

**BELIEFS ABOUT
COUNSELING**



KARIS HOUSE

COMMUNITY COUNSELING CENTER

Every counselor has beliefs about why people flourish, and about what happens when things go wrong in human experience. This influences how they believe people change in counseling, which often translates into what you can expect when you begin counseling. Although not exhaustive, this paper is meant to give an idea of Karis House's beliefs about these questions.

In the beginning, God...

God has revealed Himself without error in the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Scriptures.¹ They tell us that God is eternal,² unchanging,³ good,⁴ and utterly powerful.⁵ There has never been, nor will there ever be, a time or place without Him.⁶ As Francis Schaeffer put it, "God is there, and He is not silent." Because He exists and is good, there is hope for the "wrongness" we find in ourselves and the world.⁷ Because He has spoken to us in the Bible, we know who He is, how He made us, what went wrong, what He has done to redeem us,⁸ and how we are to respond.⁹

...created people in His image...

We were carefully and lovingly made by God Himself to resemble Him in fundamental ways,¹⁰ and the effects of this reach into every area of our existence. Far from a mere bundle of nerves and urges, we were made primarily for deep relationship with God¹¹ and others.¹² We were made to influence the people and things around us,¹³ made to use our voice by naming our desires, thoughts, and emotions. We are most human when we most resemble Him in the way we bear out his image.

...to enjoy His love and worship Him...

Imagine the most powerful,¹⁴ just,¹⁵ wise,¹⁶ merciful¹⁷ king there has ever been--then multiply it by infinity and you get God. He loves so intensely that, by his sheer goodness and generosity, He transforms enemies into His children through the death of His own son Jesus Christ.¹⁸ He is a loving Heavenly Father to His people.¹⁹ We, in turn, were made to worship (or love and revere)²⁰ and enjoy²¹ the God who created each of us. And He is worth worshipping²²

....and love and serve other people.

Out of that intimate relationship with our Creator, we were meant to love and serve other people.²³ He loves, so we flourish most when we love and are loved.

1. 2 Timothy 3:10, 16; Hebrews 1:1-2 | 2. Psalm 90:2 | 3. Hebrews 13:8 | 4. Psalm 199:68; 145:9 | 5. Job 26:14; Isaiah 26:4 | 6. Genesis 1:1; Daniel 7:14 | 7. Romans 8:20-21 | 8. Romans 3:21-24 | 9. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 | 10. Genesis 1:27 | 11. 1 John 4:10; John 15:5 | 12. Psalm 133:1-3 | 13. Genesis 1:26, 2:15 | 14. Psalm 47:2-4 | 15. Deuteronomy 32:4 | 16. Romans 11:33-34 | 17. Exodus 34:6 | 18. Ephesians 1:4-7 | 19. Matthew 7:11 | 20. Deuteronomy 10:20 | 21. Psalm 73:24-26 | 22. Psalm 7:17 | 23. Luke 10:27

But Mankind violated this relationship, alienating ourselves...

Not long after the good beginning our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned--that is, through their disobedience to God they fell from their perfect relationship with God and each other.²⁴ Distrust replaced trust, hiding replaced truth, contempt replaced love, fear replaced intimacy.²⁵ Nonexistent before, these tragic conditions became the norm in human relationships.

...and all our descendants...

Heartbreakingly, these new traits have been passed down to all of us, and are present from birth.²⁶ We each begin our lives with hearts, emotions, minds, and bodies that are marred and twisted by sin.²⁷ There is no relationship or area of our lives that is free from this spiritual infection.²⁸

...from God...

Our resemblance to our Creator, though still unmistakably beautiful, has been marred and twisted by sin. Consequently, every human being is faced with an overwhelming spiritual problem: without His direct intervention, we live every day as His enemy, separated from Him by a vast spiritual distance.²⁹ Because He is eternal and all-powerful, the consequences of this distance are ultimately more important than self-actualization or a better marriage.³⁰ But because He is merciful and loving, there is real hope to be found when we turn to Him in trust.

...from others...

We have been both victims of and participants in the degradation of God's glorious vision of what humanity meant when He created us. In the loneliness, pain, and uncertainty of that void, we often try to find ways to cope with life apart from an intimate relationship with the compassionate, holy God. Many human relationships, as a result, are strained or even severed, leading to devastating and painful isolation. We have been exploited and hurt by others, receiving scars for which we did not ask and perhaps experiencing our lives thereafter as victims. Yet even as victims, we still have the ability to affect those around us--which means that we, too, have hurt and used other people. We, people created to be in close loving relationship with others, can at times find ourselves agonizingly alienated from them.

