

Welcome to Sojourn Counseling

At Sojourn, we humbly thank you for giving us the privilege to journey with you during your time of need. We recognize our responsibility to God, to you, and to the church as we come alongside you to learn and grow together in God's grace.

Please take the time to read this short but important document that explains what you should know and expect from us as you receive care from Sojourn Counseling.

What is Gospel Counseling?

Gospel counseling is a way of loving you as we listen, explore, and understand your struggles as you live in an imperfect world. We show how Christ and His gospel truths apply in deeply personal and specific ways to the realities of life so that you can live out the gospel by faith in community, made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. At Sojourn we believe the gospel powerfully transforms our individual lives, our relationships, and the world.¹

Many of us have negative, preconceived notions of counseling done by the church. Please read what Gospel Counseling is NOT:

1. Gospel counseling is not just quoting or prescribing Bible verses and asking you for more faith and effort.
2. Gospel counseling is not simply exposing outward sins or idols of the heart.
3. Gospel counseling is not following a fixed paradigm of method and sequence, expecting the same "results" for each person.
4. Gospel Counseling is not merely teaching biblical principles in general while ignoring the specific details of each person's story.
5. Gospel Counseling is not done by one who has arrived and has already figured out life.

What to Expect from Gospel Counseling versus Traditional Counseling

In modern culture the term "counseling" has come to imply a one-on-one 'professional relationship' between a psychotherapist and a 'patient' or 'client.' Traditional "therapists" or "counselors" are typically licensed by a local or national accrediting body and are subject to the restrictions set by their licensing boards. Therapists usually meet with a 'client' on a weekly or bi-weekly basis in an office setting, provide some form of psychological assessment using secular tools and DSM-IV criteria, set restrictions on personal interactions outside the office, keep a written record, and charge a fee.

We here at Sojourn have a different vision of what counseling can and should involve. In fact, we seek to redeem the term "counseling." It is our belief that meeting once a week with a therapist for one hour does not provide enough support for those who are suffering. Counseling, we believe, can and should take place in a community. We are called to counsel each other on a daily basis – encouraging, challenging, redeeming, and building one another up in the Gospel. Nonetheless, we recognize that there are times when we may need someone to journey with us in a more intentional and in-depth way.

God has raised up men and women at Sojourn to provide such care. These individuals have been selected because we believe they have been blessed with the gifts of listening, compassion, wisdom, and insight. Our Gospel Counselors come from a broad variety of backgrounds – some have received training in the mental health disciplines, many come from other professional backgrounds, but every counselor has been trained to utilize a gospel framework for understanding and responding to life struggles.

¹ For a more detailed understanding of gospel counseling, you can read "A Vision of Gospel Counseling by the Church at counseling.sojournchurch.com."

When working in the capacity of a Gospel Counselor as a member of Sojourn Community Church, even those who have previously received formal secular mental health training utilize the Gospel Counseling model and do not adhere to the typical theories and models of traditional "psychotherapy" and are not constrained by the ethical guidelines associated with their respective state or national license.

Some things to anticipate include:

1. We do not always meet in a formal counseling setting on one of Sojourn's campuses, since much counseling occurs in the community. Written notes are not always taken during such informal gospel counseling meetings.
2. We do not set limits on personal relationships outside of counseling sessions because counseling is done in community given the holistic nature of the church.
3. We do not conduct psychological assessments based on secular theory.
4. We do not provide medical care or prescribe medications.
5. We do not function as a crisis center. On occasions when suicidal or homicidal risk emerge, the gospel counselor will take necessary measures to ensure the person's safety, to include calling 911 and/or ensuring the person is admitted to a local mental health facility.
6. And finally, we do not charge a fee for counseling.

Gospel Counseling and Psychotropic Medication

God designed our body and soul to function in an integrated manner. As a result, soul disorders can contribute to bodily disorders and vice versa. Moreover, given the pervasive effects of living in a fallen world, we recognize there are times in which the body/brain does not function as God designed—in such cases, medical treatment and/or psychotropic medication may be necessary. On the other hand, we DO believe that medications are sometimes overprescribed as a means of providing a “quick fix” for life problems—this results in part from our fast-paced, economically driven medical and therapeutic systems that do not operate from a gospel framework. However, we also recognize that counseling approaches that discourage the use of psychotropic medications may prevent people from seeking treatments that are at times appropriate and necessary. Therefore, we are careful not to advise against the use of medications to counselees since gospel counselors are not trained medical personnel. Additionally, we see the use of medications as an issue of Christian liberty that in some cases may be necessary. Nonetheless, we assert that psychotropic medications alone rarely function as a ‘cure all’ for life’s complex issues.

