



North Hills --- COUNSELING

Lay Counselor Training Program

program overview

The Lay Counselor Training Program (LCTP) is designed to provide individuals with training and hands-on experience in gospel-centered counseling. The goal of this program is to promote personal, gospel-centered growth in individuals and to equip and encourage them to engage in Spirit-dependent, gospel-saturated counseling, both formally and informally, within the NHC body.

Counseling involves “getting alongside people to serve them—to assist them in making the changes God wants them to make. This kind of counseling is not only a formal ministry of the church; it’s meant to be the lifestyle of every believer” (Paul Tripp).

The LCTP follows the “Head-Heart-Hands” approach and is comprised of academic projects, mentoring, observation, and hands-on experience divided into [three phases](#). The program is designed so that each successive phase of training progresses into deeper and more rigorous training. The student may complete only the first phase, or press on and finish all three. Therefore, the program lasts between nine and 42 months, depending on how many phases of the training you choose to complete. Your time and financial cost increases with each phase of training.

Our goal is that the lay counselor would be equipped for the good work of counseling ministry (2 Timothy 3:17).

counseling philosophy

When people hear the phrase “Christian counseling,” it’s easy to consider it therapy or psychology with a little bit of Jesus mixed in, or specialized help for “the really messed up people.” But at its heart, gospel-centered counseling is simply restorative discipleship and is therefore a significant part of accomplishing our purpose at North Hills Church: to Believe God’s Word, Connect with God’s Family, and Share God’s Story.

Restorative: A Holistic View of Brokenness

Gospel-centered counseling is restorative because it begins with a holistic view of brokenness. We need counseling because we are fallen people living in a fallen world.

Our hearts are affected deeply by sin. In the Bible, the “heart” is used to describe collectively our mind, our emotions, and our will. Our own personal brokenness and sin are reflected in thinking that is clouded, affections that are pulled toward idols, and behavior that is both sinful and destructive.

Our relationship with God is broken. Ultimately, our sinful hearts are a reflection of our broken relationship with God. We do not properly understand, worship, love, and obey Him.

We are surrounded and affected by brokenness. Not only are we sinners, we are also sufferers: we are surrounded by the brokenness of this world and are sinned against by others.

- We are affected physically. We are embodied souls vulnerable to sickness, disease, and disorders.
- We are affected spiritually. We are surrounded by spiritual forces that are real, and an enemy, the devil, that seeks to tempt and destroy.
- We are affected relationally. Abuse, neglect, family dysfunction, and other broken relationships affect us deeply.
- We are affected culturally. The voices of a world opposed to God and resistant to redemption are loud. They confuse us. They shape us. They coerce us.

As David Powlison describes, each of us is a “physically-embodied, socially-embedded, spiritually-embattled person.” We are both sinners and sufferers.

Healthy gospel-centered counseling always includes an understanding of how the active human heart, with all of its own sinfulness, responds to physical, spiritual, relational, and cultural influences.

Discipleship: A Holistic Environment for Change

Counseling is also discipleship, which means that the best way to address our brokenness is with a holistic environment, focused on gospel-centered change.

Gospel-centered. At the center of any environment that produces spiritual change is the gospel—the person and work of Jesus. Without Jesus, there is no redemption and no transformation. Change begins when we bring our shame, our guilt, and our pain to the cross and see that Jesus is sufficient for all of our brokenness.

God’s story of redemption. The beauty of the work of Jesus on the cross is seen most clearly in light of the bigger story of redemption recorded in the Bible. Jesus is God’s promised Hero, who, through the cross, restores God’s original purpose in creation. Change happens when we truly see Jesus as our only Hero and begin to find our identity and significance flowing from our place in God’s big story.

The Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit is the one who comes alongside to help, to expose our sin, to open our eyes to see the beauty and power of Jesus, and to produce genuine spiritual fruit. Without His supernatural help, change is impossible.

God's Word. The Spirit primarily speaks to us through God's Word. As we open the Bible, God reveals both our own hearts and His heart for us. We see our brokenness for what it really is and can listen to God's voice calling us to the Redeemer as our only hope.

Prayer. We show our dependence on the Spirit and the Word as we pray. Prayer is an expression of humility and need, an acknowledgement that God loves to lavish His children with grace, and that His intervention is our only hope for change.

Community. Christian community is essential to change, because it is the best place for God's people to experience a gospel-centered, spirit-dependent, Word-saturated, prayer-filled environment. As we, together, bring our brokenness to Jesus, we actually experience Jesus' fullness through each other; we speak the truth in love to one another, and we stir one another up to love and good works. In other words, God uses messed up people to help other messed up people see themselves and see Jesus.

