



FAITH BIBLE CHURCH

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Faith Bible Church and Faith Biblical Counseling Center's Position on Psychotropic Medication

Theological Foundations

The following points are foundational for a biblical understanding of how to help people who are suffering:

1. The Bible is God's Word, absolutely sufficient and authoritative for how we are to live our lives in a manner pleasing to God (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:3-4).
2. Man is both a physical and a spiritual being, which are often intertwined in suffering. Helping those who suffer often means addressing both physical and spiritual causes (Job; John 9:1-3; James 5:13-18). We do not believe that "mental disorders" are caused solely by physical abnormalities but include at least a spiritual component, if not a spiritual cause. Therefore, we hold to a holistic view of man, neither neglecting the soul or the body.
3. The Bible uses the word "heart" to refer to our mind (thoughts, attitudes), will (decision-maker), and emotions (feelings). Biblical counseling focuses upon the heart. When we address the heart, believers can always find hope no matter what the physical diagnosis may be.

The Biblical Counseling Coalition has crafted this confessional statement that succinctly states our belief.

We believe that biblical counseling should focus on the full range of human nature created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-28). A comprehensive biblical understanding sees human beings as relational (spiritual and social), rational, volitional, emotional, and physical. Wise counseling takes the whole person seriously in his or her whole person context. It helps people embrace all of life face-to-face with Christ so they become more like Christ in their relationships, thoughts, motivations, behaviors, and emotions.

We recognize the complexity of the relationship between the body and soul (Genesis 2:7). Because of this, we seek to remain sensitive to physical factors and organic issues that affect people's lives. In our desire to help people comprehensively, we seek to apply God's Word to people's lives amid bodily strengths and weaknesses. We encourage a thorough assessment and sound treatment of any suspected physical problems."¹

The Case for Medicine and the Limitations of Medicine

Medicine can be a helpful means of addressing both symptoms and causes in those situations that are caused by physical issues. Medicine is not a helpful means of addressing spiritual issues. Using medicine to treat spiritual issues will always make matters worse by ignoring the spiritual cause of the problem. Introducing medicine alone and failing to consider the reality of its side effects, will give false hope that will disappoint.

The challenge with "mood disorders" (depression, OCD, bi-polar, etc.) is to understand the cause of the problem. Depression, for example, can have a physical cause (examples: hypo and hyperthyroidism, Parkinson's, HIV). There are objective, verifiable tests that prove the physical cause in these situations. Therefore, it is often important to see a medical doctor for a diagnosis of organic, measurable, physical causes.

It is also important to realize, however, that the modern "medical model" has no organic, measurable tests for chemical imbalance and other such theories. There is no universally agreed upon understanding of how to diagnose and treat disorders that lack these measurable tests. There are hundreds of conflicting theories among psychologists today, none of which have scientific proof (observable by our five senses) to substantiate their opinions. One Christian physician pointed out that science is able to diagnose physical problems of patients through testing, but then added, "I wish I could say that medicine can make a diagnosis that easily for people suffering from emotional distress...But the test does not exist."² Therefore, biblical counselors are not alone in questioning the biological hypotheses, since even science sees it as shaky ground.

Then why do medications help some people with "mood disorders"? Researchers and practitioners agree that there are many unanswered questions:

- Why do medications help some people?
- Why doesn't it help others?
- Why, for one individual person, are some medications more effective than others?
- Why do medications that are chemically different have similar effects?
- Why do antidepressants seem to be equally effective with seemingly unrelated problems, such as obsessive thoughts and compulsive behavior?
- Why can it take up to a month before people notice a difference?
- Why do antidepressants often lose their effectiveness over time?

One counselor says an apt analogy is aspirin. Aspirin can alleviate symptoms, but it doesn't usually treat the underlying cause. Drugs can help, even when no medical exam can identify the so-called "chemical imbalance."³ But then there are several former psychiatrists who have stated that there are many disorders in which medicines have been overprescribed.

The Scripture is Sufficient

Application of God's Word can accomplish changes in ways that medication cannot. A Christian medical doctor has suggested three things medicine cannot do that Scripture can do:⁴

1. Medicine can't teach us to think on God's truth, which leads to peace and happiness instead of thoughts leading to anxiety or depression.
2. Medicine can't show us how to make godly lifestyle choices that will keep our bodies healthy.
3. Medicine can't reveal how to respond to physical limitations with spiritual attitudes that build us up instead of tearing us down.

