

Sample Structure for the First Few Biblical Counseling Sessions

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These outlines do not serve as strict models for sessions, but only examples and suggestions. Each counselee is, of course, different, and their needs and issues will vary greatly. These outlines exist only to provide a sample structure for six different sessions in succession.

Many of these suggestions on how to structure a biblical counseling session were adapted from Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries' training video sessions. Other sources of help came from Bob Greenwood (former Director of Counseling) who personally mentored me during and after my certification process. Please see the footnotes for more information. You can purchase the entire video set of *Biblical Counseling Observations* at:
<https://store.faithlafayette.org/all-products/biblical-counseling-observation-10-digital-videos/>

I also give credit to Wayne Johnston on outlines #5-6. He was my supervisor for certification and the section on Philippians was something I learned from him. I hope these outlines help you as you counsel others.

Sample Session# 1: ¹

Greetings

Prayer

Give hope from Scripture

Comment briefly on PDI if appropriate

- Philippians 4:13 ***"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength."***²

~During this first session, I will need to ask many questions.

Proverbs 18:13 says, ***"He who answers without listening - that is his folly and his shame."*** I would be foolish to not spend some time listening to you. My goal is to understand what is going on in your life.

~I would ask that you be open and honest with me and not make me try and guess what your problems are. We will be able to accomplish much more this way.

¹Patten, Randy, et al. *Biblical Counseling Observations*. Produced by Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries. Lafayette: Faith Church. DVD.

² (The scriptures I refer to in these outlines are taken from NIV, (c)1984)

~My goal is to give you something tonight to start you on the process of change.

~Brief Home History: Reader's Digest version. Please give me a chronological order of the main points of your life including the main people and events. These would be the things that have shaped your life from the beginning until now.

Family: What was your family like? Was your family close? Relationship with parents? Education?
(Some of this is on PDI)

~Faith/Religion Background:

~Church attendance

~Salvation/Testimony

~If you were to die today, do you know for sure you would go to heaven?

~If God were to say to you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" What would you say?

~What is your view of God?

~What do you think God's view of you is?

~Personal Information:

~Let's talk about the issues that brought you here today. (Take good notes!)

~Have you had previous counseling? Where? How long? (May be on PDI)

~Are there any other issues we need to discuss that you have not mentioned?

~Hope:

~The definition of biblical hope: "A confident expectation of future blessing based on the character and promises of God."³

~You have put yourself in a good position to conquer your problems with God's help.

~See Sheet with 1 Corinthians 10:13 (God's Promise/Satan's Lies) (bradbigney.com/common diagrams in counseling)

Isaiah 43:7 refers to "Everyone who is called by name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made..."

~What does this verse say we were created for? (He made us for His glory.)

~So, when we function the way God designed us to, it glorifies Him and the result is blessings. (Galatians 5:22-23) We have peace and joy. When we do not function in the way that we were designed to, it does not glorify God and the results are sorrow, anxiety, frustration, and depression. Proverbs 13:15 says, "***The way of the transgressor is hard.***"

³ From my notes at Counseling and Discipleship Training.

~Which is characteristic of you?

~Our goal is to function the way He created us to. I want to help you function the way God designed you to. How we function should be driven by our goals.

2 Corinthians 5:9 tells us that **"We make it our goal to please Him** (whether at home in the body or away from it.)

~We need to learn how to function in order to please Him. Are you in agreement with that?

~If you function in a way that pleases God, there will be joy and satisfaction, but that does not mean there won't still be difficulty. (John 16:33 tells us that **"In this world you will have trouble."**)

~ Y-Diagram-Introduce and discuss briefly (More on this in future session) (bradbigney.com/common-diagrams-in-counseling)

~ Luke 16:13 tells us that it is impossible to serve two masters.

~So, we must decide if our desire is to please God or to please self.

~ Counseling commitment: You will be expected to complete homework each week. This homework is what we will use in our sessions, so please let me know ahead of time if you are unable to complete it so that we can reschedule our appointment to meet. (Go over consent.) The agenda each week will be based on your homework.

~Possible Homework

1. Write out "I am here to glorify God. How am I doing right now?"
Checklist: Review it 10 times daily.
2. Start a journal. Keep a record of upsets. We have the greatest opportunities to glorify God when we are in situations that upset us. Write down what triggered each upset and what you were thinking. (Just enough to remember.)
3. Read *Christ and Your Problems* (written by Jay Adams) booklet. Read three times this week. Write out the seven most important points in your reading. This book will bring you hope and encouragement. (1 Corinthians 10:13)
4. Read the following scripture this week: _____
5. Memorize the following verse: _____

End with hope: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, **"Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes on not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."**

Sample Session #2⁴

Greetings

Open with prayer

Give hope from Scripture

Review memory verse: Philippians 4:13

“I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.”

