

A photograph of a wooden desk with a calendar, a smartphone, and an alarm clock. The calendar is open to a page showing days of the week and dates. The smartphone is on the left, and the alarm clock is on the right. A white text box is overlaid on the calendar.

## Four Realistic Goals for a Church's First Year of Embracing Biblical Counseling

### **Goal #1 - Unify the Leadership around the Vision**

Many churches underestimate the confusion, opposition, and controversy that introducing a vision for biblical counseling causes in many churches. Lay biblical counseling ministries that flourish have a supportive leadership team that embraces and supports the vision. Before a training center ever implements a training partnership, steps to unify the local church leadership should be undertaken.

When church leaders talk about a biblical counseling vision, is there opposition or agreement, dedication or apathy, fearful concern or committed conviction? A biblical counseling vision that is met with opposition, apathy, or even fearful concern will take far greater time to implement. Plowing ahead with biblical counseling training before obtaining a clear vision and unified leadership will likely lead to little long-term success. Our training center finds that the conversations we have before we ever implement training are crucial for success.

### **Goal #2 - Implement a Training Process and Seek Partnerships for Collaboration**

One of the advantages of partnering with a training center is that they bring a level of resourcing and experience that most churches just starting out don't have.

Look for partnerships that:

- Will equip you to train your people

- Align with your philosophy and church culture
- Will answer your questions and help you solve obstacles to implementation
- Offer a variety of ongoing training and resources to your people

If biblical counseling training organizations deserve to exist, we'd better be about helping churches make and grow disciples; specifically, equipping church leaders to answer the struggles of a hurting world wisely. Selecting a training partner is an important step for a church in the first year. Get references of people who have trained and the results they have obtained. Do you have a rapport and connection with them?

### **Goal #3 – Have a Biblical Counseling Ministry Plan “in Writing”**

Some have said about churches, “Nothing is official until it is in writing.” More than training volunteers for a week-long VBS, biblical counseling ministries require a longer development, training, and execution curve. Additionally, each location requires different concerns. Over the past year, we have trained groups in inner-city Chicago, rural Kansas, suburban Minneapolis, and the Bible-belt of South Carolina. They will all face different obstacles as they promote, implement, and develop biblical counseling. A good training center will help you think through how to execute and will weigh in on the development of your ministry plan. You won't have it all developed in the first year, but you should know where you are headed. There are four key areas that this plan needs to address:

- **Leadership** – Do you have the necessary leadership to oversee the ministry? How will your leaders report and be supported? What will the leadership structure be? How will you gather and train those who have an interest?
- **Logistics** – Do you have a clearly written plan and policies? Do you have a solid intake form that clearly explains what your ministry is and isn't? Do you have things like a sample intake form that could be helpful to you? The leading non-profit insurance company in the country published a short brochure called the “[Lay Counseling Risk Management Guide](#),” and it has a great format and examples that will be helpful.

- **Legal** – How will you safeguard your church, counselees, and counselors? Do you know the laws of your state? Have you reviewed resources about legal protection? Do you have the policies and vision in writing, and do you have a plan to clearly communicate them on a regular basis? We recommend our partners work through the “Lay Counseling Legal Guide” or another helpful article called, [“Counseling Ministries: A Legal Checkup.”](#)
- **Learning** – How will your counselors continue to grow? Since good counselors need to be continually learning, who will help your people grow in their counseling skills and knowledge? Do you have a partner that you trust to provide biblical counseling resources? A quality training partner will help you move forward faster.

#### **Goal #4 – Determine First Ministry Experiences**

One of the hardest things for churches to balance and one of the questions that our training center gets asked the most is, “When are people ready to begin counseling, and how to do we start giving them experience?”

Experience is necessary for the training process because once people get a taste of the powerful yet simple principles at work, they will often have a passion for more. Also, it is crucial that propriety and confidentiality be stressed. However, the best means of equipping counselors is not only classroom training but through actual observation and involvement.

Below are four models to increase the involvement of church leaders in the counseling process, helping potential lay counselors to take the first step.

- **Homework Helper** – Counselees may need to find a wise friend to assist them in completing assignments given by the counselor. The helper serves for accountability and encouragement but will also learn how to help others going through a similar struggle from this process. This could become the first step for the homework helper as a potential lay counselor in the future, but it certainly will be an encouragement to the counselee now. “Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed” (Prov. 15:22).
- **Life Experience Advocate** – Who can better help someone going through cancer than a person who saw God as faithful in the midst

of the same affliction (2 Cor. 1:3-7)? Those with addictions, marriage struggles, or other difficulties are encouraged and given hope when they learn from those who have already experienced great victory (1 Cor. 10:13).

- **Counseling/Pastor's Office** – Often a church's counseling office or conference table effectively allows observers to watch an experienced counselor and to grow in their own ability to counsel. Initially, trainees watch silently, but over time they become more involved in the process. Experienced leaders mentor by inviting others to join them in sessions.
- **Living Room** – Particularly in marriage counseling, inviting one married couple to minister to another creates momentum and support for a struggling marriage. Often the informal setting of a home encourages a couple to open up and share more freely. Some counselors feel more casual and comfortable as well. One of many great marriage studies can serve as the topic of discussion and give confidence to new leaders.

## Conclusion

Biblical counseling isn't simply a doctrinal position that a church can affirm or deny. We are called to put the philosophy of biblical counseling into action and to stand in the battle with help and hope with those who are struggling. If you are committed to the philosophy, keep working towards the practice. If you need help, reach out and seek the advice of others who have walked this path before.

## Questions for Reflection

Where is your church at in the process of putting your biblical counseling philosophy into practice? What goals are realistic for your church this year, and do you have a plan to accomplish them? If you haven't gotten past the philosophy of biblical counseling to the practice of biblical counseling, where is the vision breaking down?



Our LAUNCH partnerships are designed to bring flexible training, tested resources, and personal answers so that your LAUNCH will be successful the first time. We have worked with churches in more than 15 states and many countries. We have a plan and resources that can help you get started. Talk with someone today about whether Launch is right for you: go to <https://biblicalcounselingcenter.org/start-launch>.