A helpful way of thinking through the struggles of the body and soul is to consider a spectrum. On one end, the issues are primarily heart and relational in nature (issues such as anger, fear, and escapism). On the other end, the issues are primarily physiological in nature (issues such as dementia and brain injury). There are some issues that can fall in the middle of the spectrum (such as ADHD, depression, etc.). But given the reality we are all made in the image of God, even struggles that are primarily physiological in origin co-exist with heart and relational issues.

No matter where you are on this spectrum, God knows you and His gospel message relates to your situation. Our sovereign God knows our hearts, our bodies, our capabilities, and ultimately our responsibilities before Him and others. Though disordered bodily function sometimes blurs matters of responsibility and capability, we still live in God’s world and are called to live in accordance to His ways. Despite whatever weaknesses we may experience, we remain responsible to our call to love God and love others so that God is glorified through our lives.

Sojourn Counseling’s Relationships with the Mental Health System and Other Providers

We recognize our members can exercise gospel freedom by choosing to seek care and counseling outside of Sojourn. Therefore, we do not discourage or keep counselees from receiving treatment

elsewhere but it is important for them to know the counseling they may receive may not be consistent with counseling that flows from and focuses on the gospel. Moreover, counsees are welcome to work with outside agencies even while receiving care from us; however, we believe the elders and/or ministry leaders can play a vital role in the redemptive process by working with the outside agencies, given that the person receiving counseling provides written consent for such collaboration.

Gospel Ministry Limits Of Confidentiality

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matt. 7:12). It also encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of Sojourn Community Church, all staff and ministry leaders are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. Those involved in counseling cases will carefully protect all information that they receive through counseling sessions and case management, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate and necessary to reveal certain information to others, based on the purpose and function of the church, as described in Sojourn's By-Laws and Covenant available on the Sojourn website.² In particular, when a gospel counselor or Sojourn ministry leader believe it is necessary, they may disclose confidential information³ to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

Traditional Circumstances:

1. When gospel counselors or Sojourn ministry leaders believe the counselee could be in danger of harming themselves or others (Prov. 24:11-12).
2. When gospel counselors or Sojourn ministry leaders believe that there is ongoing abuse taking place—i.e. sexual, physical, domestic, child abuse, etc. (Rom. 13:1).
3. When a minor (defined by as anyone under 18 years old) shares information that gospel counselors or Sojourn ministry leaders believe is in the best interest of the child to disclose information to the parents and/or authorities (e.g., neglect, abuse, drug usage, sex, physical harm).
4. When gospel counselors or Sojourn ministry leaders are ordered by a court of law to release the counselee's information.
5. When gospel counselors or Sojourn ministry leaders seek guidance and receive regular supervision to better care for the counselee, they can discuss relevant information with ministry supervisors and/or elders (Prov. 11:14; 15:22).

Gospel Ministry Circumstances:

6. When gospel counselors or Sojourn ministry leaders offer care and counseling in community, those involved in the counseling process agree that all information shared outside of counseling amongst the involved community can be shared with one another and be discussed in the counseling sessions.
7. When a case escalates to church discipline where the counselee has consistently demonstrated an unrepentant heart. The gospel counselors, Sojourn ministry leaders and relevant members will wisely and lovingly coordinate redemptive efforts to pursue restoration (see Matt. 18:15-20), sharing only the necessary information, not a full release from confidentiality.
8. When gospel counselors or Sojourn ministry leaders are of the opinion that confidential material should be disclosed.

² Sojourn's By-Laws and Covenant found at <http://sojournchurch.com/category/resource/policies/>

³ Confidential information is defined in this document as any information shared in counseling with gospel counselors or Sojourn ministry leaders

Please be assured that we strongly prefer to keep personal information confidential and will make every effort to resolve issues as privately as possible. Based on the stated limits of confidentiality, you will not have to sign a "release of information form" when any of the above situations arise.