~Let's talk about the booklet, *Christ and Your Problems*. What things were most meaningful to you? What are the seven things you wrote out?

~Let's discuss how each point applies to your life and encourages you?

~I had asked you to keep a list of upsets. Let's discuss these:

What triggered these things?

Did you glorify God in your responses to them?

Why would God allow these things to happen to you?

Romans 8:28-29. ***“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those He foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.”***

~These verses don't say everything “is good,” but rather, everything works together for good...for those who are called according to His purpose. He has a purpose for ALL things.

~ For those he foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to His image....

~So, the good is our being transformed to His image! (This is sanctification!)

~What are these verses saying to you?

~Weigh your counselee's upsets against Romans 8:28-29 and point out that each of these are opportunities to bring honor and glory to God by allowing Him to transform them into His likeness. We don't always have to understand the “why's” but we can trust that they are for our good and God's glory.

~ I asked you to write out, ‘I am here to glorify God. How am I doing right now?’ (Checklist 10 times daily) Tell me how this went.

~ Can a sovereign God give me these specific problems in order to help me grow? YES! This is a reasonable goal in our lives.

~Review Y-diagram in detail. Give counselee a copy of the idols worksheet. (bradbigney.com/common-diagrams-in-counseling)

⁴ Patten, Randy, et al. *Biblical Counseling Observations*. Produced by Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries. Lafayette: Faith Church. DVD.

~Possible Homework: (Some HW may be repetitious in order to assure change in your life.)

1. Write out Romans 8:28-29. Review it 10 times daily. (Place checkmarks on the back each time you review it.) New habits take practice (like riding a bike). Be prepared to talk about how it has affected your life.
2. Memorize Romans 8:28-29.
3. Complete the Idol's test.
4. Complete the Data Gathering Sentence Completion sheet. (Graceky.org/counselor's toolbox)
5. Read Matthew 5-7 (The Sermon on the Mount) three times and record the time and day you did so. Write out the most meaningful verse from each day's reading and be ready to discuss these verses and how they apply to your life.

Sample Session #3⁵

Greetings

How was your week? What was the highlight of your week?

Prayer

Give hope from Scripture: Read together 1 Peter 1:6-7; Psalm 46:1-3

~Homework:

How did your HW go this week?

Were you able to complete it?

Is there anything that especially helped you?

(Have counselee "find" themselves in the HW..."How was it personal to you? How do you see yourself in that?")

~Review of HW:

Romans 8:28-29; Were you able to review it ten times daily?

Explain these verses to me and how they apply to your life

How have these verses impacted your life this week?

Recite Romans 8:28-29 word perfect with expression.

Discuss Matthew 5-7. Were you able to read this three times this week? Were you able to record one important thing you took away from these chapters each time you read them? Let's discuss those things.

Let's look at 1 Corinthians 10:13 again and talk specifically about how it applies to your life.

Review Y-Diagram

~If time permits:

Collect, review and discuss the Idols worksheet (if applicable). Read through the sheet and discuss. (Discuss next week also if appropriate)

Look at sentence completion sheet (Data Gathering Sheet). (Collect it to take home and review and prepare for next week's session).

~Review:

Have these first few sessions been helpful to you?

What is one thing that has been most helpful?

⁵ Patten, Randy, et al. *Biblical Counseling Observations*. Produced by Faith Biblical Counseling Ministries. Lafayette: Faith Church. DVD.

~Possible Homework:

1. Start keeping a journal of what God is teaching you. Use things from your bible reading, sermons, booklets, conversations, etc, This journal will be used in our future sessions together. Bring it with you each week. Write entries in your journal at least three times this week.
2. Write out the four promises from 1 Corinthians 10:13 and how they apply to your life.
3. Memorize 1 Corinthians 10:13
4. Pray daily. Spend at least 5-10 minutes in prayer to start. Focus on who God is and what He has done for you. Record what you learn in your journal.
5. Review *Christ and Your Problems*.
6. Read Scripture daily. Matthew 5-7 three times again. This was the perfect sermon and was preached by Jesus. It should only take you 15-20 minutes each time. Record insights and how they apply to your life. Reading God's word will transform your life.

