

# INFORMED CONSENT

## *Ultimate Life* Counseling

**W**elcome to the *Ultimate Life* counseling ministry. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to help you in your journey of life. Counseling can be a life changing experience. I applaud you for seeking out guidance, help, and “coaching” for your life. Counseling accomplishes much. It helps you: to deal with your current life challenges, to find the wisdom you need to make decisions (and be a healthy, happy, and effective person), and encourages you to excel with your life. Your commitment to your own personal growth is huge in this process. I commit to do everything I can to be a significant resource to you. This document answers some questions that clients often ask about counseling. I believe our work together will be more effective when you have a clear understanding of this whole process.

**My Background** I have counseled hundreds of individuals, marriages, and families within the church context over the last thirty years. I have a unique blend of education combining theological studies (*Masters of Divinity from Abilene Christian University*), ministry/pastoral training (*Doctor of Ministry from Harding University*), along with a degree in Marital and Family Therapy (*Master of Arts in Marital and Family Therapy from Bethel Seminary*). I have done PhD coursework in Clinical Psychology.

I am a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors (the largest of any counseling group in the world) and utilize many resources from this professional organization.

Through the years, I have conducted hundreds of practical seminars and lectures helping people with the challenges they face (marriage, parenting, anger, family systems, assertiveness, personality disorders, anxiety, depression, love, sex, infidelity, etc.). I have been married for thirty-eight years and we have raised four children (along with two nieces and a nephew). Feel free to ask me any questions about my background and qualifications.

**My Approach to Counseling** It is important for you to understand my approach to counseling. Although I have been trained professionally as a Marriage & Family Therapist, I am classified as a pastoral counselor in the state of Texas—one who has advanced degrees in theology and counseling psychology. The American Psychological Association describes pastoral counseling or what is also called pastoral psychotherapy as “*a form of counseling or psychotherapy in which insights and principles derived from the discipline of theology and the behavioral sciences are used in working with individuals, couples, families, groups, and social systems to achieve healing and growth. Pastoral counseling is centered in theory and research concerning the interaction of religion and science, spirituality and health, and spiritual direction and psychotherapy.*” My counseling ministry is within the context of a church and all my advice and perspectives are deeply rooted in biblical theology. Attitudes, emotions, relationships, and behavior are examined in light of God’s wisdom and will for a person’s life. I start and end every session in prayer and refer to ideas from the Bible that are helpful and significant. I find the theological perspectives do more to change us than anything else. I do take advantage of good social science research and relevant studies that could be of value in our work together.

I utilize several approaches in helping people get healthy. My primary approach is *cognitive behavioral*. You are truly transformed by the renewing of your mind (Romans 12.2; Ephesians 4.23). Your thinking affects everything about you—how you feel, behave and interpret others. Change the way you think and you change your life. I also utilize an *existential therapeutic* approach. You exist, but what about your existence. You must surely resolve the existential issues of your life (the purpose and meaning of your life; significance as an individual; being secure vs. insecure; lifestyle—ethics, virtue; and the reality of living forever—eternity). You will never be right as a human being until you solve these core existential issues. I often utilize a *narrative therapeutic approach*. Your life is essentially a story divided into various chapters. With this approach we look at the narrative of your life and how it shaped you and then commence in the writing of a new thrilling chapter. I also take a *family systems approach*. This explores your family relationships and the dynamics that existed or still exist, the issues of your family system, and the intergenerational transmission of problems, dysfunction or sins.

I tend to be direct but kind in counseling, striving to get to the truth about your life and predicaments (Eph. 4.15), and then to find and utilize the wisdom and strategies that will help you grow. Although there is the important need for commiserating, the priority is to overcome the resistant problems and help you work toward solutions. You will only feel better as you see yourself growing and changing.

**Criteria for Counseling with Me** My counseling approach may not fit your life at this point. Let me explain. I do have criteria for a person wishing to counsel with me. I am committed to what I have called ***therapeutic discipleship—I am interested in strengthening those in the Kingdom who strive to live as disciples of Christ*** I have established the following criteria before I will agree to start counseling with a person:

1. You must have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior and been baptized; or **be willing** to explore becoming a follower of Jesus/disciple.
2. You must be a member of a local church or **be willing** to at least explore becoming a part of an appropriate faith community/church. Everyone needs nourishing relationships (vs. toxic relationships) in a healthy faith community. If necessary, talk with me about this—I will help you find the most appropriate faith community.
3. You must be willing to become healthy as a person and grow as a disciple of Jesus/follower of Christ.
4. You must be willing to face the truth about your own life (Jn. 8.32).

