

West Hills Community Church
Philosophy of Counseling
(Rev 20161128)

West Hills Community Church is committed to shepherding God's people in a manner that is built upon God's Word and faithful application of the gospel to people's lives and struggles. Shepherding of God's people includes helping them navigate difficult sin patterns and situations they experience as they follow Jesus. Shepherding also includes helping people prepare for future trials and struggles. This act of helping people navigate present and future struggles is an important part of the role of pastor and elders in the local church.

The purpose of this document is to codify and clarify elements of our philosophy and approach to counseling. The following are key commitments for counseling ministry at West Hills.

- **Counseling is a responsibility of the leadership of West Hills.**

Shepherding -- caring for the people of God in the context of the local church -- is an important part of what elders are appointed to do. Scripture exhorts elders to lead by example, equip people to minister to others, and actively engage in their lives. This is a sobering call as elders will ultimately give an account to God as to how they shepherd God's people.

Counseling ministry is a central element of shepherding as it involves connecting people with specific truths from the Scriptures, helping them to discern how these Biblical truths apply in their specific challenge or situation, and working with them to practically live out these truths and grow in sanctification. Although people may experience various benefits from counseling ministry, the overriding goal from a spiritual perspective is that they mature in Christ.

Although counseling ministry is a responsibility of the elders and pastors of West Hills, this does not preclude the participation of lay individuals who carry out this ministry under the guidance and authority of the elders.

(Relevant scripture: Acts 20:28, Eph 4:12, Col 1:28, 2 Tim 4:1-2, Heb. 13:7, 17)

- **Counseling is provided freely as part of the ministry of West Hills**

There are no set limits in terms of how long a counseling relationship may last. Some individuals may require one or two meetings while others may have periodic meetings over a long period of time. The timeline of counseling is connected to the specifics of the situation and the shepherding needs of the person (1 Thes. 5:14).

West Hills does not charge for counseling as it is a normal part of shepherding and evangelizing people. Counseling is a ministry of the Word and is freely given in the same way that other ministries of the Word are freely provided (preaching, teaching, discipleship, evangelism, etc.).

West Hills Community Church
Philosophy of Counseling
(Rev 20161128)

- **Counseling is built upon the authority, sufficiency and application of Scripture**

The Scriptures provide all wisdom for our relationship with God, each other and ourselves (Ps 19:7-9; 2 Pet 1:3-4). They have the authority to call men and women into obedience to God's wisdom as they navigate various trials.

The type of counseling that West Hills provides is rooted in helping people connect their struggles with their relationship with God, others and self from a Biblical perspective. It also addresses the practical question of how Biblical truth can be lived out in the specifics of their lives and situations.

- **Counseling is intentional**

Although counseling happens both formally and informally in the local church as the Holy Spirit works in our midst, those involved in counseling ministry seek intentionally to grow in both the theological and practical aspects of their ministry. This means that individuals engaged in counseling are trained using various resources including those of the *Association of Certified Biblical Counselors*. These resources provide a framework for counseling practice and ministry standards including guidelines for confidentiality.

The intentional aspect of counseling also means that the pastors, elders and other leaders seek to identify people who are experiencing various struggles in order to connect them to resources in our church that may help them navigate those struggles and grow in Christ.

- **Counseling at West Hills provides a framework for using other resources**

There are a wide variety of counseling and mental health resources outside of our church body. Therefore, it is important to have a framework for how to interact with them. There are two errors that we seek to avoid: (1) assuming that using an external mental health professional is preferable to counseling in the local church and (2) assuming that such resources must never be used. Therefore the following framework is used:

Counseling provided by West Hills: we provide counseling for all areas for which the Scriptures provide clear guidance and we are equipped to do so. This includes areas like marriage, conflict resolution, communication, anxiety, depression, sexuality and a myriad of other challenges that we face in real life. *Our default position as a ministry is that we will seek to counsel in the context of the local church whenever possible.*

Counseling provided external to West Hills: we recognize that some circumstances may benefit from external resources. These includes things like practical strategies for living with bipolar; behavior strategies for autism, adhd, ocd or ptsd; and selecting / managing medications. Additionally, some individuals may simply prefer to meet with an

West Hills Community Church
Philosophy of Counseling
(Rev 20161128)

external resource.

Regardless of the specifics, the use of external resources -- even if Christian -- does not remove the shepherding responsibility from West Hills. Therefore we meet with individuals whenever a referral has been requested to make sure they are aware of the availability of counseling ministry at West Hills and to give them a framework for assessing external counseling relationships from a Biblical perspective. If possible, we continue to meet with those who are in an external counseling relationship to help connect what they are learning from external resources to their overall relationship with God.