

When Your Church Doesn't See Your Vision: What to Do While You Wait

By: Tim Allchin

Editor's Note: Part One of this two-part blog addresses pastors and church leadership ministering in a church where the congregation doesn't see the vision for biblical counseling. Part Two addresses members who are in a church where the leadership doesn't see the vision for biblical counseling.



The Challenge for Church Leaders: Developing a Vision for Care

I often talk with a church leader who has caught the vision for biblical counseling but leads a church who doesn't understand it or agree with it yet. He wonders if the church could ever have a successful culture of biblical counseling when the vision seems to be mostly his, and few others seem to share his passion or concern. If you are that church leader, here are some simple but profound steps toward progress—ways to encourage your church to fully embrace the vision for biblical counseling. Below are five things for you to "Stop and Start" as you wait for biblical counseling to take traction in your church.



Change Your Language

Stop using the word "counseling." Instead, start to talk about discipleship, wisdom, friendship, shepherding, and hospitality.



Shift Your Vision

Stop visualizing only a formal counseling ministry. Start encouraging holistic care and the role the church should play in helping one another.



Address Real Issues

Stop avoiding counseling topics. Start addressing relevant issues like anxiety, depression, anger, relational conflict, and infertility.

Reframing the Conversation

Stop using the word "counseling"

Before you start talking about biblical counseling, you likely need to paint a vision for what it is. One of the common hesitations in starting a "counseling" ministry is that your church may not have any "trained" counselors to serve or people willing to be trained as lay counselors.

Start talking about discipleship

Here is a better way to describe the dilemma to your church. Is wisdom available to those who need it, and do those who have it regularly share it? Do your leaders show hospitality in ways that those with struggles can share their burdens and receive prayer, care, and a biblical perspective?

You don't need to have a formal counseling ministry or formal training process to say that we as a leadership team or congregation are determined to challenge those with wisdom to be "wise friends" to those in need of compassionate care. Leadership, discipleship, and shepherding are other words that apply more universally than counseling, yet involve many of the same principles and skills.

Rethinking the Ministry Model

Stop visualizing only a formal counseling ministry

During my doctoral project, I looked at more than one thousand journal articles about non-professional counseling and what makes it effective. Surprisingly, non-professionals often have better results than those who counsel vocationally. The research shows three essential reasons why lay counselors have been effective.

1

Uncommon Love

Lay counselors have an uncommon love for people, which motivates action. Love is the greatest motivator in change, and those who counsel for loving reasons motivate the best. It isn't their job, it's their passion.

2

Greater Accessibility

Lay counselors are more accessible when needed because they only work with a few people at a time. Imagine if your doctor only care for 20 patients, he might actually know you. A typical lay counselors provides personal care.

3

Personal Experience

Lay counselors tend to passionately help people because they desire to give back in areas where they have personal experience of life change and a story of hope to tell to those needing help. Utilize the power of story in your care.

In cases where professional counseling is necessary, churches can still walk alongside the hurting, recognizing that long-term care and a network of care is needed in more severe struggles. Can your church provide motivating love, accessible wisdom, and shared experiences to help others? We are called to do this for one another as the body of Christ.

Addressing Relevant Issues



Stop avoiding counseling topics

Does your preaching ever address the hot topics that permeate the therapist's office throughout the week? Most of the people we see at the Biblical Counseling Center would say they have received little instruction about the struggle described in their intake forms.

More than fifty percent of our counselees have never talked with anyone in church about their struggle; they just found us on the internet. If they have never had any discussion about their struggles at their church, it's no wonder they don't have confidence that the church would be of much help.

i How to Start Addressing These Topics:

- If you don't know how to preach about these struggles, would you be willing to dialogue with a biblical counselor who can guide you through it?
- Go to your local library and ask the reference librarian to pull recent journal articles about these topics.
- Learn how the world describes these struggles without God in view and compare how Scripture sees the deeper heart issues.
- Start short-term topical groups or sermon series that address the issues that keep people awake at night.