As I have stressed over the years, my interest is not in rearranging chairs on the deck of the Titanic, but helping people make substantive life changes that will alter the destiny of their lives. It is my firm belief that apart from spiritual resources and relationship with God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, you will not be able to do well with your life. Surely you will want to know this before we counsel together.

**Persevering in Counseling** You are free to stay in counseling as long as you feel it is helpful and/or needed. I am committed to you over the long haul and will give my best to help you deal effectively with the issues of your life, reach the goals you have established, and provide for you the counseling that will help you get to the healthiest levels of behavior, thinking, emotions, and relationships. Counseling is challenging because you have to face yourself, make adjustments, come to realizations, and establish new patterns of thinking and behavior. When those difficult times come, it is easier to take the path of least resistance and opt out of counseling and quit. Unfortunately, we often “pull in the reins, as our horse is about to leap.” I encourage you to persevere in the process of counseling until you reach the desired goals and results. Please bring up any issues of discomfort you feel in this counseling process with me.

**Your Issues/Goals in Counseling** You may want to list below 1-3 of the most pressing issues you want to explore with me, and/or the most important goals you want to achieve through our counseling:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Confidentiality** I will treat with care all the information you share with me. Our sessions and my records are kept private. There are rare situations in which confidentiality is not protected. Texas state law mandates the reporting of incidences of child and elder abuse including physical abuse, sexual abuse, unlawful sexual intercourse, neglect, and emotional and psychological abuse. All actual or suspected acts of such abuse will need to be reported to the appropriate agency.

**About Our Appointments/Sessions** Typically, I conduct **45-55 minute sessions** once or twice a week per client. A client may need to schedule less frequent visits for financial or other practical reasons. The frequency may increase or decrease based on your felt need and my pastoral advice. I try to schedule at a time and location that is most convenient for you. I primarily operate out of four locations - Plano, Haltom City, Garland, Southwest Fort Worth - which may make our time together more accessible. I also will conduct sessions on the phone (**phone counseling**). This may be the most convenient arrangement for you.

It has been my experience that counseling usually works best when a regular weekly appointment is scheduled and kept consistently. I will consider our sessions very important and ask you to do the same. The time we schedule will be set aside exclusively for you. Please try not to miss any sessions.

**IMPORTANT TO NOTE: If you must cancel, please give me an 8-24 hour notice so I can place someone else in that appointment slot. My time (just like yours) is very limited and important, and there is a tremendous demand on my schedule to counsel people. Missed sessions without proper advanced notification will result in a \$25-45 fee (since your missed session could have been utilized by another).**

**Growth—Your Responsibility** Growth is your responsibility. I will give you all the tools and wisdom I can to help you make the changes and get to your desired goals, but the results are really up to you. Change and growth will happen when you utilize specific wisdom, ideas, practices, and strategies over a period of time.

I will give you a simple “homework/growth” assignment to be completed before the next session. Making progress in your life depends upon not only what we do in each session, but what **you do** outside of our sessions. I have found that counselees who complete their assignments each week make significant progress.

**Fees for our Sessions** I do have a fee structure that is based on your ability to afford counseling. I very much frown upon exorbitant fees that keep people from the help they need. Money should not keep anyone from getting the counsel they need. Therefore, I have developed criteria, which will help determine the appropriate remuneration for counseling. Check off which category best fits your situation:

I/we have to seek a counseling scholarship. The following churches I am involved with *may* provide a counseling scholarship. You must request the scholarship and meet certain criteria (Haltom City Christian Church, Milestone Church, Hope Works Church, Northeast Church, Wylie Northeast Church, Cross Bend Christian Church, Hillcrest Christian Church, Southwest Christian Church, Ovation Church, Denton North Church, Burleson First Baptist Church, FOCUS Campus Ministry, Embrace Grace & Embrace Life, or your local church). Individual counseling scholarships from your friends or family are tax deductible. Sessions must be paid in advance before counseling can begin.

**Peer counseling, lay counseling, and certified life coaching** are offered by Ultimate Life for free or for minimum fees ranging from \$15 to \$40 at various sites. This may be the best option for you, which will be arranged and supervised by Dr. F. Alan Pickering.