Ephesians 4:15-16 say, "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

This "speaking the truth in love" happens at North Hills Church primarily in these two ways:

- Public ministry: Sunday worship services, preaching, training classes, conferences, etc.
- Personal ministry: life groups, small group counseling, one-on-one counseling, etc.

Public and personal ministry are meant to work in cooperation with each other. This necessary cohesion is why our counseling ministry works very closely with other ministries, such as Life Groups, preaching and teaching, and Christian partner ministries outside of NHC.

How Does Counseling Work?

Simply put, gospel-centered counseling attempts to create an atmosphere of grace that connects a holistic view of brokenness and a holistic view of discipleship.

Love – All gospel-centered counseling starts with love. One sinner who loves Jesus comes alongside another sinner with a heart of love and grace. Love doesn't stand at the top of the pit and say, "come on up." Love jumps down into the pit and says, "let us bring our brokenness to Jesus together and see Him redeem."

Know – Flowing from this heart of compassion is a desire to know the person who is struggling. This is where we ask thoughtful questions that help us understand what is affecting the person's heart. We listen with carefulness and compassion. We try to understand what kind of brokenness is influencing their hearts, and we seek to understand how their hearts are responding to these influences, and ultimately, to God.

Speak – As we seek to know the person struggling, we are also gently drawing them into a gospel-centered environment for change. As we listen to the Spirit, open God's Word, and engage in prayer for and with the person we are helping, we speak, offering words of hope and truth that are centered on Jesus and His story of redemption.

Change – As we listen well and speak with grace and truth, our hope is that the person who is struggling will see Jesus as their hope for change and will respond in genuine faith, repentance, and obedience. This kind of deep change doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and patient rest in the work of God's Spirit.

program details

What is the Lay Counseling Ministry?

Counseling ministry includes many aspects: mentoring, coaching, encouraging, discipling, counseling, partnering in prayer. God calls every member of the body of Christ to minister to one another in these (and many other) ways. This training process will help us evaluate the maturity and giftedness of those desiring to be part of the lay counseling ministry of NHC. One of the goals of the program is for graduates to become part of the lay counseling ministry; however, participation in this ministry is by the invitation and discretion of the counseling leadership team and is not guaranteed upon completion of the program. Mentors will give feedback and direction as you proceed through the program regarding where you may be best suited to serve the body with your gifts.

Prerequisites

Before applying to the Lay Counselor Training Program, the following prerequisites must be met:

- You must be a member of North Hills Church,
- You must be currently engaged in a Life Group.

Candidates

A minimum of [Phase One](#) training is required for lay counselors who are assigned one-on-one cases by the counseling department. All new lay counselors, including those who have participated in the NHC Counseling Ministry for less than a year, are required to participate in the program. Individuals who have a degree in counseling or extensive counseling experience may qualify for a modified version of the program. (Discuss this with the Pastor of Counseling Ministries.)

Life Groups

As you participate in the program, you will need to continue your active engagement in your Life Group. This engagement is an integral part of your mentoring process because your primary sphere of personal ministry and counseling is naturally your life group. Therefore, you should connect with your Life Group leader (or a mature believer in your group) on a bi-weekly or monthly basis, to evaluate and encourage your personal growth, and to discuss how you can effectively serve other members of your group through personal discipleship and/or counseling.

course requirements

Course requirements for the Lay Counselor Training Program are a combination of classes, reading assignments, study guides, case studies, participation in counseling groups, and attending counseling forums and meetings. The program is designed so that the breadth and depth of training increases with each phase. The phases are intended to coincide with, and train for, the first three types of Soul Care described in [Appendix 4](#). All of these requirements have “Head-Heart-Hands” elements.

Each student has access to our online classroom, nhonlinelearning.center. Classes, training, case studies, and sermon series are made available through this online platform. Additionally, completed assignments, feedback, and progress tracking are all contained in the online classroom. To access the online classroom, visit the website above, select “register,” and complete the required information.

Phase One – Foundation

Phase One training is required for all NHC lay counselors and can be completed in less than 12 months. Cost is kept minimal and includes only the cost of books.

