

What is Biblical Counseling?

Dr. David D. Edgington, Executive Director, Phoenix, Arizona
www.CompassionateCounselors.com • CompassionateCounselors@cox.net • (602) 384-4417

Biblical Counseling is a “ministry of the Word” much like what is seen in Acts 6:4. When a Pastor preaches a sermon, he *publicly* ministers God’s Word to a large number of people. His authority for what he says is the Scriptures, not just his opinions or his education. Likewise, a biblical counselor must also minister God’s Word, but he does so *privately*. His authority for his counsel is the Scriptures, not just his opinions or his education. Since his counsel is private, he can customize it to the particular struggle or problem facing the person. But it must operate from a distinctly biblical worldview that uses God’s Word as the authority for his counsel. If he does not use the Scriptures it cannot properly be called “biblical” counseling.

Psalm 119 is one of the most significant chapters in the Bible that highlights not only the authority but also the manifold benefits of the Word of God. Consequently, our confidence at *Compassionate Counselors, Inc.* is that the Bible is sufficient to address *every single problem of life*. Though you cannot do brain surgery by reading the Bible, you can do soul surgery. This is why the Puritans were called “physicians of the soul.” They had an unswerving confidence that God’s Word would always be effective in helping believers with their struggles in life. Let’s look at some of the many truths from Psalm 119 that lead us to this conclusion.

1. We should *Delight* in God’s Counsel

In Psalm 119, there are 10 occasions where “delight” is connected to God’s Word (14, 16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 162, and 174). God’s Word is specifically designed to counsel our hearts (*Your testimonies are my delight; they are my counselors* Ps. 119:24). Biblical counseling is not trying to make the Word of God do something it was not designed to do. Scripture is designed by God to be our counselor so therefore biblical counseling is simply trying to be faithful to its authority. A key part of this design by God is that it is not only to be our *authority* but also our *delight*. This is speaking of more than just an accumulation of facts and information. It is an affect that the Holy Spirit brings about in the heart that is seeking counsel from God’s Word. In fact, we are told that if we *not* find delight in God’s counsel, then this will accelerate the pain of our afflictions (*If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction* Ps. 119:92).



2. We should *Meditate* on God’s Counsel

In Psalm 119, there are 8 occasions where “meditation” on Scripture is commended (15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 97, 99, 148). Obviously this is an important discipline for us to learn and practice. Meditation is dwelling on, pondering, and lingering upon truths in the Word of God *until* our hearts are affected by them. Paul talks about this in Phil. 4:8-9

and Col. 3:1-2. Isaiah speaks of this in Isa. 26:3. David addresses it in Ps. 145:5 and 27:4. Jesus rebukes Peter in Mt. 16:23 by informing him that he failed to biblically meditate by “*setting (your) mind on the things of God.*” So why is biblical meditation practiced so infrequently? Because it takes *time*. Psalm 119:23 is a great reminder of the power of meditation in the midst of a humanly impossible trial (princes plotting vs. you). It will take discipline to turn to God’s Word while you are being crushed by sin (either your own sin or someone’s sin vs. you). This is why Psalm 119:133 is so helpful. It is a plea to God to not allow your heart to be dominated by sin (*let no iniquity get dominion over me*). Isn’t this a discipline and a meditation that is worth pursuing?

3. We should be *Humble* under God’s Counsel

In Psalm 119 there are 13 occasions where the author describes himself as God’s “servant” (17, 23, 38, 49, 65, 76, 84, 122, 124, 125, 135, 140, 176). This is a term which reminds us that humility is a key character trait that we must pursue. If you view yourself as a servant of God, you will see the greatness and glory of God clearly. If you are humble you will be teachable and seek change to your own heart. You won’t be as tempted to see “the other person” as the chief problem in your relationship. If you are humble you will learn to see your own sin more readily than sin in someone else’s heart.

