



Counseling...What Is It?

Counseling occurs every day between friends, family members, work associates, team members, fellow students and, sometimes, between complete strangers.

The definition of counseling implies its occurrence in daily life. Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary says that counseling is "advice and support that is given to people to help them deal with problems, make important decisions, etc."¹ Dictionary.com defines counseling as "advice, opinion, or instruction given in directing the judgment or conduct of another."² Other sources define counseling similarly. Basically, counseling occurs when one or more persons help another by means of purposeful communication.

BILLIONS OF COUNSELING CONVERSATIONS EACH DAY

Counseling may occur over an extended period of time; but it may also last a few seconds. For example – A visitor lost in a city asks a stranger for directions, and the stranger responds accordingly. This verbal interchange concerns specific directions but, by definition, counseling occurs because *one person helps another by means of purposeful communication*.

More counseling examples – a novice carpenter asks his supervisor how to install a door frame . . . a daughter asks her mother how to make oatmeal . . . a young child asks his parents how to grow flowers . . . a math student asks his teacher how to solve an equation . . . a mother asks a friend about effective child discipline . . . a medical intern asks a doctor about a patient's medical needs.

Each day, billions of similar conversations occur, and all involve counseling *since one or more persons help another through purposeful communication*. Billions of people routinely counsel in their roles as parents, teachers, coaches, lawyers, medical personnel, or supervisors. In fact, anyone who offers someone advice for present or future situations is counseling.

People who define counseling as "giving professional, psychological help and advice" would not view the above examples as counseling. Their counseling stereotype involves a psychiatrist or other credentialed professional, scheduled appointments, an office setting, patients/counselees, a meeting time limit, talk therapy, a fee for services rendered, and sometimes a "medical diagnosis" such as manic-depressive, schizophrenic, bipolar, ADHD, etc. *This counseling model has existed for decades with questionable success in diagnosing and treating people with problems.*

See **Quick Facts About Psychiatry** at <http://www.cchr.org/quick-facts/introduction.html>

Citizens Commission on Human Rights at <http://www.cchr.org/>

Biblical Counseling – Part 1, pages 2-3 at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

FINE-TUNING THE DEFINITION OF COUNSELING

To understand what biblical counseling is, let's consider two key elements of counseling ... **help** and **purposeful communication**.

• HELP

Helping others is foundational to counseling, but some "help" can be harmful, as the websites referenced above indicate. Some "help" can also be sinful, for example:

- ☞ An accomplice could *help* a fellow thief plan a bank robbery by *purposefully communicating* how to access the vault.
- ☞ An adulteress could *help* her adulterous partner continue in sin by *purposefully communicating* details for their next rendezvous.
- ☞ A friend could *help* another friend avoid paying taxes by *purposefully communicating* how to falsify a tax return.
- ☞ A student could *help* a fellow student cheat on an exam by *purposefully communicating* answers for the test.

The above situations illustrate *sinful* counseling. In each of these cases, the counselor encourages another person to sin. The earthly birthplace of sinful counseling is the Garden of Eden. In that idyllic setting, Satan counseled Eve to disobey God's explicit command. Eve foolishly followed Satan's counsel as did her husband Adam. As Adam and Eve discovered, so-called help that disregards God and, instead, appeals to self-centeredness is devastating to lives and relationships.

See **Genesis chapter 3** at <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Gen+3&version=NASB>

The End of the Beginning ... The Fall of Adam and Eve at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/End%20of%20the%20Beginning.pdf>

Biblically-based help condemns self-centeredness and always opposes sinful behavior. Real help relies on biblical truth to benefit others and bring glory to God.

- **PURPOSEFUL COMMUNICATION**

The primary purpose of biblical counseling is to glorify God.

1 Corinthians 10:31, Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Peter 4:11, Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

In counseling and in all other areas of life and relationships, God's glory is paramount.

(Do All for the Glory of God at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Do%20All%20For%20the%20Glory%20of%20God.pdf>)

The vast majority of counseling deals with daily routines, tasks, and responsibilities. Human (natural) wisdom is often useful for these situations. However, challenges involving personal difficulties, relationships, and seemingly unsolvable problems require divine wisdom (Proverbs 3:5-6, 1 Corinthians 3:19-20, 1 Peter 4:11).

