

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this short book is to introduce the reader to the ministry of Biblical Counseling.

We all, at one time or another, require assistance. The ministry of Biblical Counseling is intended to provide counseling based on God's word as presented in scripture. The goal of Biblical Counseling is to assist the individual to go from where they are, to where God would have them.

The following topics are discussed in this book:

- What is Biblical Counseling?
- What is a nouthetic counseling?
- Some reasons for seeking out a Christian Counselor
- The difference between secular, Christian and Biblical counseling
- Ten myths
- A word of caution

Should you have any questions or would like to contact me for any reason, my e-mail is [surrended@MSN.com](mailto:surrended@MSN.com) and my website is [LWCMinc.com](http://LWCMinc.com).

Blessings and Shalom,

*John*

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## **Chapter 1**

### **What is Biblical Counseling**

Biblical, sometimes referred to as Christian counseling (more on that in a later chapter) focuses on a few main principles. Its primary focus is on the care of the whole person, spirit, soul, and body and maintains the values taught in the Bible. The aim of Biblical counseling is to help the counselee to regain a sense of hope for their life that is found in Jesus Christ through scripture. Christian counseling believes that at the core of what they do is to help counselees achieve a better understanding of themselves in relation to God. Christian counselors seek to make people aware of any sin in their lives that may have caused them suffering. Additionally, focus may be on any behaviors which deviate in principle from scripture which may be causing problems. Great emphasis is placed on recognizing their immense worth and value they have as a person of God.

## Chapter 2

### What is Nouthetic Counseling

While the name is new, the sort of counseling done by nouthetic counselors is not. From Biblical times onward, God's people have counseled nouthetically. The word itself is Biblical. It comes from the Greek noun *nouthesia* (verb: *noutheteo*). The word, used in the New Testament primarily by the apostle Paul, is translated "*admonish, correct or instruct.*" This term, which probably best describes Biblical counseling, occurs in such passages as Romans 15:14:

*I myself am convinced about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and competent to counsel one another.*

### Nouthetic Counseling Embraces Three Ideas

Because the New Testament term is larger than the English word "counsel," and because it doesn't carry any of the "freight" that is attached to the latter term, we have simply imported the Biblical term into English. In that way, the full force of the Biblical concept of counseling may be set forth while avoiding the many contradictory connotations surrounding the English one. The three ideas found in the word *nouthesia* are **confrontation**, **concern**, and **change**. To put it simply, *nouthetic counseling consists of lovingly confronting people out of deep concern in order to help them make those changes that God requires.*

By **confrontation** we mean that one Christian personally gives counsel to another from the Scriptures. He does not confront him with his own ideas or the ideas of others. He limits his counsel strictly to that which may be found in the Bible, believing that

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and useful for teaching, for conviction, for correction and for disciplined training in righteousness in order to fit and fully equip the man from God for every good task. (2 Timothy 3:16,17)*

By **concern** we mean that counseling is always done for the benefit of the counselee. His welfare is always in view in Biblical counseling. The apostle Paul put it this way: "*I am not writing these things to shame you, but to counsel you as my dear children.*" (1 Corinthians 4:14) Plainly, the familial nature of the word *noutheteo* appears in this verse. There is always a warm, family note to biblical counseling which is done among the saints of God who seek to help one another become more like Christ. Christians consider their counseling to be a part of the sanctification process whereby one Christian helps another get through some difficulty that is hindering him from moving forward in his spiritual growth.

By **change** we mean that counseling is done because there is something in another Christian's life that fails to meet the biblical standard and that, therefore, keeps him from honoring God. All counseling—Biblical or otherwise—attempts change. Only Biblical counselors know what a counselee should become as the result of counseling: he should look more like Christ, for Christ is the Standard. Biblical counseling is done by Christians who are convinced that God is able to make the changes that are necessary as His Word is ministered in the power of the Spirit. It is their hope to help every interested church develop a nouthetic counseling program that will be a

blessing to all of the members of that congregation. The importance of such counseling in churches is underscored by the words of Paul as he described his ministry in Ephesus:

*Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years, night and day, I didn't stop counseling each one of you with tears. (Acts 20:31)*

The regularity and intense nature of Paul's counsel during his three-year ministry at Ephesus is emphasized by these words. If Paul found it necessary to counsel nouthetically for that entire period, surely our churches need also follow suit.