Sample Session #4

Greetings

Prayer

Give hope from Scripture: Lamentations 3:22-24

Review of Homework:

1. Let's review your journal. Tell me what God has taught you this week through your bible reading, Christian literature, and sermons (or anything else).
2. Recite 1 Corinthians 10:13.
3. Tell me how you were able to apply 1 Corinthians 10:13 to your life this week.
4. Let's review your journal with regard to your prayer times this week.
5. Did you learn anything new from *Christ and Your Problems*?
6. Let's discuss any new insights you have gathered from reading the Sermon on the Mount.

Which statement best reflects your attitude this past week:

~ "I want my needs met."

~ "I want to glorify and honor God in all I do and say."

It must be our goal to glorify God in all things.

Psalm 62:8 tells us, "***Trust in Him at all times.***" Remember that God does not give us a time table, but He does promise to make us more like Him through our trials. There is no higher calling!

We do not know when this will happen, but we do know it WILL happen if we will do our part!

Can a sovereign God allow difficulty in our lives in order to help us grow? Yes! This is a reasonable goal in our lives. (Growth through trials)

In order to change, we have to pay special attention to what we want/desire. Desires have to be controlled by biblical truth or they will trap us and draw us away. Read James 4:1-3 together and discuss.

Discuss these "Three Key Statements"

1. My goal in life is to please God. When you are tempted, this is the statement you need to make. (2 Corinthians 5:9)
2. I please God by being like Jesus Christ. Jesus chose to obey His heavenly Father.
3. God knows I will not be perfect, but He does expect me to be growing. (Ephesians 4:22-24, Colossians 3:1-17, 2 Peter 3:18)

Treasures:

Let's talk about the things we treasure.

Matthew 6:21 says, ***"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."***

Our treasure must be in Him alone. If we desire to draw close to Him more than anything else, and we seek Him fully, our hearts will be full, and contentment will follow in all of our circumstances.

God designed us to glorify Him....not ourselves. We are most at peace when we are existing for His purposes. Only when we seek Him for our source of happiness will we be truly satisfied.

Possible Homework Ideas:

1. Spend time daily in prayer seeking to draw closer to God in trust and dependence. Keep track of your times with Him. Journal what He is teaching you. Focus on Psalms 145-150. Journal from these praise Psalms.
2. Be prepared to explain the Y-diagram to me in detail.
3. Read the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) and focus on his ability to trust God in the worst of times. Journal what insights you gather. Explain in your journal how his example could apply to your life.
4. Memorize the Three Key Statements with verses.

Sample Session #5

Greetings

Give Hope: Read together: 1 Peter 1:6-7 and unpack briefly
Prayer

Review of Homework:

Were you able to spend time in prayer daily?

Did you keep track of these times?

Did you journal what God is teaching you? (Psalms 145-150)

May I please take a look at your journal?

Explain the Y-Diagram to me and personalize it.

Did you read the story of Joseph?

What insights did you gain? How was it encouraging?

How can Joseph's example help you?

Ask about areas of difficulty discussed from the previous week.

Then ask, "In this waiting period, which statement below would reflect what you want the most?"
(Repeated from last week)

"I want my needs met."

"I want to glorify and honor God."

Let's start with the things we know: God's Word is true. Review Romans 8:28-29. Recite this.

No matter what does or doesn't happen, we know this: His love is certain. His promises are true. He is doing a work in you!

Psalm 62:8 says, "**Trust in Him at all times.**" God doesn't give us a time table....but He does promise to make us more like Him through our trials. Could there be a higher calling?

John 16:33 says, "**I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart...I have overcome the world.**" We do not know "when" but we do know it will happen. That is what God promises!

At this moment, what is your desire? God wants you to trust Him regardless of whether He give us peace now...or gives it eventually.

It always comes back to the heart. In your heart, do you want to bring glory and honor to God more than having your desires met?

Do you have to have certain things to be content? The response of the humble believer is being thankful for what we have today. What do you want more....to have certain things....or to honor and glorify God today?

The whole point of biblical counseling is this: The day we choose to bring glory and honor to God despite our circumstances....that is the day we will find true contentment.

Paul as an example:

In the book of Philippians, Paul is in prison. In his circumstances, one of three things could have happened.

1. He could be set free.
2. He could be executed.
3. He could be kept there.

Let's look at Paul's motive in these circumstances: Philippians 1:20-21: ***"I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."***

Paul's motive was to exalt Christ....despite his circumstances. No matter what.

Chapter 3 is the result of that motive. He evaluates his life. Read verses 1-11. He finds no confidence in the flesh! But rather says, ***"I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."*** His conclusion is to know Christ and become like Him *through* the suffering!

THE WORST POSSIBLE THING WOULD BE OKAY!!! Paul's greatest desire was to exalt Christ.

