

Road to Emmaus

Biblical Counseling Center

Qualifications of a Biblical Counselor

September 2019, Jerry Propst

One of the major driving forces for the resurgence of Biblical Counseling was Jay Adams' book, "Competent to Counsel." Secularists had dominated the counseling scene for quite some time. In fact, Christian ministers were told "You're not qualified to counsel. Leave it to the professionals." Adams' influence triggered an entire movement toward more Bible-centered counseling. According to the Institute for Nouthetic Counseling: "*Dr. Adams is the founder of the modern biblical counseling movement and is the author of the groundbreaking book Competent to Counsel. He is also the founder of the Institute for Nouthetic Studies (INS), the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors (NANC), and the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF).*"

Many people have hung out their shingle as "Christian Counselors" over the years. But they are not necessarily all Biblical counselors. The principal thrust of ACBC is to make certain that Christians who counsel are Bible-centered in their approach. It follows then that there should be some criteria by which to identify someone as a Biblical Counselor. Here is one perspective on the subject.

A Biblical counselor must:

1. Be _____

How can someone claim to be a Biblical counselor if they do not believe enough in the Bible to be a Follower of Christ?

1 Corinthians 2:14 – "...the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

2. Be Spirit _____

One of the principal tenets of Biblical counseling is that we are dealing with spiritual forces and issues in the counseling setting. We need the insights of the Holy Spirit to more effectively discern what the spiritual dimensions of our counselee's condition is. That means our own life must be under the influence of the ministries of the Holy Spirit.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:13)

"...the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but with divine power to destroy strongholds" 2 Corinthians 10:4 (ESV)

*"Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.
I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation."
Psalms 119:98-99*

3. Possess the _____ of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22)

Love – A counselor cannot properly counsel people whom he or she does not love. Counseling is a ministry of intensified discipleship. Discipleship is a form of shepherding. In order to be a good counselor we must also have a shepherd's heart.

Although we must have the capacity to think clinically and analytically, we cannot divorce ourselves spiritually or emotionally from the counselee. Jesus had compassion on the crowds. Even though he turned away from Jesus, the wealthy young man who came to him to know how he might possess eternal life was an object of Christ's love.

*"And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."
Mark 10:21*

Joy – A counselor without joy is a counselor without hope. What our counsees need is bona fide hope. The world leaves them in their brokenness, providing them with nothing but one of several crutches:

- 1 – Surrender to the inevitable (Fatalism)
- 2 – Believe a lie (Denial)
- 3 – Trade one addiction for another
- 4 – Become a perpetual patient (Dependence)
- 5 – Assume the role of the victim (Defeatism)
- 6 – Put responsibility on someone or something else (Shifting Blame)
 - God made me this way (Naturalism)
 - Society/the system did this to me (Societal)
 - My parents..., Wife..., Husband..., etc. (Relational)
 - Things happened to me (Circumstantial)

Peace – A counselor cannot convey what he or she does not possess.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27)

Longsuffering (Patience) – Counseling requires patience. Some problems are easily worked out, but others are deeply rooted and need additional discernment and time to be worked out.

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love," (Ephesians 4:1-2)

Kindness – “a disposition which delights in contributing to the happiness of others, which is exercised cheerfully...alleviating their distresses” – Webster’s 1828 Dictionary. Our mission is to lift the oppressive burden of sin and wrong-thinking that causes people to seek out our help. Kindness is compassion in action, using spiritual tools. We are servants, not drill instructors.

*I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who **eases the yoke on their jaws**, and I bent down to them and fed them.
(Hos 11:4)*

*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to **love kindness**, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mic 6:8)*

Goodness – Character is the foundation upon which all counseling is based. Integrity, morality, etc. If we are to be credible, we must be above reproach. Goodness is manifested in what we do as much as it is in what we say.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

The word for “good” here speaks expressly of the actions that flow from a good heart.

Faithfulness/Faith – following through on our commitments. We are to be faithful to the truth even when the truth is unpopular.

*This is how one should regard us, as **servants** of Christ and **stewards** of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of **stewards** that they be found **trustworthy (faithful)**.
(1 Corinthians 4:1-2)*

Faithfulness is based on a strong conviction that what we believe and what we do is right. The Greek word for “faith” is the same word translated “faithfulness” here. We stand firmly on what we believe. In order to counsel properly we need to be convinced that what we are giving them is the truth and that it will work.

