

WHEN Additional Support IS NEEDED

Finding a good Christian counselor can be challenging! We encourage you to review the following tips to assist you in that process:

WHERE TO START

Referrals from others can be a great way to connect with a good counselor. Ask family members or friends who are in counseling if they would recommend theirs! Ask specifically what they liked or didn't like about their counselor or the counseling process in general. Did they trust their counselor? Did the counselor challenge them in positive ways? If their counselor does not seem like the best fit for you (maybe you prefer a different gender or someone older or younger), ask your friend's counselor if they have any recommended referrals.

Do you personally know a trusted Christian counselor or pastor who might make a recommendation? Professionals involved in the therapeutic community understand different counselors' strengths and training. They may also have unique insight into why someone may or may not be a good fit for you.

In addition to referrals, here are websites you can search for local counselors:

- Focus on the Family Christian Counselor's Network (www.findacounselor.focusonthefamily.com/)
- Psychology Today (www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists)
Note: You can select "Christian" as a filter on this site.
- American Association of Christian Counseling (www.connect.aacc.net)

Christians often look for counselors who are also Christians because they want faith to be part of the discussion as they process difficult issues. And we highly encourage you to seek out a Christian counselor who approaches life and work with a biblical framework. But it's important to be aware that some Christian "counseling" is provided by believers who are neither professional counselors nor therapists. From a professional standpoint, true Christian counseling does not claim to heal mental illness with Scripture and prayer alone. Nor does it shy away from spiritual truths that can help someone heal from deep hurts. Counselors who are Christians are trained to walk clients through the therapeutic process in several ways. They offer various interventions and protocols for the counseling room. Prayer and spiritual discussions may be part of that experience, but there will be more involved in the therapeutic process. Also note that a professional counselor who is also a Christian may not believe and express faith exactly as you do. The counselor is a professional, just as your Christian medical doctor is a professional.

INTERVIEWING COUNSELORS

Not all counselors are the right fit for you and your needs, and that's okay! Once you identify a counselor who seems like a potential fit, we encourage you to request and review their Statement of Practice. This includes their theoretical orientation and their confidentiality policies. Read all of it and make note of any questions you have. Counselors generally love to discuss these things and you should be comfortable with how they operate.

Next, set up a time to ask questions and learn more about their approach to counseling. This would be the time to ask any questions you have about their Statement of Practice. Here are some specific questions that you might want to ask:

- **What are your specific counseling credentials?**

You want someone who graduated with at least a Master's in counseling or family therapy and ideally is either registered with the state as an LPC/ LMFT or working towards licensure/ certification. While the letters behind the name do not guarantee effectiveness, Christian counseling should be provided by counselors who have achieved the academic requirements outlined by the state in which they provide services. This means that they are trained to connect, assess, and intervene at a therapeutic level necessary for the counseling process.

- **Why did you become a counselor? What do you enjoy about it? What is the most difficult part of the profession for you?**

Assess how comfortably they can talk about unpleasant things. Are they flat or non-engaging on a question like this?

- **What are your areas of specialty in counseling? What life struggles do you not counsel?**

Is the counselor's practice focused on marital issues, adolescent struggles, or addiction? If a counselor cannot clearly and comfortably talk about the life struggles they are not equipped to address, this should be a red flag; a good counselor knows their limits and is well connected with other local counselors more proficient in the areas of their weakness.

- **How do you believe change happens?**

- **How did you come to faith in Christ and what is your church background?**

Do they portray a clear understanding of the gospel and joyful commitment to growing in their personal faith? You may also ask for the counselor's Statement of Faith. If they are advertising themselves as a Christian counselor, they should be prepared for this question.

- **How do you integrate faith, Scripture, and the Holy Spirit into counseling sessions?***

- **Do you use prayer in sessions and what does that look like? How do you invite the Lord in?***

*If you're unable to find a counselor who integrates the Holy Spirit into their sessions, we encourage you to proceed with a good counselor who is a Christian with a biblical framework to address the parts of your story that could use the assistance and support of a professional. We then encourage you to consider engaging in the biblical principles of freedom that are outlined in Mercy Multiplied's *Keys to Freedom* study (<https://mercymultiplied.com/keys-to-freedom/>) with a mentor or pastor.

We also highly suggest signing up for one (or multiple) Freedom Prayer* sessions. Ethos Church in Nashville offers online ZOOM prayer sessions. You can sign up at www.ethoschurch.org/freedomprayer.

*Freedom Prayer is a prayer ministry designed to allow the Holy Spirit to identify and address things hindering a deeper personal relationship with God. Freedom Prayer uses a biblical framework and makes room for the Holy Spirit to address inner hurts and wounds, identify and break strongholds, and bring healing and freedom, all with the purpose of knowing God better. During a prayer time, you meet with 2-3 trained staff members who have completed an in-depth training over several months followed by an apprentice period. You and the team are all active participants in the prayer time as you seek the Lord's heart together. For more information on the Freedom Prayer ministry, see www.freedomprayer.org.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Finding a good Christian counselor who is the right fit for you personally can take some time and commitment. However, when you discover a great counselor to walk alongside as you dive deeper into your own story, it will be worth the time and energy you spend on this process!

Far too often, people have a poor experience with a counselor and say, "See, COUNSELING didn't work." They give up on the process, or worse, believe they cannot be helped. Don't give up! Just because you didn't connect with a specific counselor doesn't mean there isn't someone out there who can support you well.

Once you begin meeting with a counselor, we suggest committing to at least three sessions. If you don't feel comfortable or connected with your counselor after three sessions, it may be time to try someone else. **Do NOT feel the need to keep going to a counselor who doesn't seem to be helping.** It can feel overwhelming to think about starting again with someone new, but it will be worth the effort when you find the right counselor to help you walk through whatever you are dealing with right now.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

We have recorded a couple of MercyTalk podcasts on the topic of finding a counselor. Search for these two titles on the MercyTalk page (www.mercymultiplied.com/mercytalk):

- **312 | Steps to Finding the Right Counselor**
- **329 | Jesus and Counseling...How Can I Have Both?**