...and from self.

Depression, anxiety, chronic pain, and PTSD are common examples of how our bodies, brains, and emotions have been affected by the Fall of humanity and all Creation. Our God-given emotions, designed to reflect the reality of our lives and relationships, are often suppressed, over-blown, or numbed out. Neurochemicals designed to help us sense, interpret, and respond to others can be out of balance, leading to devastating emotional and mental challenges. Rather than caring for our bodies, we often idolize or neglect them, which in turn has a profound impact on our emotional and spiritual life.

Life is often painful and complicated...

Every person, every one of us, is caught in this tension between dignity and depravity, hope and dread. We experience brokenness in our bodies, minds, emotions, and hearts; we have been wronged by and have ourselves wronged other people; and we are alienated from the loving God who has power to welcome or destroy us. Life is often difficult and painful, sometimes excruciatingly so.

...yet God has given us the Gospel: “good, hope-filled news.”

The Gospel is the story of God’s merciful intervention into our broken lives and world. Created in God’s image, we each catch glimpses of glorious dignity in ourselves and in others as we experience some of the gifts of living in the world He created.³¹ Every bit of hope for the pain and confusion we find ourselves in ultimately leads back to the kindness of God.³² But His kindness is even bigger than this! The Gospel of God is most fully seen in the person of Jesus Christ, God’s beloved Son. He perfectly and sinlessly lived out what it means to be a human made in God’s image.³³ Because of his perfect life, Jesus’ undeserved death was counted by God as the perfect ransom, offering unconditional adoption as His sons and daughters to we who were rightfully His enemies.³⁴ This is the essence of sacrificial love, and this redemptive adoption is a free gift for those who see their need. But Jesus also came back to life, signaling that the “wrongness” we experience, the death of our humanity, is not the final word, and that God will one day fully redeem and restore His family.³⁵ And so the evidence of God’s kindness and power, although sprinkled throughout our lives, finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. And all of this kindness has the potential to lead us to hope, true hope that lasts.³⁶

Gospel-centered counseling embodies hope...

Instead of a set of techniques, Gospel-centered counseling at Karis House represents a set of beliefs that give rise to hopes--and it is these hopes that most shape what clients will experience in counseling.

...that we can be met with warmth and compassion in our deepest pain;

Gospel-centered counselors do what they do because they are wounded healers. In their own suffering, sin, disbelief, pain, and self-protection they are met again and again by the sacrificial kindness of Jesus Christ and the caring presence of Christian brothers and sisters. That is why clients who come to Karis House can expect that they will be listened to, mourned with, laughed with, and celebrated--because that is how God loves us through the Holy Spirit, and that is how he means for His people to love others.³⁷

...that we can learn to love and depend on God by following Jesus;

The heart of Gospel-centered counseling is that we can learn to love and depend on God because He first loved and ransomed us; and that this good news can be applied to every area of life and struggle. When we put our trust in Christ, God remakes us from the inside out, putting the Holy Spirit into us.³⁸ We are designed, like Jesus, to depend on our Heavenly Father for life, joy, peace, and security. The Holy Spirit is God's deposit guaranteeing that this adoption, which we only understand in part now, will one day be fully realized.³⁹ But because we find so many ways to cope apart from dependence on Him, this can be a long and at times painful process. This is where a Gospel-centered counselor can help. They start by inviting us into a compassionately truthful relationship that is built on earned trust. They believe that life-changing growth is possible as we begin to face the realities of our lives--who we are, where we come from, what we are doing and believing. Lasting growth also happens as we begin to change how we are trying to live life in a world that does not work as designed apart from dependence on God. One implication of this is that God's presence in the counseling room and in the client's life is assumed. Counselors pray for God's help and loving intervention in the lives of their clients. Sometimes this happens in the session. Karis House believes, and has seen over and over again, that God is able and willing to do amazing things in the hearts and lives of those who come to him asking with empty, trusting hands.