Childcare Provisions:

Sojourn desires to reflect the love of God to the church and city by not only offering free counseling to those in need, but also free childcare. This ministry of childcare is offered to those we are caring for, to those we are equipping, and to those who are serving in the counseling ministry.

We ask you to notify the counselor of the names and ages of your children needing childcare. If one of your children is sick, we ask that you either cancel your counseling appointment or find a family member or friend to watch your children for the sake of the other children's health in childcare. If for some reason you need to cancel your appointment, please contact the Sojourn office and your counselor as soon as possible. If you do not provide a **24-hour cancellation notice**, we will ask that you pay for 1.5 hours of childcare (\$15 dollars).

Cancelling Appointments

Please contact your counselor and others that may be journeying with you when canceling appointments. We ask that you give a 24-hour notice but we also know that there are times when this is not possible.

Materials Needed For Counseling Sessions

1. Bible, notebook, pen/pencil
2. Any assigned homework

Legal Release

Your signature below serves as acknowledgement that you have read and understand the information contained in this document.

As a counselee, I understand the following:

1. I agree to receive gospel counseling knowing what it is and is not.
2. I understand the gospel counselors do not adhere to the typical theories and models of traditional "psychotherapy" and are not constrained by the ethical guidelines associated with their respective state or national license.
3. I understand I have the ability to choose other forms of care offered outside of Sojourn
4. I expressly waive any and all legal rights regarding confidentiality (including the requirement that no information can be released without my written authorization) in favor of Sojourn's ministerial limits of confidentiality described above.
5. I am free to end the counseling at any time.
6. The gospel counselor/ministry leader is free to end the counseling at any time.
7. To ensure my health and wellness, the counselor may refer me to another counselor, psychologist or psychiatrist.
8. If I have any concerns about the counseling, I am free to contact one of the Sojourn elders.
9. Out of courtesy, I will give at least 24 hours prior notice before canceling an appointment.
10. I hereby acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to seek the advice of independent legal counsel and that I have read and understood all of the terms and provisions of this Agreement.

I further agree that any disputes that arise in connection with Sojourn’s gospel counseling ministry shall be resolved as follows:

- (1) If I believe I have been personally wronged by my gospel counselor or Sojourn ministry leader, I will follow the church discipline article in Sojourn’s By-Laws available on the Sojourn website⁴
- (2) For all other complaints, the parties to this agreement are Christians and believe that the Bible commands them to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian church (see Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Therefore, the parties agree that any claim or dispute arising from or related to this agreement 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 division of Peacemaker® Ministries. Judgment upon an arbitration decision may be entered in any court otherwise having jurisdiction in Louisville, KY. The parties understand that these methods shall be the sole remedy for any controversy or claim arising out of this agreement and expressly waive their right to file a lawsuit in any civil court against one another for such disputes, except to enforce an arbitration decision.⁵

In doing so, I expressly waive the right to sue my counselor, Sojourn Community Church, its elders, or anyone else connected with the gospel counseling ministry in a court of law—this waiver will be binding on all family members, heirs, legal guardians, attorneys, etc. who might take action in connection with or on behalf of the person being counseled.

Counselee printed name	Counselee Signature	Date
Counselee printed name	Counselee Signature	Date
Parent/Guardian printed name (required for counselees under 18 years old)	Parent/Guardian Signature	Date

⁴ Sojourn’s By-Laws and Covenant found at <http://sojournchurch.com/category/resource/policies/>

⁵ (source: http://www.peacemaker.net/site/c.nuWL7MOJtE/b.5335919/k.71EF/Conciliation_Clauses.htm)

Mediation utilizes one or more neutral intermediaries who assist the parties in arriving at their own voluntary and mutually satisfactory resolution. Mediators may provide the parties with an advisory opinion, but that opinion shall not be legally binding. **Arbitration** is the submission of a dispute to a single arbitrator or a panel of arbitrators for a legally binding decision that may become and have the same effect as a judgment of a civil court. **Mediation/arbitration** is the submission of a dispute to mediation and, if mediation is not successful, to arbitration.