Proverbs 3:5-6, Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.

1 Corinthians 3:19-20, For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "*He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS*"; ²⁰ and again, "*THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.*"

1 Peter 4:11, Whoever speaks, *is to do so* as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves *is to do so* as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The first study in this Biblical Counseling series noted that hundreds of counseling perspectives derived from human wisdom compete with one another and contradict God's Word.

See **Counseling . . . Based on What?** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Biblical%20Counseling%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

Biblical counseling, however, provides totally sufficient truth and trustworthy help from the Bible. Such counseling focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ (our eternal Redeemer and the embodiment of divine truth) and the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of truth Who empowers believers to think, speak, act, and live in a manner that glorifies God).

See **TRUTH – The Measurement for All Aspects of Life and Relationships** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Truth.pdf>

THE TWO PRIMARY EMPHASES OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

The primary emphases of biblical counseling are evangelism (the Gospel/the Good News) and sanctification (growth in the Christ-life).

- **EVANGELISM**

Evangelism presents unbelievers with the Good News of Jesus Christ, offering forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life (John 3:16; Romans 3:23-24, 5:10-11; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 5:11-12).

John 3:16, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Romans 3:23-24, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 5:10-11, For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

1 Peter 1:3-5, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 John 5:11-12, And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.¹² He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

Other studies related to evangelism are . . .

This is the Gospel . . . the Good News

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/This%20is%20the%20Gospel%20-%20The%20Good%20News.pdf>

Growing in the Christ-life – Part 1... Biblical Possibility of Christ-like Change

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Growing%20in%20the%20Christ-life%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

- **SANCTIFICATION**

Sanctification deals with a believer's on-going growth in the Christ-life (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, Galatians 2:20, Galatians 5:16-23).

2 Corinthians 5:14-15, For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;¹⁵ and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Galatians 2:20, I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Galatians 5:16-23, But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.¹⁷ For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.¹⁹ Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Other studies related to sanctification are listed below . . .

Growing in the Christ-life – Part 3 ... What does Growing in the Christ-life Look Like? at

<http://wordtruth.org/Growing%20in%20the%20Christ-life%20-%20Part%203.pdf>

Abiding in God . . . A Necessity for Christ-like Development at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Abiding%20in%20God%20A%20Necessity%20for%20Christ-like%20Development.pdf>

Becoming a Christ-like Servant at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Becoming%20a%20Christ-like%20Servant.pdf>

Change Hurts like Heaven at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Change%20Hurts%20Like%20Heaven.pdf>

Christ Crucified: The Solution to Self-Dependency at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Christ%20Crucified%20Study%20with%20Outline.pdf>

Gratifying Yourself or Glorifying Your Savior at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Gratifying%20Yourself%20or%20Glorifying%20Your%20Savior.pdf>

Humility – God's Path to Edification and Exaltation at

[http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Humility%20-%20Gods%20Path%20to%20Edification%20and%20Exaltation%20\(KIR\).pdf](http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Humility%20-%20Gods%20Path%20to%20Edification%20and%20Exaltation%20(KIR).pdf)

Is Dying to Self Really Necessary? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Dying%20to%20Self.pdf>

Is Jesus Lord of Your Life? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Is%20Jesus%20Lord%20of%20Your%20Life.pdf>

Knowing Jesus or Just Knowing About Jesus? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Knowing%20Jesus.pdf>

Living by Feelings or Living by Faith at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Living%20by%20Feelings%20or%20Living%20by%20Faith.pdf>

Living for yourSELF . . . or Your SAVIOR at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Living%20for%20YourSELF%20or%20Your%20SAVIOR.pdf>

Servanthood – The Low Road to our High Calling at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Servanthood%20-%20Low%20Road%20to%20High%20Calling.pdf>

VALID BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Those who counsel biblically realize that evangelism and sanctification are essential to biblical counseling. Valid biblical counseling is not based on professional notoriety, academic degrees, ministry or teaching positions, speaking skills, government licensing, published material, church membership, counseling training, or certification.