Sharing the Counseling Load

Stop hoarding the pastoral counseling

It feels good to be liked and needed, and pastoral counseling will often give you those feelings. However, the burdens can quickly overwhelm you as the sole care-provider for your congregation's struggles. Too many pastors have burned out because they have never invited other members to share in the care.

Avoid Counsel Alone

One of the most effective ways to get advocates for biblical counseling is avoid counseling alone. As you counsel, always seek to have someone you are equipping in session with you.

Empower Your Leaders

This is just a good discipleship practice: you pour into your leadership and teach them to pour into others by checking on and encouraging the struggling person throughout the week. Empower them to serve others!

Train Key Laypeople

Some pastors have trained two to four key laymen in their offices using online training videos. Those who are trained then function as peer counselors or advocates. Start with handselected few, that help model the way for others who might get involved.

Just a simple tap on the shoulder of a wiser, older man or woman, saying, "I will train you and you will love this," may be the most effective way to get others involved as people-helpers. Every time we train at a church, the leaders are surprised by someone who expresses interest that they would not have every suspected might be interested. Training is a great way to recruit your team if you don't know who to select.

Reclaiming Pastoral Care

Stop outsourcing most of your counseling

During pastoral counseling classes at my seminary, professional counselors and professors challenged the future pastors to find a good counselor or psychologist and outsource the vast majority of their counseling once they became pastors. The professors explained that the risks, frustrations, and relational pitfalls of counseling people would far outweigh the benefits for a pastor who devoted time to counseling his congregants.

I recently wrote about the downsides of **outsourcing** most of your counseling as a pastor. You may not feel like you are the best counselor, but you would enjoy it more if you are growing more competent in counseling skills.

Initially, you may outsource the more difficult cases, but as you develop yourself and also a team of helpers, outsourcing will become a rare necessity. Many options for training exist. You can go for a week seminar of immersion or take **self-paced training online**. Make it your goal to improve your skills this year.



When Your Church Doesn't See Your Vision: Part 2

Editor's Note: Part two of this two-part blog is written to church members who serve in a church where the church leadership doesn't see the vision for biblical counseling. Part one addresses pastors and church leadership ministering in a church where the congregation doesn't see the vision for biblical counseling.

I often talk to those who are trained in biblical counseling, who have caught the vision for biblical counseling but are attending a church where the leadership has not. They wonder if there could ever be a successful culture of biblical counseling when the vision seems to reside mostly with a few laymen and not throughout the church.

Sometimes in their frustration, those newly trained in biblical counseling will jump from church to church seeking to convince church leadership to allow them to create a counseling ministry.

If you are in this position, please consider that you can make progress in small steps by adjusting just a few things. Below are five "Stops and Starts" as you wait for biblical counseling to take traction in your church.

Finding Your Place to Serve

Stop waiting for/pushing for the right ministry "position"

Very few pastors will rebuff your offer to personally disciple, pray with, and encourage those who are consumed with life-dominating struggles. You might say, "I have a burden to encourage those who are depressed, anxious, conflicted, physically infirmed, or emotionally floundering and give them support and help."

What Pastors Will Accept

Even pastors who don't buy into biblical counseling would typically see a benefit in those who are struggling to have a network of wise friends who listen, understand, encourage, and willingly help in times of need.

How You Can Help

Even if the person is seeing a secular therapist, you can engage in conversations about how God will shape them through this trial and encourage them to respond right.

Often, it isn't long until those who have been living on milk begin to see that the nourishment provided by the Word guides them to effective solutions and godly choices. You are discipling them in wisdom from Scripture.

Expanding Your Ministry Approach

Stop thinking only in terms of one-on-one formal counseling

Some of our best counseling in another church setting was done with a single moms' support group. We provided dinner, clothing for kids, surplus groceries, and a kids' program during a two-hour meeting as godly, older women taught a mix of biblical and practical topics.

