

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR COUNSELING

Please read this now and keep for future reference.

The counseling you have begun is Christian counseling. Your counselor is a Christian who has had special training in the Scriptures and their application to life. What they say to you will not be based on the systems of human thought & philosophy, or their own ideas. Their goal is to help you apply Biblical principles to the particular problems with which you are struggling. This will help you now and will leave you with biblical guidelines for problem-solving for the rest of your life.

As Christians, we want to serve all who need and desire help. Do not conclude that you must be a Christian to benefit from Christian counseling; the principles of life found in the Bible are true for everyone.

We counsel people who are having difficulties other than those with organic origins. And even then, we often counsel such persons in conjunction with a physician. If you wish to discuss this matter further, speak to your counselor about it.

Most of the problems that people have involve relationships. A person's relationship to God is the most important one. Unless that relationship is right, nothing else in life can be altogether right. And that relationship cannot be right until a person becomes a Christian, trusting in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

That happens when he depends on Jesus as the One who died on the cross in his place and bore the wrath of God for his sins. If a person does not submit to the authority of Christ, he does not know how to live in this world and does not have the power which Jesus Christ provides through His Spirit to make the changes He requires. If you are uncertain about your relationship to Jesus Christ, your counselor will be glad to speak to you about it.

The other problems that counselees have usually concern people. Sin is at the bottom of difficulties in any relationship. The Scriptures teach us how God can enable us to relate properly to Himself and to others. God commands us to love Him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Because it is foundational to all that is being done, we suggest that you take time every day to read a portion of the Bible. Read with your spouse, your children, or whoever else may be involved in the problem with you. Of course, if you are coming alone and your problem is strictly between you and God, then you may read the Scriptures alone. However, it is helpful to read with someone else, because discussions may develop that stimulate you to apply what you read to your specific situation. Try to understand the purpose of each passage, asking yourself questions like these:

Why did the Holy Spirit put this passage here?

What does He intend to do in my life if I understand and act in the way that this passage instructs me?

Do not just read the Scriptures for facts. Facts are important, but always go beyond mere facts to discover the purpose. Try to determine how the Holy Spirit intends to change you through this passage. Then obediently move in that direction.

Do not read large portions of the Bible that you do not understand. Read until something strikes you that you understand clearly and then stop. Think about your life in relationship to the truth you have uncovered. If there is someone reading with you, discuss it with him. Try to discover what the passage should mean to you in some specific practice of life.

We urge you to do your homework regularly. Prayerfully ask God to give you the strength to do what you have been asked to do. Counseling is not magic that takes place during one hour, one day a week. During the session, we will talk about your relationship to God and to others. But it is “out there” during the rest of the week that the changes must take place. That is why we give homework assignments.

We want you to understand from the outset that counseling is not a long, interminable process. In six weeks or so, your counselor is going to look for a definite change. If he doesn't see some breakthrough (not necessarily dramatic, but a real turnaround), he will want to evaluate the situation to discover the reason.

Now let us consider how to deal with difficulties that might arise between counseling sessions. If any trouble arises and you do not know what to do, follow these directions:

1. Do not panic!
2. Write about the problem, specifically but briefly.
3. Write what you have done about it.
4. Write what the outcome was and what led to that outcome.

If, for example, you attempted to do a particular homework assignment but failed to complete it, write what happened. Bring this to your next counseling session.

Counselors do not usually counsel by telephone, text, or email in between sessions. Advice given without full consideration of all the circumstances can be misleading. You need to sit down at a session to discuss the subject fully so that we can help you reach biblical decisions. Crisis counseling is provided as we are able. If you ever have an urgent need to contact your counselor, call the Verity Soul Care Line at 240.389.0901. If you ever find yourself in an emergency situation, please call your pastor, your doctor, or the police (9-1-1).

If you have young children, please make arrangements for them for while you are with the counselor. Older children who can sit quietly for an hour are welcome to accompany you, and we will find a place for them to sit quietly while you are counseled, but please take your younger children to a babysitter before coming here. (If you need help finding a babysitter, please let us know.)

**When you leave each session, please schedule your next appointment. If you ever need to change or cancel an appointment, please call as soon as possible so that we can rearrange the counselor's schedule. Thank you.

May God bless you as you strive, by His power, to follow His word.

CONSENT TO COUNSELING

Our Goal: The purpose of Biblical counseling is to help you meet the challenges of life in a manner which is pleasing and honoring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Our counseling is offered at no charge, but donations are welcome. (Donations of \$40/hour are recommended. Receipts can be provided upon request.) *No one will be turned away due to inability to make a donation for counseling.*

Biblical Basis: Counseling received through Verity Soul Care is strictly religious in nature and is conducted or overseen by Dr. Joel Wood, who is certified by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (www.biblicalcounseling.com). We believe that the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:3-4). Our counseling is based solely on the principles of Scripture and does not employ the teachings or methods of modern psychology or psychiatry. Our counselors are not trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals and do not follow the methods of such.

Counselee Initials: _____

Other Professional Advice: If you have significant medical, legal, financial, or other technical questions, you should seek the advice of a competent, independent professional. Our counselors will cooperate with such advisors and will help you consider their counsel in the light of biblical principles.

We urge our counselees to properly care for their physical bodies and to seek medical treatment for all physiological problems. Our counselors will assist you in responding to such problems in a godly manner, but our counsel is not intended to replace the services of a qualified physician in the treatment of organic problems.