## Chapter 3

### Some Reasons For Seeking Out A Christian Counselor

Hopefully, Christians consider counseling to be a part of the process (sanctification) whereby they become more Christ-like. The intent of counseling is to help the counselee overcome some sort of difficulty that is hindering him or her from moving forward in their spiritual growth.

Counseling is conducted because there is something in the Christian's life that fails to meet biblical standards and that, therefore, keeps him from honoring God. All counseling, Biblical or otherwise, attempts to accomplish change in one form or another. Only Biblical counselors know what a counselee should become as the result of counseling: he should look more like Christ for Christ is our Standard. Biblical counseling is conducted by Christians who are convinced that God can make the changes that are necessary as His Word is ministered in the power of the Holy Spirit and **applied** in the counselee's life. It is the counselor's desire to assist every interested church to develop a nouthetic counseling program that will be a blessing to all the members of that congregation. The importance of such counseling in churches is underscored by the words of Paul as he described his ministry in Ephesus:

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## Chapter 4

### What is Christian Counseling Versus Secular Counseling?

A common question often asked is, what are differences between secular and Christian counseling. There are many differences, but there are several primary ones.

One of the primary differences is in the desired result. In secular counseling, the desired result is primarily related to increasing the ability of a person to function more effectively or to become more emotionally stable. In Christian counseling, the primary goal is to enable the person to heal

in order that they are able to interact with God more effectively, and to be able to utilize their gifting in the body of Christ.

Another primary difference is related to the empowerment of the changes within the individual. Most secular therapy sees the person as a self-empowered entity that is responsible for the changes that they need to make. In Christian therapy, the Holy Spirit works through the therapist, and within the person to facilitate the changes. The changes that the individual can make in this context are often much more foundational and pervasive.

**Obviously, the individual must make the decision to begin to change,** but once this decision is made, he or she has the Holy Spirit that prompts him/her to know what changes are necessary, and then facilitates the change process. Some of the counseling methods may be similar, but often the homework suggested in Christian counseling will relate to the person's spiritual growth and development to promote their relationship with God and others.

Another primary difference between secular and Christian counseling is Christian counseling is Bible-based. It derives its understanding of who man is, the nature of his problems, why he has these problems and how to resolve them from the Scriptures and from other research that is compatible with Scripture. It recognizes that a man has a sin nature, and it is his nature that impacts his thinking, emotions, and behavior.

As sin impacts these areas, problems develop within the person's life. Christian counseling recognizes that these difficulties can only be worked through the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is the Christian counselor's job to help facilitate this process. Christ is always in the process of redeeming or "buying back" these areas to bring them into agreement with how God desires us to feel, think and act.

The intention for these changes is not primarily to allow the person to feel better, although that is part of the result, but to bring the individual into closer union with God to facilitate changes that allow the individual to function in the way which is consistent to the way God designed man. Secular counseling generally views man as good, and merely in need to correcting thoughts and behaviors that do not work for the person to be happy.

The Bible always retains its position of prominence and authority and is the lens through which the truth can be identified.

## Chapter 5

### 10 Myths Keeping Christians from the Counseling They Need

*"Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners'" (Mark 2:17)*

While there's little hesitation for someone to schedule an appointment with a family physician when they are under the weather, there seems to be great pause for most people before considering talking with a therapist.