Assignments

- Complete the Gospel-centered Counseling class (available in the [online classroom](#)).
- Read *Counsel from the Cross* by Elise Fitzpatrick and complete the corresponding assignment in [Appendix 1](#).
- Read *Caring for One Another* by Ed Welch and complete the corresponding assignment in [Appendix 1](#).
- Attend two Counseling Forums hosted by the NHC Counseling Ministry.
- Complete assignments related to one approved Wisdomfest with a counseling theme (see [Appendix 1](#)).
- Complete Mandated Reporting Training (see below).
- Complete Suicide Prevention Training (available in the [online classroom](#)).
- Join a Lay Counselor Training Group (see [Appendix 1](#)).
- Choose FIVE case studies (available in the online classroom); one of them must be the case called “Suicide.” Thoroughly answer each question and upload your paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

Mandated Reporting Training

You must successfully complete the online training for mandated reporting provided by the USC School of Law: *Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect*. This training takes approximately 45 minutes and is available at childlaw.sc.edu. After clicking on this link, please select “Online Training” and you will then see the required course. Upon completion, upload your completed certificate as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

Outcome

After completing Phase One training, the lay counselor will be equipped to counsel or mentor at the “Formative” level (see [Appendix 4](#)). The lay counselor will receive a phase one completion certificate.

Phase Two – Formation

Completing Phase One and approval from the Pastor of Counseling Ministries is required before proceeding to Phase Two. This next phase can be completed in about 12 months. While cost remains relatively low, more books and classes are required to complete it.

Assignments

- Complete two formal classes from NHC LEAD or seminary-level. One must be directly counseling related. One must NOT be directly counseling related, rather it should be general Bible knowledge (e.g. Christian Theology).
- Read *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* by Paul Tripp and complete the corresponding assignment in [Appendix 2](#).
- Read *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy Keller and complete the corresponding assignment in [Appendix 2](#).
- Attend two additional Counseling Forums hosted by the NHC Counseling Ministry.
- Join a Lay Counselor Mentor Group (see [Appendix 2](#)).
- Select at least FIVE additional case studies (available in the [online classroom](#)). Thoroughly answer each question, and upload your paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

Outcome

After completing Phase Two training, the lay counselor will be equipped to counsel or mentor at the “Directive” level (see [Appendix 4](#)). The lay counselor will receive a phase two completion certificate.

Phase Three – Sharpening

Completing Phase Two and approval from the Pastor of Counseling Ministries is required before proceeding to Phase Three. This next phase can be completed in 12-18 months. Because of the increased level of training, your cost increases with it.

Assignments

- Complete two additional formal classes from NHC LEAD or seminary-level. One must be directly counseling related. One must NOT be directly counseling related, rather it should be general Bible knowledge (e.g. Christian Theology).
- Complete one CCEF or ACBC counseling class.
- Attend a CCEF, ACBC or similar Conference approved by the Pastor of Counseling Ministries.
- Read two counseling related books that are approved by your Lay Counselor Mentor Group leader, and complete the reading assignments described in [Appendix 3](#).
- Attend two additional Counseling Forums hosted by the NHC Counseling Ministry.
- Continue in a Lay Counselor Mentor Group (see [Appendix 2](#))
- Participate in, and help lead (when needed), an NHC group counseling ministry (e.g. Regeneration, Re-engage, Redemption Group, Conquer, Healing Hearts, etc.).
- Select at least FIVE additional case studies (available in the [online classroom](#)). Thoroughly answer each question, and upload your paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).
- Write five (5) case studies of your own that you think could be used in Phase One or Phase Two training.

Outcome

After completing Phase Three training, the lay counselor will be equipped to counsel or mentor at the “Corrective” level (see [Appendix 4](#)). The lay counselor will receive a phase three, and final, completion certificate.

appendix one

The information provided below corresponds with [Phase One](#) training (Foundation).

Counsel from the Cross

Read *Counsel from the Cross* by Elise Fitzpatrick, and respond to the following questions in a formal paper that is ONE to TWO pages in length. Upload your completed paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

1. What have you learned that affects you personally? In what ways does it affect you? How has God used this book in your life?
2. What do you think this book has to do with counseling others? What insights, observations, or lessons have been helpful to you as you seek to help others?

Caring for One Another

Read *Caring for One Another* by Ed Welch, and respond to the following questions in a formal paper that is ONE to TWO pages in length. Upload your completed paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

1. What have you learned that affects you personally? In what ways does it affect you? How has God used this book in your life?
2. What do you think this book has to do with counseling others? What insights, observations, or lessons have been helpful to you as you seek to help others?