Counselee Initials: _____

Confidentiality Policy: Confidentiality is an important part of the counseling process. As Verity Soul Care differs in some respects with traditional guidelines regarding confidentiality, we have developed a policy which specifically addresses this issue. Said policy is attached to, incorporated in, and subject to the other provisions of this Consent to Counseling Agreement.

Counselee Initials: _____

Recording Policy: While Verity Soul Care does not record every counseling session, we will occasionally record sessions for the purpose of training or when extremely difficult matters are before the counselee(s). This is done to provide feedback from mentors as well as to seek wisdom for the counselee.

Counselee Initials: _____

Conflict Resolution – Arbitration: On rare occasions, a conflict may develop between a counselor and a counselee. The Bible commands that Christians make every effort to live in

peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian Church (cf. Matthew 18:15-20; I Corinthians 6:1-8), without involvement of the secular courts. Therefore, in order to ensure faithfulness to this Biblical principle, we require all counselees to agree that any claim or dispute arising under, out of, in connection with, or relating to the counseling received at Verity Counseling or any dispute with a counselor thereof shall be settled by Biblically-based mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation of the Institute for Christian Conciliation (a copy of which is available on request).

Each party to the dispute shall choose one arbiter, with those two arbiters then selecting the third. It is expressly understood that, by consenting in advance to arbitration, the counselee is waiving his right to trial in the civil courts.

Counselee Initials: _____

Donation: “As counselee, I intend to donate \$ _____ /hr to help cover the cost of this ministry.” *Donations are payable to Dr. Joel Wood via Cash, Personal Check, Money Order, or PayPal.*

Again, this is not a requirement. Some ministries require that the counselee pay unless they provide proof of worship attendance. We are satisfied if one makes clear they are doing all they can to work out the counsel given in the context of a local Christian assembly.

Counselee Initials: _____

Having clarified the principles and policies of our counseling ministry, we welcome the opportunity to minister to you in the name of Christ and to be used by Him as He helps you grow in spiritual maturity and prepares you for usefulness in His body. If you have any questions about these guidelines, please speak with your counselor. Your signature below indicates your informed consent to these guidelines.

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

We understand that confidentiality is an important and vital aspect of the counseling relationship. To that end, Verity Soul Care and its representatives agree to carefully guard the information entrusted to them by counsees to the fullest extent possible.

Staff members and students participating in the Verity Soul Care program are expected to protect the information they receive in order to ensure the integrity of the counseling process and the privacy of the counselee. Should a counselor or student fail to protect said information, it may become necessary for them to be dismissed from service in the Verity Soul Care program.

Under certain circumstances, however, it may be necessary to reveal information obtained in the counseling process in order to uphold the principles of Scripture, the standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (of which, Dr. Wood is an ordained Teaching Elder), and/or the laws of the state of Maryland. Verity Soul Care does not hold to the legal concepts of the priest/penitent, doctor/patient, psychotherapist/patient or counselor/counselee privileges.

Situations wherein it may become necessary to reveal otherwise confidential information include, but are not limited to:

1. Where a counselee, although encouraged to renounce a particular sin refuses to do so, it may become necessary to seek the assistance of others in the church to encourage repentance and reconciliation in accordance with the Scriptures (cf. Proverbs 15:22, 24:11; Matthew 18:15-20). In said cases, only such information as is necessary to deal with that particular sin will be revealed. Further, said information will only be revealed to those Biblically required to be involved. To that end, it may become necessary to contact the pastor and/or other elders of a counselee's home church.

Counselee Initials: _____

2. Counselors, uncertain as to how a particular issue should be addressed, may reveal necessary information to and seek assistance from another counselor or pastor.

Counselee Initials: _____

3. Where a counselee threatens to harm himself/herself or another person, it may become necessary to notify the proper legal authorities, family members, pastor, intended victim, or all of the above. If the counselee makes such threats in the context of a counseling session, the Counselor will, immediately upon receiving the information, consult with another Verity Soul Care counselor, if such is available, who will work with them to assess the situation and assist in making the appropriate notifications, if necessary.

Counselee Initials: _____

4. If a Counselor is privy to evidence that abuse or some other crime has been or is about to be committed, it may be necessary to reveal such to the legal authorities.

Counselee Initials: _____

5. We recognize that in the course of the loving discipline of their children, Christian parents may employ corporal punishment, in accordance with the teachings of Scripture and, in conformity with those Scriptures, Verity Counseling supports a parent's right to do so. However, if in the course of counseling, the Counselor suspects that a minor child has been physically or sexually abused, the Counselor may immediately consult with another Verity Soul Care counselor, who will assist in the assessment of the situation. If it is then suspected that abuse has occurred, the legal authorities will be contacted in an appropriate manner. If no other counselor is available and a child is in imminent danger of being abused, the counselor may immediately contact the appropriate legal authorities without employing the above consultation process.

Counselee Initials: _____

6. Observers including, but not limited to, counseling students, may sit in on counseling sessions either to assist in the counseling process or for training purposes.

Counselee Initials: _____

7. All observers and counselors agree to be bound by this confidentiality agreement and should they be found to be in violation of this agreement understand they face expulsion from the Verity Soul Care counseling program by the Verity Soul Care Director.

Counselee Initials: _____

Counselee Signature: _____

Date: _____