He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20)

Gentleness – People who come for counseling are often in great pain. Many of them are fragile. Although it is necessary at times to be confrontational, we must also remember what Isaiah states about the Messiah,

...a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. (Isaiah 42:3)

Paul exhibited the same spirit in his own ministry:

*But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.
(1 Thessalonians 2:7)*

Self-control (egkrateia) – We possess intellect, emotion and will. It takes all of these for us to be successful as counselors. We have to know what the scriptures say and mean. We have to choose to speak the truth in an intelligent and practical manner. And we have to have control over our emotions in dealing with people who may be emotionally distraught themselves. We have to have a mastery of all our appetites, tempers, and passions if we are to help others bring theirs under control. None of this can happen without the enablement of the Holy Spirit. Self-control begins with Spirit-control.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled (controlled) with the Spirit, (Eph 5:18)

Further, we cannot allow the resistance and irresponsibility of a counselee derail us emotionally. We need to remain under control in our spirit and in control of the situation.

Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city. (Proverbs 16:32 ESV)

SUMMARY

The following is an apt description of what Paul means in his instructions to the Galatians regarding being spirit-filled:

...but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; (2Co 6:4-8)

This is the spirit in which a counselor must approach his responsibility to God, himself, to the body of Christ and to the counselee. Counseling can be emotionally draining and demanding. There are times of great joy and others of deep disappointment. Without the operation of the Holy Spirit in our lives on a daily basis, we cannot accomplish what God intends in the life of everyone who comes to us.

4. Possess Faith

The counselor needs sufficient confidence in the power of the Lord and of His Word to believe that the counselee can be helped.

*And without faith it is **impossible** to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must **believe** that he exists and that he **rewards** those who seek him.*

(Hebrews 11:6)

*I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever **abides in me** and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

(John 15:5)

*He said to them, "Because of your **little faith**. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20) (Jesus at Mt. Of Transf.)*

5. Have a firm commitment to the _____

The principal distinction between secular counselors and Biblical counselors is that the Biblical counselor is confident that the scriptures hold the answer to liberation from the chains of sin and can unlock the mysteries of the heart.

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

*"The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple."
(Psalms 119:130)*

6. Have a good working _____ of the Scriptures

The Bible is the scalpel with which the delicate work of spiritual surgery is accomplished.

*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.
(Hebrews 4:12)*

*"...and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,"
(Ephesians 6:17)*

*"And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."
(Luke 24:25-27)*

7. Be Aware of the _____ Nature of our Warfare

*"For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete."
(2 Corinthians 10:4-6)*

Eph 6:12-18

(12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

(13) Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

(14) Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness,

(15) and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

*(16) In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one;
(17) and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,
(18) praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,*

8. Be _____

The teacher who is “apt” to teach must first be teachable, meaning that we should continue to grow in our understanding of truth. We need to be able to take criticism, admit our ignorance, and be willing to receive counsel from others.

Likewise, in the counseling room we should continue to learn not only how to be better, but to continue learning about the counselee. We should not assume we have all we need to know by the end of the first session with a counselee.

Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning. (Proverbs 9:9)

Example of Apollos

(24) Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.

(25) He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.

(26) He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

*(27) And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed,
(Acts 18:24-27)*

9. Possess _____

If people have confidence in us they will reveal things about themselves that perhaps no one else would know. They have to believe that we will use that information wisely and not for their ultimate harm.

Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered. (Proverbs 11:13)

Nor should we ever give them reason to believe that we have any inclination to personally profit from their circumstances.

If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. (1 Corinthians 9:12)

This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.
(1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;
(1 Peter 5:2)

10. Possess _____

The devil is a liar and the father of lies.

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

The counselee is in his predicament because at some point he or she began believing a lie.

Some are willingly deceived.

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God,
(2 Peter 3:5)

Others are not.

"And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.
(Acts 3:17)

Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, (Acts 3:19)

It is the counselor's responsibility to determine what their error is and to address it. Without being skilled in discernment he or she cannot be of help to the counselee.

But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. (Hebrews 5:14)

Suggested Reading:

- 1. "Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands," Paul Tripp, Chapters 5-9**
- 2. "Competent to Counsel," Jay Adams Chapter 4, What Is Nouthetic Counseling?**