Most people are not motivated to change until there is a high level of physical or emotional pain.
2. Nehemiah describes how God sent His Word to His people first and they would not listen until God allowed them to experience a great deal of pain.

a. Nehemiah 9:30, "Yet for many years You had patience with them, and testified against them by Your Spirit in (by) Your prophets. Yet they would not listen; therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands."

b. God's works can be the basis of His discipline.

1) Heb. 12:5-11

### C. By His Spirit

1. Ps. 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart...try me and know my anxious thoughts (symptom), and see if there be any hurtful (KJV "wicked") way in me."

2. John 16:8-11, Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness, judgment.

3. Romans 8:14, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

### D. By His People

1. Paul confronted Peter personally in Antioch for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-14).

2. Paul confronted many people through his letters (I Cor. 11:17-34).

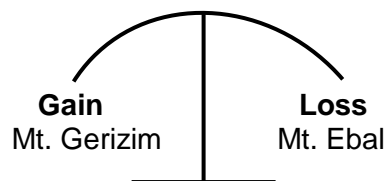
### E. Recognize the levels of individuals' motivation.

1. Motivation is usually based on a desire for gain or a fear of loss basis.

a. God designated two mountains in Israel, one was Mt. Gerizim (Blessing) and the other Mt. Ebal (Curse). When Israelites walked past these two mountains they were reminded that obedience brings blessing and disobedience brought a curse (Deut. 11:26-29; Josh. 8:22,35).

2. Each person has an imaginary gain/loss scale in the back of his mind on which he bases his decisions.

DRAWING



3. The levels of motivation can be on three different levels at any given time.

a. Desire for God's gain and a fear of God's loss.

1) The prophet, Nathan, confronted King David for his adultery and told him he had caused enemies of God to blaspheme. The greatest loss was not David's; it was God's (II Sam. 12:14).

b. Desire for others' gain and a fear of others' loss.

1) Phil 1:21-24. Desire to go, need to stay.

- c. Desire for our gain and a fear of our loss.
  - 1) 1 Corinthians 9:27, “But I discipline my body and bring *it* into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.
  - 2) Genesis 3:1-6 Satan deceived Eve on a personal gain/loss level.
    - a) Satan hid the loss side of disobedience with a lie (you shall not surely die). Once the loss side was removed in her thinking, she was free to focus on the personal gain side and to eat of the forbidden fruit.
- 4. All three levels have their place and may be appropriate in any given situation.
- 5. Most decisions are based on a gain/loss scale at any level at any time.

### **AFFIRMATION**

#### **V. Affirmation**

**A. There may be a need to simply agree with them that what they are doing is appropriate and they just need to keep up the good work. // You can be a confirmation to their right behavior.**

1. I Cor. 11:2, “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.”
2. Gal. 6:9, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.”
3. Revelation 2:2-3 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.”

**B. Affirmation and praise is very biblical.**

1. Prov. 27:2, “Let another man praise you and not your own mouth...lips.”
2. I Cor. 11:2, “Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.”

#### **VI. Summary Keys:**

**A. Identify with counselees in spirit and compassionate understanding.**

**B. Identify what the actual issues are.**

**C. Share your own experiences where appropriate.**

**D. Correct wrong core beliefs of the heart.**

- E. Distinguish between feelings and facts (reality).**
- F. Apply biblical truth to them personally.**
- G. Motivate change with the use of gain/loss scales.**
- H. Affirm them when their behavior is appropriate.**
- I. Use praise to affirm.**

## **VII. Bibliography**

## **VIII. Props**

- A. Picture frame with no glass or back on it to use as a window frame.**
- B. Mirror**
- C. Big red heart**

## Five Basic Aspects of a Biblical Counselor

### Small Group Questions

1. How would you describe the process of counseling? What does it involve?
2. What would you say are the hindrances a person may have in identifying emotionally with someone sharing a problem with them?
3. Why do you believe it is so difficult to listen to a person sharing a problem or need?
4. What experiences have you had in not being allowed to express emotion? How did that affect you? How do you think it would have been helpful to have been allowed to express your emotions appropriately?
5. What experience have you had in giving a friend permission to express emotions appropriately? What was their response to your openness?
6. What have you been able to share out of your past experiences that has been helpful to someone you are wanting to help?
7. What have you learned by experience that makes people open to what you have to share with them?
8. What have you discovered prevents people from listening to information that would normally help them?
9. How have you learned to discover people's core beliefs that are behind their behavior? How has that been helpful to you in helping others?
10. What are some creative ways you have used to get people to apply biblical truth to their lives? How did you learn these?
11. What approaches have you found effective to motivate people to apply God's Word?
12. Share a personal experience where someone affirmed you for doing the right thing. How did you feel? What difference did it make?