

# Missional Community leaders as Biblical Counselors?

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If the question was posed “What skills are required to be a truly affective MC leader?” some of the things that would likely rise to the top of the list would be traits like:

1. The patience to listen well
2. The discipline to be faithful in prayer
3. The ability to offer sound biblical teaching in very small portions
4. A steady faith in God to bring about change in His time
5. Always offering hope and encouragement to guard against discouragement
6. A genuine love for the person(s) in view

This is not an exhaustive list by any means. But already the list resembles part of another list: the skills required to be a good biblical counselor. The overlap between the 2 roles is significant even if the reader has not considered it before.

## **Consider two words to drive the point home: shepherding and discipleship**

MC leaders are shepherds of the flock, no way around it. The larger group on Sunday morning is broken down into smaller groups, often in the same geographic area of the city. They regularly gather to share meals, their stories, and their spiritual lives. When leadership leads in such a way to foster self-revelation and transparency, each participant’s spiritual wellness and health will become evident over time inside the MC. When properly cast in the role and trained with some basic skills the result will be a “shepherding of flock that is under your care” (1 Peter 5:2-3). This sort of shepherding, just like the work done on any farm with livestock, is a skill. Skills have to be developed and honed over time. Ideally young shepherds would learn from those with more experience and those doing the work would gain proficiency at caring for the souls before them.

At this point you might be wondering “wait, what are we talking about, the role of the MC leader or biblical counselor?” and this is precisely the point. The two are far more similar than different. We shouldn’t be fooled or concerned by the lack of a formal counseling structure in the MC context. The reality is that when people struggle with a difficulty or suffer in most any way, the time will come when they will look to others for help, support, insight, and encouragement. Their MC may be the very first place they look to find what they can’t seem to locate on their own.

The second word to consider is discipleship. What follows is one of the best definitions available to answer the question what is biblical counseling and it was provided by Ed Welch in 1997.

*“My present perspective is that biblical counseling is a hybrid of discipleship and biblical friendship, neither of which can be mistaken for a passing fad. Instead, biblical counseling is as old as human history and will flourish throughout the generations to come. It began with God speaking to his people; it was further established by kings, prophets, priests, and the apostles as they applied God’s words to various situations. It has been practiced by wise pastors, friends, brothers, sisters, fathers, and mothers throughout history, and it continues today with men and women who, having studied what God says in His Word, both receive biblical counsel and offer it to others.”*

Again, the connection and similarity to what occurs in the life of a thriving MC is too important to miss. So much of what discipleship means in reality comes from doing the things Welch mentions and many more. To be effective at discipleship requires aspects and attributes of this “biblical friendship”. Quality discipleship always has and always will include a central focus on God’s word and the application of that Word to daily life. So again we have to ask: “are we talking about discipleship or biblical counseling or missional community leadership?” and the answer has to be *all of the above*.

There are many other aspects and connections of these forms of ministry, so many that there are more books on the topic than we could read or mention here, but the connection is plain to see. When MC leaders begin to expand the understanding of their role to include skills, practices, and methods of solid biblical counselors, their service to the flock will be enhanced in so many God-honoring and wonderful ways. This can happen even if they never mention the words biblical counseling.

### **Simple Skill Building Steps**

For those that want to grow in the areas touched on here, there are some easy action steps to consider. To be brief, here are 3 action steps to explore.

First, consider bible intake. Scripture reminds us how absolutely central it is for our lives as followers and shepherds, and parents and disciples . . . and on and on. It always helps to be reminded about the fact that God gives us “everything we need for life and godliness”(2 Peter 1:3) and that all scripture is “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16) and is “living and active and sharper than any double-edged sword” (Heb 4:12). So we need to make sure that we are in the word and that we are taking it in through as many of the five common intake methods as possible. All 5 really matter and enhance our ability to use the scripture skillfully.

The five ways are hear, read, study, memorize and meditate. Certain passages are central to understand and soak in to really improve our skills in working with others. MC leaders should consider how to get a better grasp on the truth of God's word.

Second, consider an increase in the intake of other helpful resources. The resources currently available to MC leaders and counselors are beyond imagination. The quantity of free content is just as astounding. There are rock solid blog posts, e-mail newsletters, journal articles, sermons and other MP3 content, books, and online or distance education classes that are truly amazing. Here are 2 sites that are deep and rich with great content and they represent only the tip of the iceberg: [www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org) and [www.biblicalcounseling.com](http://www.biblicalcounseling.com). Wise shepherds want and need a steady stream of new teaching, insight, and thought on which to fuel spiritual growth and personal change, as well as to be better prepared for serving others in need.

Last, each leader needs to gather with other leaders to talk, listen, and pray for each other on a regular basis. Prolonged isolation does not help those who are regularly making themselves available to be used in the lives of others. Leaders need biblical community every bit as much as those they are tasked with leading. Wisdom dictates moving toward others who have a heart for this form of ministry and then to spend meaningful time with these likeminded people.