



Guiding Theology for Biblical Care

Introduction¹

We are convinced that personal ministry centered on Jesus, powered by the gospel, and shaped by the Scriptures offers real hope and loving help to a fallen and broken world, and we are committed to promoting excellence and unity in counseling that glorifies Jesus, our Redeemer and greatest Treasure, by practicing effective discipleship and compassionate outreach.

Our Biblical Care Is Motivated by Joy in Jesus. The Goal of Our Biblical Care Is the Glory of God and the Good of Others.

We are dedicated to a theology and practice of the personal ministry of the gospel and the Scriptures; variously known as biblical counseling, personal discipleship, one another ministry, pastoral counseling, the priesthood of all believers, every member ministry, and soul care.

We desire that our biblical care ministry focus on a positive presentation and proper understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture and the power of the gospel in progressive sanctification. Our goal is to provide relevant biblically centered resources and training that equip the church to change lives with Christ's changeless truth. We seek to interact in a way that is winsome and wise, maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

We confess that we have not "arrived" (Phil. 3:12-14). We comfort and counsel others only as we humbly receive ongoing comfort and counsel from Jesus and his body, the church (2 Cor. 1:3-4). We readily admit that we struggle to apply consistently all that we say we believe. We who counsel live in process, just like those we counsel, so we want to learn and grow in Jesus' wisdom and grace.

All Christian ministry arises from and is anchored in God's self-revelation in the Word—the written Word (Scripture) and the living Word (Christ). This is true both for the personal ministry of the Word (conversational ministry which our culture calls "counseling"), and for the pulpit ministry of the Word (public preaching and teaching).

In light of this core conviction about Christ-centered, Word-based ministry, we affirm the following central commitments:

1. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Centered on Jesus

We believe that wise biblical care centers on Jesus and his cross and resurrection where God reveals the depths of our sin and the heights of his grace. Wise biblical care gets to the heart of personal and interpersonal problems by bringing to bear the truth, mercy, and power of Jesus' gospel of grace. There are no truly mentally healthy people and there are no truly healthy relationships without understanding the desperate condition we were in without Jesus, and without experiencing the joy of deliverance from that condition through his death and resurrection on our behalf.

We point people to a person, Jesus, our Redeemer and greatest Treasure. People need a real and personal relationship with him, not a system of self-salvation, self-management, or self-actualization. Authentic biblical care guides people to a dynamic relationship with Jesus. We desire to lead struggling, hurting, and confused people to the hope, resources, strength, and life that are only available in him. Our biblical care is not one of many systems of change; rather, it places its trust in the transformative power of the one who is our Redeemer and greatest Treasure, as the only hope to change people's hearts.

¹ Adapted in large part from the *Guiding Philosophy of Counseling* (Bethlehem Baptist Church) — which is itself adapted from the *Confessional Statement* of the Biblical Counseling Coalition. Approved by the DCC Elders on 12/4/17.

2. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Rooted in Scripture

We believe that the Bible is inerrant, sufficient, powerful, profound, and enduringly relevant. No other source of knowledge is ultimately authoritative to equip us for the task of counseling focused on heart change. The Scriptures, rightly interpreted and carefully applied, offer us all-encompassing wisdom for understanding who we are, the problems we face, how people change, and God's provision for that change in the gospel. The wisdom given by God in the Bible is distinctive and robust—comprehensively addressing the sin and suffering of all people in all situations. A system of faith and practice for wise biblical care is not a mere collection of proof-texts from the Scriptures, but a wise application of God's all-embracing truth, culminating in the person and gospel of Jesus, to our complex lives.

The Bible actively drives our theory and practice as we interpret it accurately and apply it relevantly so that our conceptual framework and practical methods emerge as much as possible from the biblical text itself. When we say that Scripture is comprehensive and all-encompassing in wisdom, we mean that the Bible makes sense of all things, not that it contains all the information we could ever know about all topics. God's common grace brings many good things to human life, but it cannot cure the soul. We affirm that numerous sources contribute to our knowledge of people, but none can constitute a comprehensive system of biblical care principles and practices.

3. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Grounded in Theology

We believe that biblical care is fundamentally a practical-theological discipline because every aspect of life is related to God (Rom. 11:36). God intends that we care for one another in ways that relate human struggles to his person, purposes, and promises. Wise biblical care arises from a theological way of looking at life—a mindset, a worldview—that informs how we understand people, problems, and solutions (Col. 3:16). Thus the best biblical care providers are wise, balanced, caring, Spirit-dependent, sorrowful yet always rejoicing (2 Cor. 6:10), and theologically grounded. The ideas, goals, and practices of biblical care should cohere primarily with the Scriptures, but also secondarily with the historic creeds, confessions, and other wise writings that are shaped by the Scriptures and express the church's consensual wisdom for living.

We work to relate the Scriptures relevantly to the life of the counselee. All wise ministry understands particular texts and a person's unique life experience within the context of the Bible's larger storyline: God's creation, our fall into sin, his great redemptive plan, and the consummation of all things in the person and gospel of Jesus. Thus as soul physicians and spiritual friends, we engage in person-specific, naturally flowing conversations growing out of a comprehensive biblical theology, culminating in the gospel, to the exaltation of Jesus.

4. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Dependent Upon the Holy Spirit

We believe that genuine change of heart and lifestyle depends fully upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We know that it is impossible to speak wisely and lovingly to bring about true and lasting change apart from the decisive, compassionate, and convicting work of the Spirit in the counselor and the counselee. We acknowledge the Holy Spirit as the One who illumines the gospel and energizes its application in everyday life.

We serve in the strength which God supplies so that in everything God receives the glory (1 Pet. 4:11). We affirm the absolute necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to inform, guide, and empower both the counselor and the counselee.

5. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Focused on Sanctification

We believe that wise biblical care should be transformative, change-oriented, and grounded in the biblical reality of progressive sanctification. The aim of wise biblical care is intentional and intensive discipleship—growing spiritually mature persons who increasingly reflect Jesus by enjoying and exalting God, by trusting more fully in God's promises to us,

and by gladly ministering to others. Our goal is spiritual, personal, and interpersonal maturity evidenced by relationships, desires, thoughts, motives, actions, and emotions increasingly resembling Jesus, our Redeemer and Treasure.

We seek to maintain the biblical compatibility of God's sovereign role and human responsibility. God's strength and mercy call for our response of the obedience of faith (Rom 1:5), a response he himself empowers (Phil. 2:13). Biblical care helps believers to grasp our new identity in Jesus and to apply the principles of progressive sanctification by cultivating communion with Jesus and his body, the church. The lifelong change process begins at regeneration and continues until we see Jesus face-to-face (1 John 3:2).

6. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Embedded in the Church

We believe that we best reflect the Triune God as we live and grow in community. Sanctification is not a self-improvement project, but a process of learning to delight in God and serve others in love (Gal. 5:6). This embeds personal change within Jesus' community—the church—with all its rich resources of corporate and interpersonal means of grace. We believe that the church is the ideal context for, and should be the center of, Jesus-focused, gospel-centered biblical care.

By example and exhortation, the New Testament commends the personal, face-to-face, one-another ministry of the gospel (Heb. 3:12-13; Jas. 5:16)—those activities which our culture calls “counseling.” God calls us to mutual wise biblical care just as he calls us to public ministries of the gospel in preaching, teaching, and observing the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. God desires that his people love and serve each other by speaking his truth in love to each other (Eph. 4:15). The primary and fullest expression of biblical care ministry is meant to occur in local church communities where leaders effectively shepherd souls while equipping and overseeing diverse forms of every-member ministry. Other likeminded counselors, counseling institutions and organizations are beneficial insofar as they seek to serve alongside of, and lead persons to, the church, as well as seeking to encourage the church to care biblically.

7. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Founded in Love

We believe that Jesus' incarnation is not just the basis for care, but also the model for how we care. We seek to enter into a person's story, listening well, expressing thoughtful love, and engaging the person with compassion. The wise and loving personal ministry of the gospel takes many appropriate forms, from caring comfort to loving rebuke, from careful listening to relevant scriptural exploration, all while building trusting, authentic relationships.

Wise counseling takes into account all that people are experiencing (desires, fears, attitudes, thoughts, goals, actions, words, emotions, struggles, and situational pressure) as the context for understanding how the gospel and the Scriptures relate to all life. Such awareness not only shapes the content of biblical care, but also shapes the way we speak the truth in love so that everything said is “constructive, according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph. 4:29).

8. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Attentive to Issues of the Heart

We believe that human behavior is inextricably tied to deeper thoughts, intentions, and affections of the heart, either sinful or redeemed (Eph. 4:17-24). We emphasize the primacy of the heart and target the inner person because all human acts are acts of worship, either disordered or rightly ordered in relation to God in Jesus. The Word of God alone reveals and penetrates our heart (desires, beliefs, and motives) and behavior (relationships, words, and actions), rightly weighing who we are and what we do before the eyes of God (Heb. 4:12). We seek to address both the inward and outward aspects of human life to bring thorough and lasting change into the image of Jesus.

The Bible is clear that human behavior is not mechanical, but grows out of a heart that desires, longs, thinks, chooses, feels, and is oriented towards or against Jesus. We desire to work to see struggling people experience change at all levels: to love

Jesus with heart, soul, mind, and strength; and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Matt. 22:37-39). Our focus is on both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions, both the inner and the outer person, both issues of the heart and behavior.

9. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Comprehensive in Understanding

We believe that our biblical care should focus on the full range of human nature created in the image of God. A comprehensive biblical understanding perceives human beings as relational, rational, volitional, emotional, spiritual, and physical. We take the whole person seriously in his or her whole life context.

We recognize that people are physically embodied by God's good design and that a variety of bodily influences impact moral response. Appreciating the complexity and mystery of the interface between body and soul, we recognize that there are physiological factors and organic issues that affect a person's life and that treatment of those factors may require medical diagnosis in some circumstances.

We also recognize that people are socially embedded by God's design and that a variety of historical, social, cultural, and family factors may impact moral response. Appreciating the complexity and mystery of the interface between persons and their social environment, we seek to remain sensitive to social factors, as the context within which God calls a person to the obedience of faith.

We further recognize that people are spiritually influenced, under God's wise control, by the spiritual realm and that demonic factors may impact moral response (Eph. 6:10-20). Appreciating the complexity and mystery of the interface between a person and the spiritual world, we seek to remain sensitive to those spiritual influences and address them accordingly.

While we do not view all these factors—physical-embodiment, social-embeddedness, and spiritual-influence—as determinative, recognizing these factors and the interplay between them does help us address the influence they may have on how people relate, think, choose, and feel.

10. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Thorough in Care

We believe that the Scriptures, rightly interpreted in Jesus (Luke 24:27, 44-45), are profitable for dealing thoroughly with the evils we suffer as well as with the sins we commit (2 Tim. 3:16-17). We seek to discern both the differences and interconnections between sin and suffering, and to minister appropriately to each.

We desire to address suffering and engage sufferers in many compassionate ways, including by offering God's encouragement, comfort, and hope for the hurting. Our biblical care also addresses sin and engages sinners by speaking Jesus' truth in love in numerous caring ways, including by offering God's confrontation of sins and by presenting God's gracious forgiveness in Jesus.

11. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Relevant in Methodology

We believe that commitment to the sufficiency of the Scriptures results in ministry that demonstrates the relevancy of God's Word. The Bible calls us to use wise methods that minister in relevant ways to the specific biblical care problems of specific people. While a gospel-centered conceptual framework is essential, embodying relational competency in the practical issues of the biblical care process is critical as well.

The Bible has conceptual authority for biblical care as well as authority with regard to biblical care methodology. Within the Bible's conceptual framework there is room for methodological diversity.

12. Our Biblical Care Aims to Be Missional in Orientation

We believe that Christianity is missionary-minded by its very nature. Therefore, our biblical care should be a powerful evangelistic and apologetic force in our world. We want to bring the good news of Jesus to the world that God created and only God can redeem. We seek to speak in relevant ways to Christians and non-Christians, to draw them to the Savior and the distinctive wisdom that comes only from him.

Our deepest desire is to build a great city through the Gospel for the glory of God. We aim to present Jesus' changeless truth to our changing world with a joyful, proactive spirit. We want to engage the broad spectrum of Christian counseling by gladly affirming the good in other approaches, and by graciously and respectfully interacting with people when we differ.