This all is the context for Chapter 4. Let's read this together. (Read Philippians 4)

vs. 11-13 say, ***"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."***

The only way Paul learned this was by starting with the right motive. (Chapter 1:20-21)

If the only goal you choose is to glorify and honor Christ, this will lead to contentment. If this is your desire, nothing else matters!

TODAY could be the best possible day imaginable.....If you boldly choose to honor and glorify Christ!
Homework:

1. Read the book of Philippians and journal as God speaks to your heart through it's chapters. What things can you practically apply to your life?
2. Read *From Pride to Humility* by Stuart Scott two times. Highlight those points that speak to you personally. Be prepared to discuss them.
3. Daily prayer/devotions. (Even 5-10 minutes!)
4. Memorize the following verse: Philippians 1:20-21 word perfect.

Sample Session #6:

Greetings
Give Hope from Scripture
Prayer

Review of homework:

Look at journal (Philippians) Tell me what you learned from these chapters. How does this apply to your life? How has this helped or encouraged you this week?

Discuss *From Pride and Humility* - What things spoke to you personally?

Discuss the need for repentance regarding counselee's pride.

How did you do with your devotions this week? (Daily?)

Recite Philippians 1:20-21 What has this verse meant to you this week?

Review journal: Psalms 145-150.

Repentance:

Today we are going to focus on the importance of repentance.

(Review the truths of Romans 8:28-29, Philippians 4:13, Isaiah 43:7, 2 Corinthians 5:9.)

So these (presenting) problems are not really the problems....and they are not in your head....they are really in your heart. We can trace all unhappiness, discontentment, and pride back to the heart. The way we think is an overflow of what is in our heart. Who and what are we worshipping?

This leads to the need for repentance. This is a sin issue. We have to decide what we want more....the idol, or is it our desire to honor, glorify, and exalt Christ in our lives?

Read 1 John 2:15-17 (The love of the world) We have to decide what our goal is!

Read Romans 6:1-14 together.

Think through the gospel...I am not a slave to sin.... there is hope! (Romans 6:15-18)

We must have this attitude....

"I may tend to want things my way....but I am not a slave to sin. I am going to live my life for God."

This is what the Scriptures say about what you have been doing....and what you need to do. You need to repent of sin. This is one of the best opportunities to glorify and honor Christ.

What will you decide to do? What will your purpose be?
Will you come to the point that you are not going to live for you anymore?

Pray together for repentance.

Homework:

1. Write out James 4:1-3, 14-15 on index cards. Review these verses daily.
2. Specifically ask forgiveness for your behavior. Consider these questions:
 - ~What was I wanting or desiring when I behaved this way?
 - ~What kinds of things do I typically want when I behave this way?
3. Review the three key statements and verses. Read each three times daily.
4. List five of God's attributes and focus on them daily in prayer and journaling. Write out what they mean to you.
5. Pray often. Review all verses. Serve others with intentional acts of love and kindness, and pray for God to change your heart.
6. Memorize James 4:1

The following two pages are examples of documents I use to keep track of what I cover with each counselee throughout the process of counseling them.

Verses of Hope	Memory Verses
Romans 15:13	2 Corinthians 4:16-18
Psalm 73:25-28	1 Corinthians 10:13 **
2 Corinthians 4:16-18	Zephaniah 3:17
Psalm 24:1-6	Galatians 2:20 **
2 Corinthians 1:3-4	Colossians 4:6
Romans 8:31-37	Jonah 2:8 **
Isaiah 43:1-2	Isaiah 55:8-9
Ezekiel 36:26	Ephesians 1:3-5
Psalm 40:1-3	Ephesians 4:22-24
Psalm 139:1-10	Psalm 73:25-26
Psalm 9:7-10	Hebrews 12:1-2
Isaiah 40:12-14, 28-31	2 Chronicles 16:9
Titus 3:3-7	
Psalm 121	
Hebrews 4:14-16	
Psalm 89:1-8	
Psalm 139:7-10	
Psalm 104	
Psalm 73:25-28	
Psalm 91	
Romans 5:1-5	

2 Chronicles 16:9	
Isaiah 55:1-2	
Psalms 66:5-7	

Homework

Christ and Your Problems (1 Cor. 10:13) (2 times)

Y-Diagram

Job 38-42

Matthew 5-7 (Sermon on the Mount)

Motives Booklet (2 times)

Reading and journaling in the gospels

Heart Journal questions

Identifying personal idols

Listen to Idolatry messages (Brad Bigney)

Read Psalm 139 daily/Journal

From Pride to Humility-Stuart Scott

Loneliness Worksheet

The Knowledge of the Holy

Ephesians 1-2 List who/what are we in Christ,