Instead, valid biblical counseling occurs when the counselor (a biblically obedient believer dependent on the Holy Spirit) provides help based on scriptural truth through purposeful communication that glorifies God by emphasizing salvation through Jesus Christ (evangelism) and faithful growth in the Christ-life (sanctification).

A new Christian's knowledge and use of the Bible will not have the breadth and depth that a mature disciple will have. Nevertheless, *all* believers can counsel biblically to the degree they use scriptural truth and rely on the Holy Spirit to help others glorify God in all aspects of life and relationships.

COUNSELING BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS

Those who seek help with challenges of life and relationships are either believers or unbelievers. When counseling unbelievers, a biblical counselor presents the Gospel in the context of the unbeliever's difficulties. Biblical counselors realize that apart from belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, unbelievers cannot adequately understand scriptural truth concerning life's challenges and relationships.

1 Corinthians 2:14, But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

If an unbeliever persistently rejects Jesus Christ, a biblical counselor should patiently focus on the Gospel and the inevitable results of self-centered choices. It may be helpful to ask an unbeliever, "Do you recognize the hopelessness and difficulties you have experienced going your own way and rejecting any consideration of Jesus Christ?"

At this point, if the non-Christian counselee seems confused or begins to recount his problems and spiritual situation, kindly bring his attention back to the Gospel as the basis for facing and dealing with his life in a manner that glorifies God.

(Life's Most Important Decision at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Lifes%20Most%20Important%20Decision.pdf>)

If the Gospel has been faithfully presented many times, yet the counselee still rejects Jesus Christ, a biblical counselor may eventually respond with something like this . . .

"We have reached an impasse in our counseling. Everything I have to offer you from God's Word is linked to your belief in Jesus Christ and the salvation He provides. I will continue to pray that God will help you see the importance of trusting Him and believing the truth of God's Word. If you want, I will provide appropriate material to help you prayerfully reconsider your response to God's love that was demonstrated through the cross of Jesus Christ. I would also consider it a privilege to meet with you again for the specific purpose of reviewing God's plan of salvation and its impact on your life and relationships.

"God's Word says that apart from believing in Christ, you cannot experience God's power to help you overcome your challenges. You also cannot fully understand God's truth in the Bible and its application to your situation. If, by God's grace, you respond to His love and place your faith in Jesus Christ, I will rejoice with you that your sins are forgiven and that you have received eternal life. I would also enjoy the possibility of further counseling with you so we can discover Christ-honoring solutions to your difficulties."

BIBLICAL COUNSELING IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

On the other hand, biblical counseling among believers is beneficial and glorifies God due to:

- a common foundation of salvation in Jesus Christ,
- a common trust in the truth and sufficiency of God's Word,
- a common reliance on the power and leading of the Holy Spirit,
- a common belief in the necessity and benefits of prayer, and
- a common fellowship with other believers that is accompanied by diverse ministries in the Body of Christ.

Most counseling among believers is simply a facet of biblical discipleship, the joyous life-long process of learning God's Word, obeying its truth, and growing in the Christ-life. Communication in this regard can involve encouragement, instruction, rebuke, comfort, restoration, exhortation, and correction, to name but a few benefits of counseling among believers. In various settings and situations, believers can pray for and remind one another to obey God's Word and apply divine truth to all aspects of life and relationships (Colossians 1:9-12).

Colossians 1:9-12, For this reason also, since the day we heard *of it*, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

SUMMARY OF THIS STUDY

- Counseling occurs when one or more persons help another by means of purposeful communication.
- Biblically based help (biblical counseling) always brings glory to God, discourages self-centeredness, opposes and reveals sinful behavior, emphasizes the need for salvation through Christ, and encourages believers to grow in the Christ-life.
- The primary emphases of biblical counseling are evangelism (the Gospel) and sanctification (growth in the Christ-life).
- Counselees who persistently reject salvation through Jesus Christ are unable to understand biblical truth fully and may eventually be dismissed from on-going counseling for a period of time. At this dismissal, unbelieving counselees are encouraged to reconsider their biblical need of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ in order for them to be overwhelming conquerors through Him.
- In the Body of Christ, biblical counseling is integral to the discipleship process.

Endnotes:

¹<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/counseling?show=0&t=1353347135>

²<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/counseling?s=t>