There is also a large emphasis in Psalm 119 on “understanding” God’s Word. This Psalm addresses this on 10 occasions (27, 34, 73, 99, 100, 104, 125, 130, 144, 169). Ordinarily, when we think of “understanding” we only think of intellectual capacity. But this word intimately con-





nects comprehension with actual *change*. To “understand” means *to keep (God’s) law and observe it with my whole heart* (119:34). It means that we truly “learn” God’s commandments not just intellectually

but in a practical manner (119:73). It means we apply God’s Word to life (119:100). It means we not only recognize sin, but actually begin to hate it (119:104). We “understand” God’s Word when we “know” it (119:125). This is the same type of “knowing” where Adam “knew” his wife in the most physically intimate manner between a husband and wife (Gen 4:1). We should seek to “know” God’s Word in a warm, personal manner where it becomes so central and important to our life that we find intimate delight in it.

4. We should be *Changed* by God’s Counsel

In Psalm 119 there are 7 occasions where the author describes having a “longing” in his heart for God’s Word (20, 40, 81, 82, 123, 131, 174). In fact, on one occasion, he says, *I open my mouth & pant because I long for your commandments* (Ps. 119:131). This longing, this “intense desire,” is a work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart that is called a “gracious affection.” These are not only integral to faith, but they are also essential to faith. What is the Greatest Commandment in Scripture? It is to *love* God with all our hearts, soul, mind and strength (Mk. 11:30). It is not so much an action or activity as it is a *fervent desire*. It is more than just an acknowledgement of facts or an awareness of truth. This is a hunger that we should expect. *How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth* - Ps. 119:103. This is why he desires not just “half-hearted” obedience but obedience with his “whole heart” (Ps. 119:2, 10, 58, 145). This is why the “affections” are crucial. Biblical Christianity is not just “do’s and don’ts.” New desires and loves are crucial to the heart of a growing, maturing believer.

But likewise, we should not only have new “loves” but also new “hatreds.” As believers, we should “hate” one thing more than anything else in our lives – “sin.” We should not be mildly disturbed by sin; we should loathe it in our own souls. This is why Psalm 119 speaks of *hating every false way* (104, 128). We should hate greed, lust, sinful anger, unforgiveness, impatience, & bitterness in our hearts. In short, when we think of these affections or desires, they should include loving the things that God loves and hating the things that God hates. An authentic biblical faith includes a change of heart and a change of affections and desires. It is not just the acquisition of knowledge and truth.

5. We should have *Hope* from God’s Counsel

Lastly, in Psalm 119, there are 5 occasions where a distinctly God-centered “hope” is described (43, 49, 81, 114, 147). In biblical counseling “hope” is integral to solving life’s problems. Without hope, we give up and do not persevere. This biblical “hope” is not the kind of hope that has doubt or uncertainty attached to it (*I hope traffic isn’t too bad today*). The biblical “hope” is a confident certainty. It is faith for the future. It is an eager expectation for God to be faithful to what He has said in His Word. *My hope is in Your rules* (119:43). This is why some Bibles translate this word as “wait.” It is not a matter of “if,” but instead it is a matter of “when” God will act. Think of the great comfort and security that comes from seeing God as your personal *“biding place and shield”* (Ps. 119:114). This is the majestic, faithful God Who reveals Himself in the Scriptures.

Psychotherapy cannot give this kind of hope since it is borne of man-made theories. Hope is evacuated from our souls if we do not define problems biblically. If we call “sin” a disease (alcoholism, drug addiction), we undermine hope for change. If we confuse character with personality (most anger is driven by sin; no anger is driven by “personality”), then we don’t pursue holiness. If we blame others for our sinful choices (*you make me angry*), we don’t take responsibility for our lives. We lose hope and see no way to change if we do not define problems biblically. Psychotherapy and its accompanying worldview and labels not only fails to glorify God with its solutions, but it also does not address problems of the heart. It cannot do so because it is not designed to do so.

At *Compassionate Counselors, Inc.* we do not practice nor endorse psychotherapy. We desire for our counsel to *deliberately and intentionally* glorify God. This can only happen as God changes the hearts of His people to live in growing conformity to His perfect Word. It does not happen through a “talking cure” or through “changing your environment,” or “reflective listening.” It comes from the Holy Spirit applying the Word of God to the heart of a person who is seeking Jesus Christ.

As you have been reading this pamphlet, you may be wondering, “*When will God start to work on my own heart like this?*” We would like to encourage you that God has already begun to work on your heart; otherwise you would not have taken the time to read this. We look forward to the privilege of privately ministering God’s Word to you to help you with your current challenges.

