



A Call to Discipleship Counseling

od Calls All Believers to Discipleship Counseling

Christ commands and authorizes us to counsel each other. We must not and need not leave mutual care only to pastors or counseling professionals. God envisions believers giving biblical counsel to each other. Biblical discipleship counseling involves caringly ministering God's Word to help people handle their life struggles.

*"And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' "This is the great and foremost commandment. "The second is like it, '**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**'" Matthew 22:37–39*

*"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matt 28:18-20.*

*"We proclaim Him, **admonishing** every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Colossians 1:28–29*

*"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and **admonishing** one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Colossians 3:16*

*"And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to **admonish** one another." Romans 15:14*

*"We urge you, brethren, **admonish** the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone." 1 Thessalonians 5:14*

*"Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, **teaching** in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, **and healing** every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, **He felt compassion for them**, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." Matthew 9:35–36*



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The Discipleship Battlefield:

Think of discipleship in terms of a battle. The front line of the battle is not the counseling room, but the weekly gathering as well as the conversations that take place among members of the church every day in their homes, over lunch meetings, in Bible study, in small group gatherings, in conversations after church, over the phone, and even in texts and emails !

All of a church's life together involves counseling and each of these opportunities gives us a chance to counsel one another in the Word.

If people have at least one or two people in their lives who are willing to share in the ugly details, to be open about their struggles, to hold one another accountable, to admonish and encourage one another, then God can use these experiences to shed light on the darkness and confusion.

One step back from the front line is not the counselor, but wise and godly older men and women in the faith who take time to pour themselves into the lives of younger Christians. These are the "captains" and "generals" of the faith, who by their wisdom and experience direct the soldiers in battle.

A culture of discipleship that encourages younger members of the faith to seek out the wise older ones honors Christ by making good use of the rich relational resources that God has built into his church.

To carry the battle analogy one last step, think of the counseling room as the M.A.S.H. unit that sits far behind the front line. It's only when people are beaten up, bleeding, or maimed so badly that they are no longer useful in the battle that they must be sent to get special medical help.

Most people only retreat to the counseling room when their problems get too far out of hand, when they are at a complete loss for wisdom, or when they can no longer tolerate their own struggles.

As counselors (or doctor of souls?) we do our best to consider what unseen infections might lie deeper than what can be seen on the surface, treat them accordingly, and then send them back into battle.

Illustration By Deepak Reju - associate pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D. C.

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Connection is the first step in caring well for others. It builds trust, shows compassion and empathy, creates a safe environment and ultimately allows us to be humble as we come beside them.

Key Scripture: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience," Colossians 3:12

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Understanding and application of the Word of God produces gospel transformation in the life of a believer. We can confidently use Scripture to help others grow into the image of Christ.

Key Scripture: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16–17

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A model for lasting change comes from God himself who sanctifies us. Jesus changes us from the inside out through the Holy Spirit as he transforms, cleanses, and changes the heart of His people.

Key Scripture: "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Eph 4:22-24

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Engagement with God and His people provides ongoing hope, healing, purpose, and wholeness. This allows believers to grow in Christ and live lives of gospel transformation.

Key Scripture: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." John 15:4

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Connect Creatively: *"Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light..." John 3:19, "But whoever lives by the truth comes in the light..." John 3:21*

- Create a safe and trusting environment. Assure confidentiality, with the understanding of when a duty to safety may break confidentiality: harm to self or others.
- Don't get stuck in the "casual": be patient. It takes vulnerability to bring their circumstances into the light.

Connect with Curiosity: *"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out." Proverbs 20:5*

- Get on their level, be interested in them and ask good questions.
- Show your care for them as a person and not just their circumstance.

Connect by Listening: *"If one gives an answer before he hears (listens), it is his folly and shame." Proverbs 18:13*

- Listen, don't fix. Eye contact and body language- be engaged.
- Reflect back to them what you have heard- the need to be heard, paraphrase listening.
- Listen carefully for how the person is factoring (or not factoring) God into their troubles? What is their perspective of the Lord's involvement with their predicament?
- Avoid transference: transferring feelings or beliefs they have about their situation to you.
- Avoid countertransference: placing feelings/beliefs you have for their circumstances on them.

Connect Compassionately: *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience," Colossians 3:12*

- "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Theodore Roosevelt.

Connect through Encouragement and Hope: *"Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11 "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from Him." Psalm 62:5*

- Pray with them: Taking their story to God: assure them that you care and most importantly, God cares.



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TABLE TALK

What are good characteristics of a good listener ?

Talk about a time you jumped in to “solve” a problem before allowing the person to be heard. How did that go ?



