



4 REALISTIC GOALS FOR A CHURCH'S FIRST YEAR OF EMBRACING BIBLICAL COUNSELING



FRUSTRATION AND VICTORY

I talked with several churches recently that had taken groups to weeklong biblical counseling training conferences or purchased curriculum to develop a training process.

Unfortunately, they are frustrated because they have little to show for it.

They received valuable teaching that they wanted to implement in their church, but they seem no closer to developing a biblical counseling strategy.



As the executive director of a training center, I often hear these types of stories about biblical counseling training. Far more people have attended biblical counseling training courses than are utilizing those skills on a regular basis. This frustrates pastors, and counseling training centers are frustrated too. What should we do about it? Churches need to have realistic goals for their first year. Here are the four sequential goals that we lay out for them as realistic.

UNIFY THE LEADERSHIP AROUND THE VISION

GOAL #1



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.

IMPLEMENT A TRAINING PROCESS AND SEEK PARTNERSHIPS FOR COLLABORATION

GOAL # 2

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

You want to 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 a biblical counseling training organizations deserve to exist, we 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?

HAVE A BIBLICAL COUNSELING MINISTRY PLAN — “IN WRITING”

GOAL #3

Some have said about churches, “Nothing is official until it is in writing.” More than training volunteers for a weeklong 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 they 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 clear 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 the resources about legal protection included in this resource guide? 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 constantly learning, who will help your people grow in the 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.

DETERMINE FIRST MINISTRY EXPERIENCES

GOAL # 4

One of the hardest thing 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 them getting experience?" Experience is necessary in 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 4 models to increase involvement of church leaders in the counseling process, helping some potential lay counselors to take a first step:

HOMEWORK HELPER

Counselees may need to find a wise friend that will assist them in completing assignments given by the counselor. The helper serves for accountability and encouragement but will also learn from this process how to help others going through a similar struggle. 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" (Pro 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 just 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. 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 those who are struggling with help and hope. If you are committed to the philosophy, keep working towards the practice. If you need help, reach out and seek the help of others who have walked this path before.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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?