Wisdomfest

Wisdomfest is a five-week summer tradition at NHC when we break from our normal sermon series to address a theological or cultural topic. Many topics have included themes that overlap into counseling.

You may choose ONE of the following Wisdomfest series, available at northhillchurch.com/sermons, to complete this requirement:

- "From Anger to Forgiveness"
- "Open Heart Surgery"
- "Created to Be Addicts"
- "Homosexuality Into the Light"
- "Changeable"
- "Free: Life in the Spirit"
- "Lonely Together"

Thoroughly answer the following questions regarding the series you chose, record your answers in a formal paper that is at least ONE page. Upload your completed paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

1. What information did you uncover that you did not previously know or experience?
2. What applications do you think you can make to counseling or mentoring people?

Lay Counselor Training Group

Training Groups are gender-specific and are comprised of 2-4 individuals who are in the counseling training program.¹²³ Required reading for training groups is the book, *A Biblical Counseling Process* by Lauren Whitman. This book is available for FREE from the NHC Counseling Office. Attendance at all training group meetings is required. Additionally, the groups generally work on counseling skills, case studies, and applications of the required reading. An NHC counseling staff member leads the training group. Send us an email at soulcare@northhillchurch.com to request to join a training group.

appendix two

The information provided below corresponds with [Phase Two](#) training (Formation).

Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands

Read *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* by Paul Tripp, and respond to the following questions in a formal paper that is ONE to TWO pages in length. Upload your completed paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

1. What have you learned that affects you personally? In what ways does it affect you? How has God used this book in your life?
2. What do you think this book has to do with counseling others? What insights, observations, or lessons have been helpful to you as you seek to help others?

The Meaning of Marriage

Read *The Meaning of Marriage* by Timothy Keller, and respond to the following questions in a formal paper that is ONE to TWO pages in length. Upload your completed paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

1. What have you learned that affects you personally? In what ways does it affect you? How has God used this book in your life?
2. What do you think this book has to do with counseling others? What insights, observations, or lessons have been helpful to you as you seek to help others?

Lay Counselor Mentor Group

Mentor Groups are gender-specific and are comprised of 4+ individuals who are lay counselors at NHC. They generally meet every other month throughout the year (approx. 6X per year). Attendance at all mentor group meetings is required. The mentor groups often study a book and/or work through case studies. The group also shares tough counseling cases to receive feedback, advice, and encouragement. The group primarily focuses on growing as counselors. Send us an email at soulcare@northhillschurch.com to request to join a mentor group.

appendix three

The information provided below corresponds with [Phase Three](#) training (Sharpening).

Reading Assignments

Read two counseling related books that are approved by your mentor group leader and complete the reading assignments below for EACH book. Upload your completed paper as a PDF in the [online classroom](#).

1. What have you learned that affects you personally? In what ways does it affect you? How has God used this book in your life?
2. What do you think this book has to do with counseling others? What insights, observations, or lessons have been helpful to you as you seek to help others?

appendix four

Types of Gospel-centered Soul Care

Counseling, or “Soul Care,” is not something that can always be categorized. God has made everyone in wonderfully unique ways (Ps. 139:14) and each being, created in God’s image, faces different challenges. NHC desires to shepherd our people as best we can, with the Holy Spirit’s help. There are no “levels” of counseling, but as each person presents with different care needs, NHC seeks to meet those needs in ways that are encouraging, effective, and consistent with the truth of scripture.

1. Formative—Counselees here would need some basic discipleship. A counselor in this role would help someone understand and apply fundamental doctrines of the faith as well as provide consistent accountability and encouragement from God’s Word ([Phase One](#) training).

2. Directive—Counselees in need of some directive care are often having difficulty understanding and navigating a particular issue in their lives. A counselor in this role would seek to listen well and ask good questions in an effort to help them apply biblical truth to specific issues and topics. A person with this type of care need would also be tremendously helped by active participation in a life group ([Phase Two](#) training).
3. Corrective—Counselees presenting with a corrective soul care need require that a counselor be tasked with getting much more detail about a person's background, and ways in which their struggles present themselves. Much more training is required to serve in this capacity. The training received would better equip a counselor to handle more complex, life-dominating issues ([Phase Three](#) training).
4. Intensive—Counselees in need of intensive soul care are often struggling with a clinical diagnosis of some kind, and/or serious life-dominating issues, and sometimes life-threatening sin and addictions. Counselees may also be survivors of abuse or abusers themselves. The intensive level of care needed often requires referrals outside the church to a trusted partner working in the mental health or addiction recovery field.