

BIBLICAL COUNSELING POLICIES & PROCEDURES

(Please Read, then Sign Consent Form at End)

OVERVIEW OF OUR BIBLICAL COUNSELING MINISTRY

Biblical Counseling (“BC”) is an outreach ministry of Higher Ground Church (“HGC”). The purpose of BC is to provide Biblical counseling services for you as a counselee, **free of charge**.

All counseling will be provided by a pastor or volunteer lay counselor, not licensed professionals. Therefore, as “Biblical” counselors, the goal of BC is to help you gain insight into your problem and life, yet help you understand your problem in light of God’s Word and His purpose for your life. The ultimate goal of BC is to help you grow in your faith, knowledge, and love for Jesus Christ, and help you be conformed to His likeness.

BIBLICAL BASIS

Because HGC believes that the Bible is the very Word of God to man concerning faith and life, the principles used in our counseling will be based upon Scripture and not necessarily in adherence with any psychological or psychiatric association. A foundation to BC is our belief that God has specifically created mankind in His own image and for the purpose of His own glory. Therefore, we believe in order to fully address the root of the problems that counselees face, we must help them apply God’s Word to their lives.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We are often asked whether HGC's counseling ministry promises total confidentiality, in other words, that no one else will ever know what is being shared during a counseling session. We are discreet but not confidential as the concept of total confidentiality is not Biblical. However, information regarding a counselee/disciple will be handled with a high level of discretion.

Discerning how to share information is an important aspect of the counseling relationship and we will carefully guard any information entrusted to us. Hebrews 13:17 makes it clear that the leaders of the church, not the counselors, have the responsibility for caring for the souls of the church. Accordingly, the appropriate staff and/or elders will be made aware of your situation. There are three other situations whereby we may be legally or biblically obligated to share certain information with others:

1. When there is a clear indication of harm to you or someone else,
2. When there is evidence or reasonable suspicion of abuse against a minor child, elderly person, or dependent adult,
3. When a person persistently refuses to renounce a particular sin and it becomes necessary to seek the assistance of others in the church to encourage repentance and reconciliation (see Proverbs 5:22; 24:11, Matthew 18:15-20)

As part of our mission to train and equip others in Biblical counseling, we may have counselor(s)-in training ("CIT") participate in the counseling sessions. These individuals will abide by the same standards outlined above. However, in highly-sensitive situations, we may

dismiss the CIT for a time. If you think your situation might require this, please let us know at the time you submit your paperwork.

DISTINCTIVES OF BIBLICAL COUNSELING

- The church is called to minister to the whole person within the Body of Christ.
- HGC believes that a personal, vital knowledge of Jesus Christ is essential to salvation and is the foundation of all true Biblical counseling. We are thereby committed to a presentation of the gospel to those who seek counseling and are not believers in Jesus Christ.
- The focus of Biblical counseling involves:
 - Identifying the core issues,
 - Identifying and establishing a spiritual mindset,
 - A four-step process to bring about changes from 2 Timothy 3:16:
 1. Teaching what the Bible says about the issue(s)
 2. Conviction of the necessity for the change(s)
 3. Correction of the things that need to be done to create the change(s)
 4. Training via homework and accountability that leads to God-honoring habits
- The Word of God and its practical application functions as the counselor's primary tool. Accordingly, we believe the Bible is the only and absolute authority in our lives today.

- The work of the person of the Holy Spirit is an integral part of the methodology and philosophy of Biblical counseling. The Holy Spirit works to effect change through the Christian's new identity in Christ and a careful study of and devotion to the Word.
- The Word of God is a therapeutic and a theological tool. It can be used to heal emotional and spiritual issues.
- The Scriptures provide the basic standard for every area of life. As such, its system of ethics pertains to any culture and contemporary situation. Biblical counselors, therefore, possess an ethic for both right and wrong thinking and behavior.

PROCEDURES

- We begin on time but are not held to a clock.
- Everyone stays for the entire session and faces all the issues brought up. Nobody gets up and leaves just because the topic is uncomfortable.
- Everyone speaks for himself/herself.
- Everyone has a chance to be fully heard. We will not interrupt another individual (counselor or counselee) while they are speaking.
- We will not ignore the nonverbal or body language that is emitted but will deal with them openly as they occur.
- The counselor will not take sides.
- The time spent together is for the purpose of working on the concerns of persons in the session, not for playing games, making personal points or diversion.
- Everyone gets an opportunity to define the current problems and suggest realistic solutions. At least one positive action step is desired from each person.

- Homework is an essential part of Biblical counseling. Each counselee will be expected to complete his/her assignment prior to each session.
- We will deal mainly with the “here-and-now”, and not get bogged down in the past and in blaming others.
- We will confront and deal with each other as honestly and objectively as we possibly can.
- There will be no retribution, retaliation, or grudges over what is said in the session. Statements made in the sessions are not to be repeated elsewhere.
- There will be no physical violence or threats of violence.
- We will operate on the premise that God’s Word has the solution to our problems and seek to be obedient to it over and against our own conclusions.
- Due to the increasing need for HGC counseling services, we ask that you cancel your appointment at least **two days** in advance in order that we can offer the time to someone on the waiting list. Multiple cancellations without prior notice may forfeit future sessions.

REMOTE COUNSELING

In situations where in-person sessions are not feasible, we may consider offering remote Biblical counseling (also known as Online/Virtual/or Video counseling) via computer or phone. By signing below, I/we indicate that if I/we participate in remote Biblical counseling through Higher Ground Church’s Biblical Counseling Ministry:

1. I/we agree that neither the counselor(s) nor I/we will record our Biblical counseling sessions through the use of technology (audio and/or video) unless all parties have consented, in writing, prior to recording.
2. I/we understand that the risks and consequences from remote Biblical counseling include but are not limited to the possibility, despite reasonable efforts on the part of the counselor and Higher Ground Church, that:
 - the transmission of information could be disrupted or distorted by technical failure,
 - the transmission of my information could be interrupted by unauthorized persons,
 - and/or my information could be accessed by unauthorized persons (i.e. Apple, Google, Zoom, etc.).

INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT/WAIVER

As a counselee, having sought Biblical counseling from the Biblical Counseling Ministry of Higher Ground Church, I/we hereby acknowledge my understanding of the “policies” (described herein) of the Biblical Counseling Ministry of this church, and that all these guidelines are acceptable to me. As such, by signing below I/we do hereby waive any right to pursue legal action against Higher Ground Church, its pastors, agents, employees and lay counselors from any liability (claim or litigation) whatsoever arising from my/our participation in this ministry. I/we understand that the counselors of the Biblical Counseling Ministry of Higher Ground Church are not state licensed under California statues, and are not psychologists or psychiatrists. I further understand that the Pastor of Biblical Counseling,

Billie Dempsey, is not state licensed under California statues, and is not a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

Each individual counselee must PRINT NAME and SIGN Below.

_____	_____	_____
Print Name	Sign Name	Date

_____	_____	_____
Print Name	Sign Name	Date

*Please return to the HGC office in one of the following ways: **scan and email to office@highergroundchurch.org**; or drop off; or postal mail to: Higher Ground Church (attn: BCM) 6022 Seminary Ave. Oakland, CA 94605*