This hesitation seems to run deepest within Christian circles. From a need to portray a perfect life to feeling like a disappointment to God for needing help, a Christian can feel a lot of guilt in seeing a medical-mental professional. But the truth is, God never expected us to be perfect. If he did, he would not have sent Jesus! He also never thought we could do life alone because he makes it quite clear that together, with those around us, we are the body of Christ.

**So, to remove the stigma counseling is enshrouded in, let us address the 10 most common myths that are keeping Christians from the counseling they need.**

#### **1. "If the Lord is my strength, I can't be weak."**

The Lord is your strength—that is true! (Take a look at Psalm 28:7.) But where it gets dangerous is confusing his strength with our strength. He is perfect, all-powerful, and never changing. We are imperfect, inconsistent, and not nearly as strong. When we mix the two up, we are left thinking we are strong enough to handle every problem on our own and put off counseling.

But what is fantastic about God's strength is that it is perfect in our weakness. When we are downtrodden, God picks us up. And guess what! Sometimes that help is through counseling. When you seek out a faithful Christian counselor, do not view it as a flaw—view it to access more of God's strength in your life!

#### **2. "I need to have it all together."**

"If I don't have my life completely together, how will people ever be brought to Christ?"

Oh, dear sweet friend! Your perceived perfection is not going to be the thing that brings droves of people to church. In fact, quite the opposite! Pretending to have your life completely together can be such a turn-off. It makes people feel guilty about the less-than-glamorous parts of their lives. Plus being vulnerable with your struggles—and how God mightily works through them—can be such a compelling testimony.

Now, I want you to know I completely understand not wanting everyone to know your struggles. Trust me—I get it. But it is still powerful to be able to talk with someone, say a counselor, who is sworn to confidentiality. Once you talk through everything with someone, you will be surprised by the freedom you feel to tell others your story.

#### **3. "It's going to hurt more to deal with my past than to ignore it and move forward."**

There is a chance that therapy will, in fact, hurt. When you are working through a situation that is rooted in pain, it could sting to dig up its roots. But, avoiding therapy because it might hurt is like refusing to get a broken bone set. The pain of fixing the issue is well worth the healing that comes from it.

As you begin to work with your therapist, you may find yourself emotionally tired, overwhelmed, or feeling left on empty. But as you start making progress, you are going to feel lighter, more confident, and ready to move forward with your life. Do not let the fear of dealing with your pain head-on prevent you from the healing God has for you.

#### **4. "If I just pray harder..."**

Prayer is powerful and can very much bring you healing. But I have met so many people who feel embarrassed to talk to a professional because they assume it is all their responsibility to fix. They found themselves in this situation, for whatever reason, and it is up to them to pray their way out.

I love that their first instinct in times of trouble is to pray. But it breaks my heart that people will grapple with something, and then on top of that, heap guilt on themselves for “not praying hard enough.” If you are stuck and cannot move past something, no matter how hard you are praying, remember: counseling can also be an answer to your prayers. Keep open those powerful lines of communication with God, but try talking things out with a counselor, too. They will offer wisdom and give you a new perspective on your situation.

#### **5. "I can talk to my small group/family about my problems."**

It is so great that you have a group of people in your life who will listen to you as your process through your emotions. But relying on your loved ones to fill the role of your therapist can be damaging to your relationships. You are heaping on a lot of responsibility on their shoulders, and that weight can be incredibly straining. Plus, your friends probably are not equipped to give you the guidance you need.

So instead, I encourage you to seek professional help. There is a lot of value in working with an actual therapist. A therapist is trained to not only listen, but also to help you work through everything floating around in your mind. They will provide an unbiased opinion, and, most importantly, they can tell if there is something more serious going on.

#### **6. "God is good, so the problem I'm going through is fine."**

Many Christians fall into the trap of believing that our problems take away from God's goodness. But there are two things I know for sure: I regularly have issues, but God is still good.

