

## **12 Biblical Counseling Distinctives**

### **By Bob Kellemen, Ph.D.**

People often ask:

- “What makes biblical counseling truly biblical?”
- “How does biblical counseling differ from other approaches to soul care?”

The [Biblical Counseling Coalition](#) addressed these questions when three dozen leaders spent nine months and ten drafts to develop The Biblical Counseling Coalition [Confessional Statement](#). I had the privilege of facilitating this process. I’m biased, but I believe this document is invaluable.

Because of the Confessional Statement’s richness, depth, and length, I’ve thought for some time that a shortened, outline version would be helpful. So, developed from the BCC’s Confessional Statement, I offer you *12 Biblical Counseling Distinctives*.

#### **Distinctive #1: Biblical Counseling Is Anchored in Scripture**

- God’s Word is authoritative, sufficient, and relevant for life and godliness (Psalm 19:7-14; Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 4:4; Hebrews 4:12-13; 2 Peter 1:3).
- The inspired and inerrant Scriptures, rightly interpreted and carefully applied, offer us God’s comprehensive wisdom. We learn to understand who God is, who we are, the problems we face, how people change, and God’s provision for change in the gospel (John 8:31-32; 10:10; 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- No other source of knowledge thoroughly equips us to counsel in ways that transform the human heart (Psalm 19:7-14; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3).
- Biblical counseling is an insightful application of God’s all-embracing truth to our complex lives (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6; Philippians 1:9-11).
- Scripture alone teaches a perspective and way of looking at life by which we can think biblically about and critically evaluate information and actions from any source (Colossians 2:1-15; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

#### **Distinctive #2: Biblical Counseling Is Centered on Christ and the Gospel**

- Biblical counseling centers on Christ—His sinless life, death on the cross, burial, resurrection, present reign, and promised return (Colossians 1:9-23; 1:27-29).
- Through the gospel, God reveals the depths of sin, the scope of suffering, and the heights of grace (John 1:14; 3:1-16; 4:1-24; Ephesians 3:14-21).
- Biblical counselors point people to a person—Jesus our Redeemer—not to a program, theory, or experience. We place our trust in the transforming power of the Redeemer as the only hope to change people’s hearts (John 14:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

### **Distinctive #3: Biblical Counseling Is Grounded in Sound Theology**

- Biblical counseling arises from a theological way of looking at life—a worldview—that informs how we understand people, problems, and solutions. The best biblical counselors are wise, balanced, caring, experienced practical theologians (Philippians 1:9-11).
- Biblical counselors relate the Scriptures relevantly to people's lives (Hebrews 3:12-19).
- Wise counselors understand specific passages and a person's unique life experience within the context of the Bible's larger story. Counselors engage in person-specific conversations flowing naturally from a comprehensive biblical theology of life (John 4:1-24).

### **Distinctive #4: Biblical Counseling Is Dependent Upon the Holy Spirit and Prayer**

- Genuine change of heart and transformation of lifestyle depend upon the Holy Spirit. Biblical counselors affirm the absolute necessity of the work of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower the counselor, the counselee, and the counseling relationship (John 14:15-16:16; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Galatians 5:22-23).
- Dependent prayer is essential to the work of biblical counseling (Ephesians 6:18-20).

### **Distinctive #5: Biblical Counseling Is Directed Toward Sanctification**

- Biblical counseling is transformative, change-oriented, and grounded in the doctrine of sanctification (Romans 6:3-14; 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18; Philippians 2:12-13).
- The lifelong change process begins at salvation and continues until we see Jesus face-to-face (Romans 12:1-2; 1 John 3:1-3).
- The aim of biblical counseling is intentional and intensive discipleship. The fruit of counseling is spiritually mature people who increasingly reflect Christ (relationally, rationally, volitionally, and emotionally) by enjoying and exalting God and by loving others well and wisely (Matthew 22:35-40; Galatians 5:22-6:10).

### **Distinctive #6: Biblical Counseling Is Rooted in the Life of the Church**

- Wise counseling embeds personal change within the church—with all God's rich resources of corporate and interpersonal means of grace (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).
- By example and exhortation the New Testament commends the personal, face-to-face, one-another ministry of the Word—whether in one-to-one or small group relationships (Hebrews 3:12-19; 10:19-25).
- God desires His people to love and serve each other by speaking His truth in love to one another (Romans 15:14; Ephesians 4:15-16).
- The primary and fullest expression of counseling ministry is meant to occur in local church communities where pastors effectively shepherd souls while equipping and overseeing diverse forms of every-member ministry (Romans 15:14; Ephesians 4:11-14).

