

The Difference between Secular Counseling and Discipleship

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- *What is the focus of secular counseling?*
- *What is the focus of discipleship?*
- *Shouldn't we have both, and aren't they essentially the same?*

This brochure does not deal with physiological problems such as brain disease, chemical imbalance, or physically-caused personality disorders. Our purpose here is to compare secular counseling for social, personal, and relational issues to biblical discipleship.

In general, the differences listed below explore the idea that secular counseling is people helping people to overcome distress and bring them into a comfort zone. This is done through applying information outside the Bible and used alone or mixed with biblical truth. This is a reactive process.

Biblical discipleship, however, is God helping people to glorify Himself through their life situation. This is a proactive process.

- (1) In *secular counseling*, people, representing the wisdom of people, counsel people.
In **discipleship**, God uses people, representing His wisdom, to counsel people (Psalm 23:1-3; 32:8; 62:5; Isaiah 9:6).
- (2) *Secular counseling* sees problems as situations that need to be solved.
Discipleship sees problems as an introduction to the grace of God, which strengthens faith (1 Peter 1:6-7).
- (3) *Secular counseling* assumes earthly situations are responsible for suffering.
Discipleship assumes God is responsible for suffering (Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4).
- (4) *Secular counseling* focuses on analysis.
Discipleship focuses on answers (Matthew 10:38; 16:24).
- (5) *Secular counseling* says people need to find themselves.
Discipleship says people need to lose themselves for Christ's sake (Luke 9:23-24).
- (6) *Secular counseling* sees psychology as the basis of truth and may add Bible verses to reinforce psychological principles.
Discipleship uses the Bible as the basis of truth (Mark 7:7, 13).
- (7) *Secular counseling* helps people to get gratification in this life.
Discipleship helps people to get rewards in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21).
- (8) *Secular counseling* pursues being at peace with the world.
Discipleship pursues separation from the world according to the truth of God's Word (John 17:15-17).
- (9) *Secular counseling* says all truth is God's truth. Therefore, we should not throw out human wisdom just because it's not found in the Bible.
Discipleship is determined to know nothing more than the Bible knows (Psalm 119:97-105; John 8:31-33). So how would we know something else is true or relevant?

- (10) *Secular counseling* includes freeing people from the feeling of guilt.
Discipleship says we are all guilty and need repentance (Romans 3:23; 6:23).
- (11) *Secular counseling* sees problems as horizontal--between people.
Discipleship sees problems as vertical--between people and God (Psalm 51:1-4).
- (12) *Secular counseling* integrates experiential evidence with Scripture.
Discipleship sees the Bible alone as sufficient (Matthew 16:6; Ephesians 4:17-18).
- (13) *Secular counseling* believes the problems of the modern world are too complex to restrict them to biblical answers alone.
Discipleship believes there is nothing new under the sun for which the Bible is not sufficient (1 Corinthians 2:12-13).
- (14) *Secular counseling* emphasizes your knowledge to bring about your will.
Discipleship prays that you will be filled with the knowledge of God's will (Colossians 1:9-10).
- (15) *Secular counseling* believes tough cases should be sent to experts in psychology or psychotherapy.
Discipleship believes tough cases should be sent to those who are mature in God's Word, abiding in Christ, and demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit (John 15:4-5; Colossians 5:22-25).
- (16) *Secular counseling* thinks it is the counselor's advice that matters, not his personal moral character.
Discipleship thinks you should first take the log out of your own eye (Matthew 7:3-5).
- (17) *Secular counseling* says our only hope is education.
Discipleship says our only hope is the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15).
- (18) *Secular counseling* says people are dysfunctional, codependent, and victimized.
Discipleship says people are responsible for and will be held accountable for their actions (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10).
- (19) *Secular counseling* analyzes based on the complexity of the human personality.
Discipleship analyzes based on the character of God--Who He is and what He does (John 17:3).
- (20) *Secular counseling* looks inward and backward for self-understanding.
Discipleship looks forward and upward to the call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:12-14).
- (21) *Secular counseling* believes people are controlled by memories buried in their subconscious minds which must be uncovered if they are to find help.
Discipleship believes people are controlled by sin which needs to be confessed as they focus on Christ not their subconscious (1 Corinthians 2:16; Colossians 3:2-3).
- (22) *Secular counseling* thinks people don't love themselves enough.
Discipleship thinks people don't love God as a priority, and others as a second priority, because they love themselves too much (Matthew 22:35-40).
- (23) *Secular counseling* believes we should understand ourselves based on personality evaluation, temperament analysis, or birth order.
Discipleship believes we should understand ourselves as being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18).
- (24) *Secular counseling* promotes pride.
Discipleship promotes humility (James 4:6).
- (25) *Secular counseling* focuses on making a person physically productive.
Discipleship focuses on making a person spiritually reproductive (2 Timothy 2:1-3).

Secular counseling is part of the wisdom of the world, and the wisdom of the world works for the world. Suppose you had, say, a bad marriage, financial debt, or an illness. The world's wisdom would allow a sinful solution: get a divorce, re-organize your debt into more debt with smaller payments, seek Satanic healing, hypnotism, voodoo, etc.

Both the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God include compassion. But God's wisdom is *first pure* (James 3:15-17). It seeks healing from hurting but without sin. Also, God's wisdom does not believe there is necessarily a solution in this life. The solution is serving God for rewards in heaven based on the glory of God (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Certainly there is an element of counseling with discipleship. But it is communicating the counsel of God from the Word of God. It's not to find the strength within yourself to overcome your suffering. It's to depend on God and conform to the image of Christ as you mature in Him.

Questions and Answers

Q: *What is the focus of secular counseling?*

A: Secular counseling is people helping people overcome their life struggles and difficult situations. It is reactive.

Q: *What is the focus of discipleship?*

A: Discipleship is more mature brothers and sisters in Christ helping the less mature understand the Word of God as a basis for conforming to and reproducing the image of Christ. It's proactive.

Q: *Shouldn't we have both, and aren't they essentially the same?*

A: We should not pursue both, and they are not the same. Secular counseling is rooted in the world's idea of pride, and discipleship is rooted in humility.