Ever since Eve sinned, our world has been less than perfect. That is why we go through tough times, and sometimes, it is not even our fault. Things happen to us that are entirely out of our control. So, please know, there is nothing to be embarrassed about in having problems. You do not have issues because you believe less in God's goodness. But, since God is good, he wants the best for our lives. Hence, he gives us resources such as small groups, friends, and—you guessed it—counseling.

### **7. "The therapist is just going to shame me."**

A therapist should never, ever shame you. If you are seeing a professional and you leave feeling more so like it is your fault, you did something wrong, or that you should be ashamed of who you are, then you need to find a new therapist. A therapist's job is to help you better understand yourself and to shine a light (and the truth) the situation.

Now, there is a chance that what you are struggling with is a consequence of choices you are making. But, in no way, is shame going to lift you up out of that situation. I have never heard of anyone shamed into healing, have you? Remember, *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1).

### **8. "Counseling is only for serious problems."**

Therapy is not just for someone who went through a traumatic experience like a sudden death of a loved one, fighting in a war zone, or escaping an abusive relationship. Counseling is just talking with someone trained to assist you in working through your thoughts and feelings. This means, you could go to therapy for learning how to balance your schedule in college, working through the transition of marriage, or even when everything in life is going well.

The problem with creating the stigma that counseling is reserved for "serious" problems is that people will wait until small struggles become something much more significant. If a person begins to see a therapist before an issue takes root, healing is going to come quicker.

### **9. "There's no way I could afford to go to counseling."**

Yes, it is true, some therapy options may be expensive. But some options are much more reasonable, without sacrificing the quality of help you are receiving. All it takes is a little research.

When you first start looking for counseling, figure out what your budget allows. Remember, this should be a high priority. If you need to cut back on your coffee habit or going out to eat, I promise you it is worth it.

Next, look for options through your church. Many churches have affordable (or free!) therapy options. Even if your church does not have counseling, they may offer scholarships for specific Christian counselors in the area. At the very least, they may be able to recommend a professional to you. And in some cases, counseling centers offer need-based scholarships themselves.

### **10. "There's nothing I can do to change the past."**

You are right: the past is the past, and there is nothing you can do to change it. But therapy helps with the events of the past in two critical ways.

First, seeing a counselor and talking through what happened changes your perspective. It shines light and truth into the situation and lets you up from under the weight of the shame, guilt, stress or worry you have been feeling.

Next, counseling allows you to move forward in freedom. You are better equipped to handle life. You have fought through troubling situations in the past, and you are better able to avoid those situations in the future. You walk more confidently, and if you stumble, you know that therapy is always an option.

## **Chapter 6**

### **A Word of Caution**

I would be remiss if I did not red flag certain areas that relate to Christian counseling. The following comments are based on my specific training, and of greater importance, personal experience.

Choosing a counselor is extremely important. The counselor must be mature spiritually, very well versed in scripture, a great listener, and communicator and possesses abundant empathy. Membership in one of several Christian counseling organizations is important as well. Membership suggest that certain educational requirements have been met and the counselor's competency has been checked and endorsed by the certifying body.

Having been actively involved in pastoral ministry and counseling for the past 30 years, the next caution point is a touchy one. Not all pastors are competent to counsel. I in no way suggest this as a slight to my fellow pastors. Counseling, in its simplest form, is one-to-one discipleship! Some pastors may be gifted preachers/teachers but may not have the gift and patience to disciple an individual one-to-one. Pastor and counselor are not necessarily synonymous. In fact, it is not the least bit unusual for a pastor to refer a congregant in need of counseling to someone outside the church. The overarching importance is matching the believer in need with someone best qualified to address and meet that need.

Another word of caution... same sex counseling is important whenever possible. Men should counsel men, women should counsel woman, is a generally accepted rule of thumb. There may be exceptions, but extreme care must be taken to avoid all appearances that could possibly be misconstrued. Counsel with an "open door" wherever and whenever possible.

These are general guidelines. There may be other specifics relative to your particular case. Always follow protocol that honors God and gives absolutely no room for misunderstanding.