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Understanding and application of the Word of God produces gospel transformation in the life of a believer. Believers can confidently use the Scriptures to help those who possess the knowledge of God to grow into the image of Christ.

Key Scripture: "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:14–17

Biblical discipleship counseling happens as the disciple guides another to apply the Word of God to their specific trials and struggles.

The Word of God is inspired, inerrant, authoritative and therefore it is fully sufficient pertaining to the ministry of discipleship counseling.

"For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

The Word of God is Truth. We can help people apply the truth of God's word to the difficult issues of life.

"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth." John 17:19

The Word of God is Wisdom that has the ability to help people understand and then overcome their struggles with sin and suffering experienced in this life.

"in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Colossians 2:3

The Word of God is Sufficient to provide to us all that we need in order to both know him and live as he intends us to. It is all that is ultimately needed to both understand and to treat the mental, emotional, and spiritual problems experienced by all people.

"seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." 2 Peter 1:3

The Word of God is Holy-Spirit Inspired and therefore the spirit filled means of helping people understand and overcome their struggles with sin and suffering in this world.

"But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." 2 Peter 1:20–21



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Selecting an Appropriate Passage for Counseling

Which passage from this God-breathed, life-transforming book should we bring to our specific counselees? Of the 31,000-plus verses in the 1,189 chapters in the 66 books of the Bible, which should we choose? What Scripture text would be most “timely” (Prov 15:23) and “good for building up someone in need, so that it” helps (Eph 4:29)? How can we skillfully, confidently, and compassionately minister the Word?

Let’s consider three marks of a timely counseling passage.

1. A Timely Passage Addresses the Person’s Struggle

While there might not be a one-to-one correspondence between specific situations in the Bible and in a counselee’s life, there should be a clear approximation we can see and show.

2. A Timely Passage Brings Jesus Christ and His Provisions of Grace, Truth, Promises, and Presence

It presents a specific Christ-centered truth that speaks to some key aspects of the counselee’s personal and relational problems.

3. A Timely Passage Invites Change and Calls for Some Response by Your Counselee

It’s a passage that helps your counselee envision the kind of biblical heart and behavioral changes. In other words, what passage—if the counselee were to grasp and apply it—might best help them right now? Ideally, such a passage reflects the previously discussed indicative-imperative dynamic (e.g., 1 Pet 5:7) or at least shows that dynamic in its context (e.g., Rom 12:18 with 12:1).

Before considering examples, let’s insert several qualifications. First, we are not necessarily talking about general hope-inviting verses (e.g., 2 Pet 1:3) we might share in a first session when we don’t yet know the problem well. At this point, we need Scripture that specifically addresses the main problem we have agreed to discuss.

Second, we need not labor to find the perfect passage. Don’t place yourself under that pressure. No doubt Jesus would have a perfect passage; you are not Jesus. You simply need to bring a passage that meets our above criteria. While some passages fit better than others, many can work for any given counseling problem.

Third, among several passages that could fit, consider one you know well. Maybe you have studied it previously and feel greater confidence in sharing it. Maybe your pastor or Sunday School teacher recently unpacked it. Maybe it’s a passage that impacted you and in sharing it you can offer personal testimony about how the Lord has used it in your life.

Fourth, bring one main passage at a time to the session. A counseling session is not a Bible study or a topical discipleship lesson. It’s a time to bring God’s life-changing Word to speak directly to the counselee’s problem. It’s a time to go deep, not broad.¹

¹ Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2021), 190–191.

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TABLE TALK

What is the difference in knowing scripture and applying it?

Talk about a situation where you have been able to apply scripture to your own struggle or circumstance.



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A model for lasting change comes from God himself who sanctifies us. Jesus changes us from the inside out through the Holy Spirit as he transforms, cleanses, and changes the heart of His people.

KEY SCRIPTURE: *"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness." Eph 4:22-24*

Resemble: goal is to look more like Christ! *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another..." 2 Cor 3:18*

- Identity: understanding our true identity helps change the lens of our circumstances.
- "We always live out of some kind of identity and the identities we assign ourselves powerfully influence our responses to life." (Paul David Trip: Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands)

Redress: put off/put on

- Practice, practice, practice: replace old habits with new ones: Spiritual disciplines: Scripture reading – worship – meditation – fasting – praying – serving - personal reflection - etc.
- Flesh vs. Spirit: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Gal 5:16-26 Desires of the flesh vs. fruits of the Spirit.
- Nothing good comes easy: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." James 1:2-4

Reach for the heart: *"Create in me a clean heart, o God, and renew a right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10*