Support for Single Moms

- Respite from daily responsibilities
- Practical support and resources
- Biblical teaching on relevant topics
- Community with others in similar situations

Support Benevolence with Structured Care

- Opportunity for biblical counseling in group setting
- Platform for one-on-one conversations
- Practical demonstration of Christ's love

Potential Topic-Based Groups

- Anxiety and depression
- Anger management
- Infertility support
- Grief and loss
- Marriage enrichment
- Anxiety
- Addiction/Purity

These classes often lead to individual conversations and opportunities to help those who struggle with issues that are so common but so often neglected in our churches.

Building Partnerships Beyond Your Church

Stop thinking only about your local church

Many pastors are so overwhelmed with administration, preaching, and other duties that adding one more "ministry" to their plate to oversee seems impossible. However, there may be multiple churches in your area with the same issue of an overworked pastor who needs discipleship helpers.

Questions to Consider:

- Does each individual church need to create a space for counseling and host a training class, or could several churches work together?
- Could you organize a group discipleship training across multiple churches?
- What options for care do neighboring churches have and how might you help churches carry the burden to help hurting congregants?

Potential Partnership Opportunities:

- Recovery groups
- Local marriage ministries
- Crisis pregnancy centers
- Homeless shelters
- Senior centers
- Legal Aid Organizations
- Boys/Girls Clubs

Prove that you can counsel in ministry settings such as those listed above, and your church and pastor may be more likely to give you other opportunities within your own church walls. You are sharpening your own skills as you are helping others. This benefits everyone and increases the effectiveness of your ministry.

Demonstrating Grace in Your Approach

Stop complaining about people who don't see the vision

Sometimes churches don't want a biblical counseling ministry because the people proposing such a ministry are difficult to deal with. That statement might sting a little (or a lot), but you need to evaluate if it's true, because it's way more common than you think.

 Biblical counselors are unique in the counseling world because we have a deep conviction about truth, doctrine, and practical obedience. At times, however, our counsel may reflect more the Christian sub-culture than wise and faithful application of the text. We need the word to correct any imbalance or legalistic tendencies we may have. Grace and Truth are equally important.

The Challenge

When a pastor has experienced dogmatic or difficult biblical counselors in the past, he may be more hesitant to partner with someone in ministry who may emulate that same mentality.

The Solution

If you want to prove that you are a biblical counselor who understands grace, you must be gracious! Are you demonstrating that in how you respond to a resistant church leadership who does not see your vision to counsel biblically?

The Approach

A humble disciple is winsome to blaze the trail for greater discipleship. Focus on all the good you can do to lovingly disciple those in that congregation.

Continuing Your Personal Development

Stop neglecting your own personal development

Even if you can't solve all the world's problems today, they will be worse tomorrow. Leaders are learners, and the more that you think through the complicated issues that face our society, the more you can become potent salt and light.



As I wrote my doctoral project a few years ago, I reflected on how different my experience was than my dad's when he wrote his in the mid-1980s. I had thousands of article and books available to me electronically to search exact phrases and words. My dad had to search bibliographic cards in a library filing cabinet. Now there is no excuse for counselors being ill-prepared.

In our Christian publishing circles, so many resources are being published that address counseling issues from a biblical perspective. Effective conferences and online training course are available to you as an aspiring biblical counselor.

There are counseling coalitions and certifying organizations. You may prove you are serious about helping people by continuing to prepare. Don't conclude that God has closed a door, because sometimes He prepares us through the waiting.

About the Author



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Tim is the Executive Director of the Biblical Counseling Center located in the Chicago area. At Biblical Counseling Center, Tim counsels, oversees staff counselors, and trains churches to develop counseling ministries. He earned his Doctor of Ministry from Central Baptist Theological Seminary (2017) and holds an M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (2003).

Before joining the Biblical Counseling Center in 2012, Tim pastored in a variety of roles for 12 years in a local church, overseeing students and families, biblical counseling, small groups, and support groups. In each role, Tim's passion was helping the hurting to find hope in applying God's Word to the practical issues of life. Tim is married and has two college age sons.

Question for Reflection

Have you found yourself in any of the situations that I have described above? As a ministry, we love to come alongside churches and help them to create an organized system of care and training for their leaders. If your church is interested in partnering with us, we would welcome the opportunity to help you move forward. Reach out. We have resources that may help facilitate the conversation.