

## ***Creating a Culture of Counselling***

### **What is Discipling and Counselling?**

Discipling is the 1-on-1 ministry of investing in another believer with the goal of helping them grow in Christ.

Biblical counselling is a form of discipling. BC deals with the difficulty/thorny parts of discipling spectrum.

How are Counselling and Discipleship Related? Example of a river with eddies.

Discipling is more general, focused on personal spiritual growth. BC is problem-focused.

Discipling is more long-term; BC is shorter-term.

### **False Assumptions about Professional Help**

Common false assumption: Too many Christians think that discipling and counselling is the responsibility of the professional pastors and counsellors, and not the congregation.

**BIBLICAL Goal:** For your congregation to disciple and counsel one another in the Word.

I want to argue that the local church is the best context for discipling, spiritual growth and care of members.

How do I get this from Scripture? Look at “one another” passages.

- "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).
- "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10).
- "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Rom 13:18).
- "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to

God” (Romans 15:7).

- “I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another” (Romans 15: 14).
- “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2).
- “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).
- “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

You can disciple and care for Christians in lots of different contexts (work, college, parachurch, etc.). I want to contend that the church is the **normative place** for Christian relationships, spiritual growth, discipling and care.

We want a church where it is hard to be an anonymous or nominal Christian.

Structural fixes (formal programs and structures we put in place to help with relationships and pastoral care) vs. Organic care (the natural way we live with each other).

Catch phrase: Culture of discipling and counselling.

“Culture” – the whole personality of the congregation is making and shepherding disciples.

Pastor or church leader: What kind of culture are you building?

The How-To’s of creating this culture:

- Meaningful membership
- Small groups vs. 1-on-1
- Model it as leaders
- Reproducible fruit
- Teach it
- Set the expectation as they join, in MM and membership interview
- Use small groups to get people into 1-on-1 discipling relationships
- Sunday PM services

Our primary goal: For the members to be committed to discipling and caring for each other with the Word.

Be patient and take a long-term view.

**Obstacles to Being Invested in Each Other’s Lives**

1. They are too busy.
2. They just don't see it as all that important.
3. They prefer to save face and exist with masks when they are at church.
4. They don't want to get involved in the mess.
5. They're too quick to pass off problems to pastors or counsellors.

### **The War Analogy: Normal, Everyday Christians Fighting at the Front Lines**

The front line of the battle is the conversations that take place every day in your home, over your lunch meetings, in the daily conversations with your children, spouse, and with fellow members, in your Bible study, in your conversations after church, over the phone, and even in your emails!

One step back from the front line are wise and godly older men and women in the faith who take time to pour themselves into the lives of younger Christians.

To carry the war analogy one last step, let's think of the counselling room as the MASH unit that sits far behind the front line.

### **Does this Actually Work?**

Primary goal: Not to have the pastors do all of the discipling and counselling, but to train the members and equip the congregation.

If a Christian says he wants to learn to study the bible or be more faithful in prayer, many of our members will be able to help. But if a Christian says I want to kill myself or I am an alcoholic, not everyone knows what to do or where to go in Scripture.

### **When Do We Seek Out Help from Pastors and Counsellors?**

Just for the sake of clarity, let me clarify a few things. What I am NOT saying is:

- that a church member sorts through other people's problems on their own;
- that a church member has to deal with this without any help;
- that the pastors don't really care about discipling and counselling the members;
- that the pastors expect the church members to fix others' problems.

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you...” (1 Peter 5:1-2).

When should you get a pastor get more involved in difficult situation?

- If you know the person’s problem is significant and that no one (or really very few folks) knows about it, you can either encourage them to come speak with a pastor or get permission to talk with a pastor on their behalf.
- If you are feeling overwhelmed with the problem and don’t know how to handle it.
- If you don’t know where to go in Scripture or how to apply Scripture to this particular problem.
- If you are scared that this person is going to do physical or spiritual harm to themselves or others and you feel you need help slowing them down.
- If you feel like someone is out of control with their sin.
- If you the other person’s sin is public and scandalous.
- If you want guidance on how to help someone else.

### **Building a Culture of Trust**

Strict confidentiality = If I share with you (pastor or counsellor or fellow church member), you must not share it with anyone else unless I give you permission.

Strict confidentiality is not possible in a church (Matthew 18:15-20).

What’s biblical basis for Christian relationships?

- Love (1 Cor 13), transparency (Genesis 2:25, 3:10), honesty (Proverbs 24:26), servant-hearted (Mark 10:43-45), humility (James 4:6)
- Consistent, godly, Christian character builds TRUST in relationships.

I want to promote a culture in the church that doesn’t hold a person’s secrets or unrepentant sin, but promotes trust among members and members with their pastors.