### **Distinctive #7: Biblical Counseling Is Founded in Love**

- Christ's incarnation is not just the basis for care, but also the model for how we care (John 3-4; 13:34-35; Hebrews 4:14-16).
- Biblical counselors seek to enter into a person's story, listening well, expressing thoughtful love, and engaging the person with compassion (Ephesians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).
- The wise and loving personal ministry of the Word takes many appropriate forms, from caring comfort to loving rebuke, from careful listening to relevant scriptural exploration, all while building trusting, authentic relationships (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12; 5:14-15; 1 John 4:7-21).

### **Distinctive #8: Biblical Counseling Is Attentive to Heart Issues**

- Human behavior is tied to thoughts, intentions, and affections of the heart. All our actions arise from hearts that are worshipping either God or something else, therefore we emphasize the importance of the heart and address the inner person (Hebrews 4:12-13).
- Biblical counseling seeks to address both the inward and outward aspects of human life to bring thorough and lasting change into the image of Christ. Wise counsel appropriately focuses on the vertical and the horizontal dimensions, on the inner and the outer person, and on observable behavior and underlying issues of the heart (Matthew 23:23-28).

### **Distinctive #9: Biblical Counseling Is Comprehensive in Understanding**

- Biblical counseling focuses on the full range of human nature created in the image of God. A comprehensive biblical understanding sees human beings as relational (spiritual and social), rational, volitional, emotional, and physical beings. (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7).
- Biblical counseling recognizes the complexity of the relationship between the body and soul. We seek to apply God's Word to people's lives amid bodily strengths and weaknesses (Genesis 2:7; 2 Corinthians 4:7-10).
- Biblical counseling recognizes the complexity of the connection between people and their social environment. We seek to remain sensitive to the impact of suffering and of the great variety of significant social-cultural factors (1 Peter 3:8-22).

### **Distinctive #10: Biblical Counseling Is Thorough in Care**

- God's Word is profitable for dealing thoroughly with the evils we suffer and with the sins we commit. Wise counselors seek to discern the differences and connections between sin and suffering, and to minister appropriately to both (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
- Biblical counseling addresses suffering and engages sufferers in many compassionate ways. It offers God's encouragement, comfort, and hope for the hurting (Romans 8:17-18; Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3-8).
- Biblical counseling addresses sin and engages sinners in numerous caring ways. It offers God's confrontation of sins, encourages repentance of sins, presents God's gracious forgiveness in Christ, and shares God's powerful path for progressive victory over sin (1 John 1:8-2:2; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Colossians 3:1-17; 2 Timothy 2:24-26).

### **Distinctive #11: Biblical Counseling Is Practical and Relevant**

- A commitment to the sufficiency of God's Word results in counseling that demonstrates the relevancy of God's Word. Biblical counseling offers a practical approach to daily life that is uniquely effective in the real world where people live and relate (1 John 3:11-24).
- The Bible calls us to use wise methods that minister in Christ-centered ways to the unique life situations of specific people (Proverbs 15:23; 25:11).
- We are to speak what is helpful for building others up according to the need of the moment, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29).

### **Distinctive #12: Biblical Counseling Is Oriented Toward Outreach**

- Biblical counseling is a powerful evangelistic and apologetic force. 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 His Word (Titus 2:10-15).
- Biblical counselors seek to present the claims, mercies, hope, and relevance of Christ in a positive, loving, Christ-like spirit (1 Peter 3:15).
- Our mission to spread the fame of Jesus Christ includes a desire that all counselors appreciate and embrace the beauty of a Christ-centered and Word-based approach to people, problems, and solutions (Philippians 1:9-11).

### **What Makes Biblical Counseling Truly Biblical?**

Here are two answers, first in sixty-one words, and then in eighteen:

- Biblical counseling occurs whenever God's people engage in conversations that are anchored in Scripture, centered on Christ and the gospel, grounded in sound theology, dependent upon the Holy Spirit and prayer, directed toward sanctification, rooted in the life of the church, founded in love, attentive to heart issues, comprehensive in understanding, thorough in care, practical and relevant, and oriented toward outreach.
- Biblical counseling promotes personal change, centered on the person of Christ through the personal ministry of the Word.

**A Word From Bob:** For a fuller development of these distinctives, in addition to the BCC's Confessional Statement, see [\*Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives\*](#).