Whether or not a person is taking psychotropic drugs is not the issue in counseling. However we are passionate about helping the counselee see that no matter what may be causing his problems there is a divine perspective- "God is in the problem".⁵ We think that before any progress can be made the counselee should ask themselves the following questions:

1. **Spiritual:** Am I committed to knowing and following Jesus? Do I want to pursue the Lord and seek thorough and lasting change, including self-examination and repentance related to possible spiritual causes of my depression, etc.?
2. **Physical:** Am I suffering so severely that it significantly interferes with my sincere efforts to pursue the spiritual agenda above, and
3. **Assessment of side effects:** Have I made a reasonable assessment of the benefits of taking antidepressants and/or other psychotropic drugs?⁶

Review of our core beliefs

- Biblical counselors see a seamless interconnection of the physical and the spiritual. Your body can respond to your spiritual growth, and it usually does when we gain God's view of our suffering by renewing of our minds through God's Word (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18).
- Biblical counselors have as our primary goal the growth of counselees so they can please God by living to the glory of God in all of life's circumstances (2 Corinthians 5:9-10; Ephesians 5:1-2, 8b-10).
- Biblical counselors believe that the Christian is to please God by restoring and perfecting the image of God from its fallen position to its redeemed position (2 Corinthians 4:7-18; 2 Peter 3:18). We do this by putting off the "old self" and putting on the "new self" of Christlikeness whether or not the physical or psychological suffering is relieved (Romans 12:13; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; Ephesians 4:22-24).
- Biblical counselors understand that since the fall of man, every emotional problem of man contains a spiritual element, and there may also be a physical component.
- Biblical counselors may recommend a medical exam if the counselee reports a sudden onset of depression or the counselee has not had a recent physical examination.
- Biblical counselors believe that it is wrong to criticize or judge counselees that are taking medicine, and we believe that we should not be judged if we think that it may not be particularly helpful in every case.

- Biblical counselors believe that the counselee considering drugs should be aware that there is caution even among medical providers regarding these drugs, and the wise patient should consider the possible side effects of the medication before beginning. The patient should remain under the supervision of the physician while taking psychotropic drugs. The decision regarding treatment should be made through prayer and wise counsel, remembering that the Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
- The biblical counselor's goal is not to make everyone drug-free! Many counsees want to eventually be off medication; they often realize this themselves, over time. CAUTION: Many psychotropic drugs have dangerous side effects in withdrawal and should only be reduced and/or discontinued under the supervision of and in consultation with their doctor.

Toward a Comprehensive Approach to Biblical Counseling

Our elders and our biblical counselors are deeply committed to "Understanding people, diagnosing the root sources of problems, prescribing wise 'treatment options' that require robust, relational, comprehensive, and compassionate care grounded in our shared redemptive relationship to Christ."⁷ We are eager to help the counselee holistically. Since we are not medical doctors, we respect the help medical doctors can bring to the complex cases that we are privileged to minister. Our passion is to help people live to the glory of God.

Paul in his letter to the Romans was absolutely convinced that believers could competently provide soul care to one another.

"I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another." Romans 15:14

Faith Biblical Counseling Center has helped many people by the same goodwill, knowledge of God's truth, and wise instruction. By God's grace, we would like to help you, too.

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¹ Biblical Counseling Coalition, *Confessional Statement*, <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/about/confessional-statement/>.

² Hodges, Charles D., M.D., *Good Mood Bad Mood*, Wapwallopen, PA, Shepherd Press, 2013, page24

³ Welch, Edward T., *Depression, A Stubborn Darkness*, Greensboro, NC, New Growth, Press, 2004, page 211.

⁴ Street, John D., General Editor, *Men Counseling Men*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013, (Geoffrey V. Drew, M.D., Chapter 22, Using Psychotropic Drugs, page375)

⁵ Quote attributed to Dr. Jay Adams

⁶ Jones, Robert D., Faith Bible Seminary, Lafayette, IN, BC 401, Course Notes, 2013

⁷ MacDonald, James, *Christ Centered Biblical Counseling*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2013, (Laura Hendrickson, M.D., Chapter 28, The Complex Mind/Body Connection, pages 409-410).