

## **The Top 9 Books on the History of Pastoral Counseling/Biblical Counseling**

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If we are to practice biblical counseling effectively today, we need to understand our historical roots. As G. K. Chesterton noted:

“Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about” (*Orthodoxy*, p. 3).

The following books give “vote and voice” to that “great cloud of witnesses” whose lives and ministries have much to teach us about the personal ministry of the word.

[\*Beyond the Suffering: Embracing the Legacy of African American Soul Care and Spiritual Direction\*](#), by Bob Kellemen (Baker Books, 2007).

The African American church has always helped hurting people through the ministries of sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding. This four-dimensional model is the traditional and widely recognized pattern for understanding one-another ministry, spiritual friendship and pastoral care. *Beyond the Suffering* offers an in-depth exploration of this rich tradition showing Christians proven ways to help people find hope in the midst of their deep pain. Learn from the heroes of Black Church history.

[\*The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams\*](#), by Heath Lambert (Crossway, 2011).

*The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams* is a valuable book for anyone who wants to understand what makes biblical counseling truly biblical, and how the modern biblical counseling movement has developed over the past forty years.

[\*The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context\*](#), by David Powlison (New Growth Press, 2010).

*The Biblical Counseling Movement* unites the twin themes of biblical counseling and church history. Everyone interested in the modern biblical counseling movement will benefit from this well-researched and well-written book. It presents a fair and balanced exploration of one of the most important developments in the Evangelical church over the past generation. Readers will be equipped not only with historical insight, but more importantly, with wisdom for how to speak the truth in love.

[\*Classical Pastoral Care, Vol. 3: Pastoral Counsel\*](#), by Thomas C. Oden (Baker, 1987).

It’s almost unfathomable to imagine the amount of tedious research that went into the development of *Classical Pastoral Care*. All four volumes are worth purchasing. But volume three, “Pastoral Counsel,” is worth the price of the entire series. Here Oden collates amazingly relevant quotes from the halls of Church history, all demonstrating how God’s

people, pastoral and lay, men and women, have always ministered pastoral care one to another.

[Helpful Truth in Past Places](#): *The Puritan Practice of Biblical Counseling*, by Mark A. Deckard (Christian Focus, 2010).

*Helpful Truth in Past Places* is a valuable addition to the growing literature on the history of biblical counseling, soul care, and spiritual direction. It helps us to think theologically about suffering and sin. It encourages us with the truth that God's Word is sufficient, relevant, and profound. It accomplished the goal Deckard set for it, "it will hopefully encourage believers to revisit these and other Puritan writers in order to be better equipped in their ministry of helping others."

[A History of the Cure of Souls](#), by John T. McNeil (Harper, 1951/1977).

McNeil provides readers with a magisterial mapping of the landscape of two millennium of soul care and spiritual direction. In a brief but pointed section on Old Testament and New Testament spiritual care, McNeil documents that God's people have always been about the business of helping hurting and hardened people through shared conversations around the Word. He then transports readers through Church history both chronologically and denominationally. For an introduction to the history of soul care, no one does it better.

[A History of Pastoral Care in America](#): *From Salvation to Self-Realization*, by E. Brooks Holifield (Wipf and Stock, 1983/2005).

*A History of Pastoral Care in America* is peerless. Others such as Clebsch and Jaekle and McNeil have written broad histories of soul care, but none have tackled the challenge of a focused study of soul care and spiritual direction in American religious history. E. Brooks Holifield has penned the comprehensive guide that traces the trajectory of American pastoral care. Holifield's greatest gift in this book is his ability to synthesize large tracks of material. In particular, his subtitle communicates his understanding of the historical path taken by American pastors: "from salvation to self-realization."

[Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective](#), by William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle (Jason Aronson, 1964/1994).

This book revolutionized my thinking about biblical counseling. It provided me with the historical matrix of sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding. Clebsch and Jaekle write convincingly that any model of pastoral counseling worthy of the title must include these four elements (sustaining, healing, reconciling, and guiding). After several well-written chapters that overview the nature of these four tasks, the authors then provide historical samples upon which to feast—samples illustrating the four tasks in historical perspective.

[Sacred Friendships](#): *Celebrating the Legacy of Women Heroes of the Faith*, by Bob Kellemen (BMH Books, 2009).

*Sacred Friendships* celebrates the incredible stories of over fifty amazing Christian women. It gives voice to the voiceless as it narrates how godly women for the past 2,000 years have provided sustaining and healing soul care along with reconciling and guiding spiritual direction. *Sacred Friendships* enlightens readers to the often neglected legacy of Christian women and then equips women and men to apply that legacy to their lives and ministries.

## Join the Conversation

What books on the history of pastoral counseling/biblical counseling would you add to this list?

**Note:** This book list first appeared at the [Biblical Counseling Coalition's](#) Book Review [site](#). You can read it [here](#).

## Book Images