I'm/we're struggling financially with a combined income of \$40K or less and can only afford the minimum fee of \$50/session.

My/our combined income is \$41-60K—the fee is \$55/session

My/our combined income is between \$61-80K—the fee is \$60/session

My/our combined income is between \$81-100K—the fee is \$65/session

My/our combined income is between \$101-150K—the fee is \$75/session

My/our combined income is between \$151-199K—the fee is \$85/session

My/our combined income is between \$200-299K—the fee is \$100/session

My/our combined income is \$300K or greater—the fee is \$135/session

\*\*The fee is based on combined income, which includes income from salary, spousal support, child support, trust fund, inheritance, etc.

**Your fee for each session has been set at \$\_\_\_\_\_.**

**Payment** Payment is required at the end of the session in the form of cash, credit card (Master Card, Visa, American Express, Discover, Venmo, Cash App, PayPal, or personal check, which should be made out to **NTPCC (North Texas Pastoral Counseling Center)**. I am also able to accept most HSA cards (Health Savings Account). If you need me to hold any checks, please let me know. I do not want the finances to present a burden of concern for you—I will work with you in this respect. You will be charged a \$20-\$35 fee for any returned checks. Also, as your income changes the fee will be adjusted.

**Fees for Testing, Assessments, and Materials** I believe in the use of assessments, tests and inventories. The advantage of testing is that it spares us enormous time in trying to figure things out, helps us to pinpoint problems accurately (diagnosis), and helps you to gain a clear view on yourself (behaviors, emotions, attitudes, thinking). Many of the short inventories are free. I do have set minimal fees for others tests, which I have to pay for myself to obtain and utilize (Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis, Personality Assessment Inventory, Omni, Omni IV, etc.). I often will utilize materials that will help you systematically work through issues. Sometimes there is a minimal cost for such materials (notebooks, CDs, DVDs, etc.). You are responsible for materials I loan you (books, CDs, DVDs, board games for communication, etc.). If they are lost, you have a responsibility to replace the items through a payment for the value of the materials.

**Special Involvement Outside of Counseling Sessions** Often I am asked to appear in court cases, conduct weddings or funerals. The fees set for each of these special events are determined based on the number of hours involving the event, preparation time, drive to and from the event, and the event itself (the per hour cost is \$60). Payment is required before the event.

Court Cases With respect to court appearances, if the hearing or case is postponed, I need an 8-24 hour notice. Otherwise, there will be a charge for the time blocked in my calendar if I cannot fill it with counseling sessions.

Weddings It is my joy to help couples enter into a covenant relationship/marriage. I will not conduct a wedding unless a couple has taken several evaluations and/or tests and has spent at least six sessions with me in premarital counseling. The couples then will receive the TwoGether in Texas certificate, which will give them a 90% discount on their wedding license.

Funerals My approach with funerals is to make the experience a very significant time together honoring and reflecting on the deceased life. This involves considerable preparation time with the family.

**If You Need to Contact Me in Urgent Situations** You may contact me on my cell phone at 817.807.6869 before 10PM. I am available for short 5-minute consultations on the phone. Conversations requiring more time will have to be resumed for an arranged phone session. Often during the day, it is difficult for me to handle a call. I will try to get back to you during a break or later at night during my commute time. The quickest way to communicate with me is through text.

**An Emergency Contact for Me to Contact if Necessary** If there is an emergency during our work together, or if I become concerned about your personal safety, I am required by law to contact someone close to you (perhaps a relative, spouse, close friend). Please provide the name and contact information below for the person you have chosen ↗

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ How long you have known this person \_\_\_\_\_

**Statement of Principles and Complaint Procedures** I fully abide by all the rules of the *American Association of Christian Counselors* (AACC). Difficulties may arise in our relationship, just as in any working relationship. If you are not satisfied with any area of our work, please raise your concerns with me at once. Our work together will be slower and harder if your concerns are not worked out quickly. I will make every effort to hear your complaints and seek solutions to them.

**Our Agreement** I have read (or have had read to me), the content in this *Informed Consent Form*. I have discussed those points I did not understand, and have had my questions, if any, fully answered. I agree to act according to the guidelines covered in this document. I hereby agree to freely enter into pastoral counseling with Dr. F. Alan Pickering and intend to cooperate fully and to the best of my ability, as shown by my signature ↗

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client Printed Name

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (best number to reach you) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Counselor's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Dr. F. Alan Pickering  
Counselor's Printed Name