

“Can you help?”

When people are struggling, we look for sources of help. There are many places we can turn, and Biblical Counselling UK is frequently asked if we know of counsellors we can recommend.

1. Look again at church

Our initial response is that, according to the Bible, the first and normal place to look for help is in the body of the local church. God puts there a wide range of people with different gifts and abilities, and people with different weaknesses and disabilities, so both need each other and care for each other. In this way we grow in love to reflect his character to each other and the wider world.

So, start by asking your church. Ask an older Christian in your church, or the leaders of the church, for their thoughts about how the church might respond to your situation. Sometimes the response will be that the church has some resources that will make a big difference, and at other times the help of others will be needed. Even if the church does not respond well when asked for help, it's good to make the church aware that you are feeling the need.

2. Looking outside church

When the decision is to look outside the church, because either the church leadership is on the hunt for someone to help or a good friend or struggling person are looking for themselves, then Biblical Counselling UK is often asked for advice. What follows explains that, while we don't have lists of approved people, we can offer some advice on finding someone good.

We don't keep an “approved list” because Biblical Counselling UK does not have the tools by which to assess people's skill or ability. We don't have systems of supervision, or accreditation, or intense and rigorous practical training like the secular counselling professionals. These are great safeguards, and the work they do can be immensely valuable, but we are simply not able to put any kind of Biblical Counselling UK seal of approval on anyone – ourselves included.

We suggest looking for someone who has been helpful to others. You could ask the leaders of your church about counsellors they know, or make enquiries of other good local churches. People also discover local names on the internet. But how can the names that come out of that process be assessed?

There are many different kinds of counsellor who can be helpful in different ways. What makes a good biblical counsellor, who can help work through issues in relationship with God?

Here are some tips:

1. Pray. God knows what we truly need and how he will meet that need from his resources. We may often feel stretched and short of resources – but God never does. While you are at it, feel free pray for Biblical Counselling UK – that God will lead us on in our thinking and in opening up more and more ways and, critically, people to serve the local church in Biblical counselling.

2. Ask questions about the counsellor. Ask the person who recommended them. What was helpful? How did they incorporate Scripture and prayer into the counselling? What came out of the counselling, especially with regard to the individual's relationship with God? For biblical counselling, the most important part of any human being is their relationship with God. How did the counselling recognise and address that in the midst of addressing the issues under discussion?

3. Ask the counsellor themselves. From their website if they have one, or by email or over the phone, it should be possible to learn a lot about the counsellor, about their own relationship with God, and their convictions about counselling. Biblical counsellors care deeply about the model they use, and think it of central importance in pursuing counselling. They will not mind being asked important questions about their own faith, their church membership and whether their church supports their work, about whether they think Scripture has “everything we need for life and godliness” and how they bring prayer and Scripture to bear in counselling. You can also ask important questions about timings, any counselling contract they use, payments and so on. There is no need to follow a recommendation if doubts arise at this stage.

4. Ask someone else to ask the counsellor. If you don't trust your own wisdom to make a judgement, find a wise person to help, perhaps a pastor or friend. Perhaps they could give the counsellor a call and process the answers with you.

5. Communication. When churches deal with a problem within the church body, it's normal and good for the people concerned, operating as a loving family, to share some limited information to make sure people know what they need to know to love and care properly (and that only the people who need to know know only what they need to know!). Counsellors from outside a church will sometimes not be able to share any significant information at all with a referring church because their training and ethical codes require them to maintain confidentiality except for reasons of legal, safeguarding necessity. Frustrating though this can be, it does not mean the counsellor is not good! Other counsellors are able to share more, by agreement with the person being counselled. Whatever the counsellor's position, we would always encourage someone who is receiving counselling to **communicate freely with someone in their home church** about how it's going, what is proving helpful and what is hard, and to be prayed for and supported. This avoids the work of counselling being totally disconnected from normal relationships in church.

6. Still “do Church.” Though outside your church, a biblical counsellor will know that God has a unique purpose for your local church as place of care and service. **Ask potential counsellors where they go to church, how they value church** and whether they can give examples of how this influences their counselling. The goal of truly biblical counselling is not that someone merely leaves happy and grateful for the counsellor, but that someone grows as *a worshipper of God* in all of life, with all its joys and sorrows, as *part of his church*. They will want to help people find ongoing support in their church and to develop their gifts and their service of Christ as part of their church

family. It is normal in biblical counselling to **go with a trusted church friend** who can sit in a counselling session or series of sessions. This can be a great help in learning how to support those who are struggling, and very positively strengthen the person's connections with church, sharing the experience and learning to love with increasing wisdom.

7. Starting Out. If you find someone who seems good, it may be time to arrange an initial session with them. Again, a friend could perhaps join this meeting to meet the counsellor and raise some of the questions. If they charge for counselling as their paid work then this initial meeting will usually need to be paid for, but there should be no commitment on either side. It matters to both sides that get a sense of open and honest dialogue and trust, and that they love and care for others because they are loved and cared for by Jesus.

3. What if we can't find anyone?

It's quite possible that, after much searching, you don't find anyone of the kind you were looking for. Biblical Counselling is growing in our churches, but it can still be hard to find someone with training and capacity to help people outside their own church setting. Here are three things to bear in mind:

- The Lord knows your needs and he will meet all of them in his own way. He uses times of plentiful provision and times where resources are in short supply because he is the great Pastor who does all his work so well. Feeling in need is common for the Christian, as is the temptation to despair or resentment. Ask God's help to trust him as he leads you on.
- You might also ask God to keep providing people who invest in training for biblical counselling. Our certificate course is one way, but it takes much time and effort.
- Look again at those God has already placed around you, in your church. Take care to notice not only what is missing, but also what is there. God is able to provide comfort through people with very different experiences to our own (2 Cor 1). His leading, either now or at some future point, will provide people to bless you, and those whom you will bless – perhaps even by sharing biblical counsel.

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For some more detailed advice on how to discover a good Biblical counsellor, you might find <http://www.ccef.org/counseling/choosing-a-christian-counselor> to be helpful.