...that everyone, regardless of their beliefs, can find some amount of healing;

Karis House is often asked what Gospel-centered counseling means for someone who doesn't want a relationship with the God of the Bible. The answer is simple: Karis counselors want to meet them exactly where they are, and aren't going to push them toward God. Whatever problems, heartaches, or hopes they bring to counseling are important to the counselor because they are important to that person. Their counselor will work with them to address their concerns from within a Christian worldview. And because this worldview has a foundation of the love and truth of Jesus Christ, Gospel-centered counseling offers compassion and honesty through every part of even the most painful stories. Anyone is welcome at Karis House.

...that our stories can be grieved and celebrated in caring relationship;

Often, counseling begins (and continues) with the counselor learning what the client's life has been like. As they learn something of who the client is and where they have come from, the dignity and depravity of their story gradually become clearer. This always requires a new level of personal honesty. It means celebrating more intensely the glory of how God has uniquely blessed the client, and grieving more deeply over the brokenness they have suffered and the brokenness they have caused. It may mean getting reacquainted with a fuller range of emotions. In fact, it is partly through this work in their own stories that clients find their emotions and desires beginning to come alive, sometimes after years of dormancy. This can be painful and confusing, but is part of the process of becoming more fully human: better able to live their lives with wisdom, compassion, and love for God and others.

...that we can gradually learn to love others boldly and truthfully;

Gospel-centered counseling will often focus on how a client is relating with other people. Relationships, romantic and non-romantic, are so often at the core of how we experience pain and joy. As a client slowly entrusts their counselor with their story, the counselor can help find language for how people have wronged them-- and how they have wronged others. Often, this works out practically in the counseling room through a focus on process. Process refers to what is going on between the counselor and client relationally during each session.

Although the verbal content (what is said) of the session remains important, the interpersonal process (how it is said and how it affects the relationship in real time) can reveal much about the client's style of relating, which can actually be more important for long-term growth than simply solving immediate problems. The developing, moment-by-moment relationship between the counselor and client can be reflective of the unspoken "roles and rules" of how a client has operated in their other relationships going all the way back to the family they grew up in. Trying to understand these relational tendencies in the session can often provide clients with insight into some of their closest relationships now.

Insight into how we relate to others is extremely helpful for fostering change, but it is not sufficient. We need to be able to apply that insight and choose something better. This requires bravery, a willingness to risk further disappointment or pain for the hope of intimacy with those that matter to us. Or it may mean bold new honesty or new boundaries in relationships that have made us feel powerless. Or perhaps learning to honor the legitimate responsibility we have shrugged off for so long.

Because we are all made in His image, these changes are possible in part even without a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Yet we don't center our counseling around God's good news simply because it's effective for change. We do it because the good news is actually true and because the hope it offers is true hope that lasts. For instance, seeing human relationships in the context of God's bigger story of sin and redemption means that we are free to fully lament the pain and brokenness of difficult relationships, knowing that God is our perfect Heavenly Father. We are also free to fully celebrate the good in imperfect relationships, knowing that this life is not supposed to be the peak of our eternal happiness. Because Jesus has given us a new way of seeing ourselves, there is freedom to be found in loving and serving others rather than in getting our personal significance from them. And because Jesus has poured out his life for our forgiveness and cleansing, there is hope that we can forgive others through the power of His Holy Spirit.

..that we can learn to compassionately care for the needs of ourselves and others;

Research is showing more and more what is already foundational to a Biblical view of humanity: that our minds and spirits do not operate independently of our bodies and emotions. Indeed, God made us with bodies and emotions on purpose. Far from downplaying their importance, Jesus Christ took on a fully human body and emotions. In practice, this means that getting exercise, eating a healthy diet, getting adequate sleep, and balancing rest with work make us feel better precisely because these are the rhythms of life for which God has hard-wired each of us. Karis House counselors see these things as very important for growth in intimacy with God and others.

...and that Jesus will one day return to complete His work of redemption.

This is the hope of all hopes: Jesus Christ will return to take up His rightful kingship over His people and the whole universe. He will wipe away every tear from every eye in His kingdom. Death will be gone forever, and pain will be banished when Jesus comes to live with His people forever.⁴⁰ Thus we see the healing and blessing we receive in this life as a mere deposit on the wealth of joy that we will inherit when He comes back. And we see the pain and confusion of this life as the dark night before a glorious dawning of a day that will never end.

40. Revelation 21:4

[illegible]

[illegible][illegible]