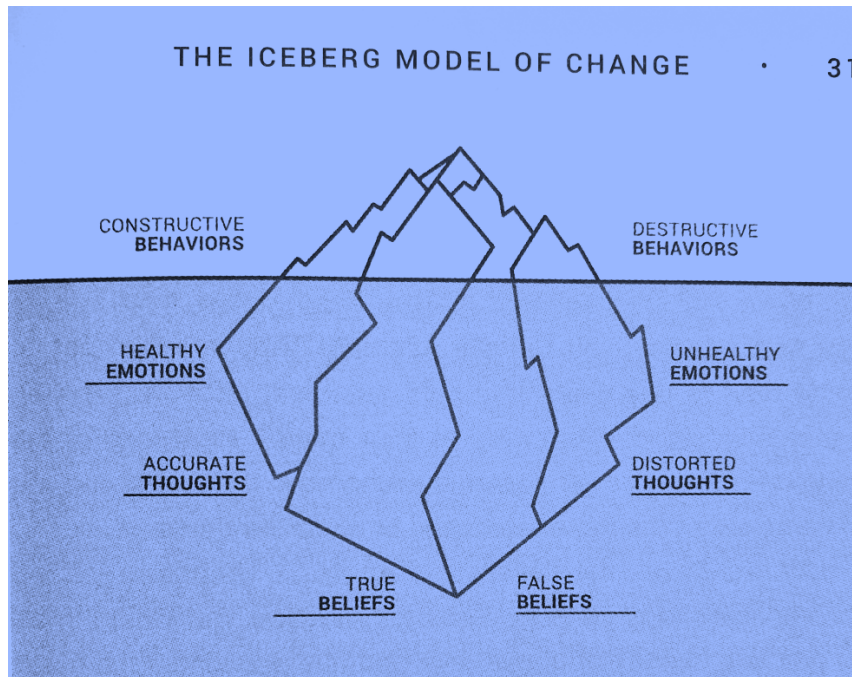
- Iceberg: Don't just address behaviors. Reach for the heart of the issues.
- The goal is not simply behavior modification – but heart transformation.

Rest: *"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matt 11:28-30*

- Rest in the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf!
- Sanctification process: help them understand that knowing God's sovereignty is key to finding peace in all circumstances.

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The Iceberg Model of Change *At The Crossroads by Pete Kuiper*

The tip of the iceberg is **behaviors**. Behaviors are the actions we perform, the way we interact with others. Problem behaviors are often the motivator for getting some form of counseling: drinking too much, having affairs, being abusive, spending money recklessly, skipping school, etc.

The next layer of this iceberg is **emotions** — what you feel. People struggle with many emotional issues, like depression, fear, anxiety, shame, betrayal, etc. Some people have little control of their emotions, living on an emotional roller coaster of subjectivity. Others have learned that if, “I feel too much, I hurt too much, and so learned to repress emotions and become good stuffers.

The third layer of the iceberg is **thoughts** — the cognitive part, the intellectual, the mind. People experiencing a problem often become very analytical: “I need to think this through, figure this out, gather the right information, listen to the latest podcast, etc. I can solve the problem through better understanding.

The deepest level of the iceberg is **beliefs**. What you believe underlies all your thoughts, feelings and behaviors. For everyone, there are significant differences between their formal beliefs and their functional beliefs. **Formal beliefs** are what you “know to be true.” **Functional beliefs**, however, are what you actually live out, what you do and say.

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Renew

TABLE TALK

How can you practice replacing old habits with new Spiritual disciplines with a group member?

How does your identity in Christ help you in difficulties?



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Engage

Engagement with God and His people provides ongoing hope, healing, purpose, and wholeness. This allows believers to grow in Christ and live lives of gospel transformation.

Key Scriptures: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." John 15:4

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." Acts 2:42-47

Engage in Group Life:

- Small Groups – Keep them in a context where they have connection while learning,
- Care Groups – focused support groups pertaining to their specific struggles.
- Serve Groups – Working with fellow believers to engage in Kingdom Growth.

Engage in Spiritual Disciplines:

- Effective discipleship counseling results in ongoing spiritual formation.
- Bible Intake – Prayer - Scripture Memory – Evangelism – Worship – Etc.

Engage in Biblical Resources:

- There are many Biblical resources that help disciples of Christ to live Gospel transformed lives.
- Study Bibles - Bible Studies – Devotionals - Retreats and Conferences – RightNow Media

Engage in Serving:

- It is transformative to help disciples engage in a place of meaningful service.
- Research has demonstrated actively serving others is an effective way to overcome our own struggles.

Engage in Biblical Counseling:

- Biblical Counseling – Trained counselors use God given wisdom, scripture, and prayer as a means of providing more focused healing and help with specific life struggles.

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Engage

TABLE TALK

What are some other next step engagements you can direct a group member to?

Give an example of how group helped you through a hardship in your life.
