

# What You Should Expect From Pastoral Counseling

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The goal of all worthwhile Christian counseling is to help believers meet the challenges of life in a way that will please and honor the Lord. It is aimed at training believers how to walk without stumbling into, or how to recover from, patterns of sinful behavior, as well as to teach them how to walk in consistent and joyful righteousness.

When you seek counsel from your pastor, or when your pastor seeks you out because he recognizes a counseling need in your life, here are a few things you should expect if he is a godly, biblically minded man:



## A Commitment to Biblical Counseling

The Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life. Therefore, godly counseling is based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Your pastor is probably not trained or licensed as a psychotherapist or mental health professional. Therefore you should not expect him to follow the methods of such specialists or to refer you to such a specialist.

You are free to seek the advice of an outside professional if you so choose, but if you do, your pastor will likely request that he be included in communication with such an advisor. You should fully cooperate with this request because a secular counsel can easily lead you away from biblical thinking, and perhaps even into sin. By including your pastor in a “triangular” relationship with you and the advisor, your pastor will be able to help you consider the outside counsel in the light of scriptural principles.

## Encouragement to Seek Professional Advice in Some Cases

In biblical counseling there is often a need for significant advice with regard to legal, medical, financial or other technical matters. If your situation involves issues of this nature, your pastor may encourage you to seek professional counsel (perhaps even from a member of your church who has expertise in one of these areas). Again he will likely ask to be included in communication with such advisors. For the reasons stated above, you should honor his request.

## A Commitment to Limited Confidentiality

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect. It also discourages harmful gossip and invites confession, thus encouraging people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, a godly pastor will carefully

protect all information that he receives through pastoral counseling.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times it is necessary for a pastor to reveal certain information to others. Consider a few examples of this:

- When a pastor is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem, he may need to discretely seek advice from other leaders who can help him. You should value your pastor’s humility and his desire to obtain help in cases like this, since it is being sought for your spiritual benefit.
- When the person who disclosed the information to the pastor, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene, a godly pastor will need to warn or inform those involved, and/or those who can provide the needed protection or care (e.g., family members, medical professionals, law enforcement, etc.).
- Pastors and other church leaders are required by law to report suspected child abuse in certain cases, particularly those involving children. Be aware that information you provide to a pastor in such cases *must* be passed along to the proper authorities.
- When a person receiving counsel for a serious pattern of sin refuses to repent, it may become necessary, in order to promote repentance and maintain purity in the church, to inform others so that redemptive church discipline can take place.

These few pointers should help you better understand, appreciate, and support your pastor in his role as a counselor in your own life and in the life of your local church.

Adapted from “Consent to Counsel,” a document used by Reigning Grace Counseling Center, Kansas City, Missouri.

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