# Informed Consent

# Ultimate Life Now Counseling

Welcome to the Ultimate Life Now counseling ministry. We are a 501(c) 3 counseling ministry under the official name North Texas Pastoral Counseling Center. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to help you on 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, 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 pursued my second doctorate—a Ph.D. in Psychology with a theological concentration at Liberty University (Lynchburg, Virginia), and Grand Canyon University.

I am a member of the *American Association of Christian Counselors* (the largest of any counseling group in the world) and the *American Psychological Association* (APA) and their subdivision, *Society for Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (Division 36). I utilize many resources from both of these professional organizations.

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 forty-five 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/ pastoral psychotherapist 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. As a pastoral counselor, I am instructive vs. passive in my role

with you in the counseling experience (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus). Attitudes, emotions, relationships, and behavior are examined in light of God's wisdom 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, neuroscience 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 compassionate) in counseling, strive 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. I am not fond of mere "talk therapy," although there is the important need for sufficient commiseration. The priority in my counseling is to provide for you the best wisdom, protocols, and interventions to help you grow, overcome resistant negative counter-productive patterns of behavior, and help you work toward solutions for the maximizing of your life. You will only feel better as you see yourself growing and changing.

**Criteria for Counseling with Me**

***Testing***

I require you to take at least two tests initially to get our counseling going in an informed and strong way—*Taylor Johnson Temperament Analysis* ($75), *Omni* ($90). (We can space these tests out, and you can pay for them over time.). The reasons for taking these tests include: 1) identify the deeper underlying issues of your life that you may or may not be aware of; 2) understand the unhealthy and healthy patterns that have been developed in your life; and 3) get to the truth of the reality of your life. Testing can be advantageous in many ways, spares us of needless wasted time, and moves us to solutions and a proper focus.

***Spirituality***

My counseling approach may not fit your life at this point, but I hope it does. 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/faith community or **be willing to at least** explore becoming a part of such a group—without the appropriate nourishing community, you will not be able to grow. 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. If after a certain period (10-20 sessions), these two mandates are not met, we will have to re-evaluate our counseling relationship.
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* 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.

**How a Typical Session is Organized** A typical session generally is divided into three sections: *First*, charting—a "gut check" going through various categories of your life (scale 1 least -10 greatest). This should typically take around 180-240 seconds (if you just give me the numbers without much commentary or explanation). *Second*, an opportunity for you to bring me any "presenting problems" that you need to talk about. This could last as brief or as long as you need. *Third*, a substantive/resourceful focus on a topic, issue, or a book to help in your growth for the improving and maximizing of your life.

**Counseling Couples** I only counsel couples who are in a marriage (separated or together) or engaged and have a date set for their marriage. I am not interested in helping couples who *just live together*. I will have 2-5 sessions and test couples who cohabitate (but are not married) to decide if they should push on into a covenant relationship of marriage with each other. The research on couples who cohabit is clear: after 2.5 years of living together, 87% will never get married.

**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.

Research cited by *Psychology Today* a few years ago revealed that permanent change does not start to take place through counseling until the 37th week! This is a remarkable statistic that must be seriously considered. All things considered, short-term counseling is essentially a waste of time and money, because change takes a lot of time. Traveling on the "long road of obedience" is what makes the difference in the development of a person's life. (It would be naïve to think one could become a more refined and/or excellent ball player in just a few sessions/weeks.) Long term counseling is essential to make permanent changes that will put your life on a much more effective level.

**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.

**Exceptions to Confidentiality (Laws/Statues)**

- Client request*:* you, the client, may authorize the release of information.
- Therapist assesses imminent risk of suicide (§ TX Health and Safety Code 611.004).
- Therapist assesses a probability of impending harm to the client or others.
- Client reports or acknowledges the abuse or neglect of a child, elderly or mentally challenged person.
- Files subpoenaed by a court of law.

I understand Ultimate Life will do everything possible to maintain confidentiality; however, text messages, emails, and other electronic transmission to/from clients are not guaranteed to be confidential due to the possibility of hacking. I give permission for my counselor to contact me using texts, emails, or other electronic means. _____ (initials) Phone calls are the preferred method of communicating to protect privacy. By signing this form, I give consent if for any reason my counselor becomes incapacitated or dies, another counselor may take possession of my file/records and provide copies upon request or deliver them to a mental health provider of my choice.

**How did you hear about me?** ☐ Friend ☐ Relative ☐ Recommendation ☐ Social groups/ club ☐ Attending one of Dr. Alan Pickering's speaking engagement/ seminars ☐ Other _____

**About Our Appointments/Sessions:** Typically, a session is **around 45-55 minutes.** Meeting once a week is ideal. 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. Sessions are primarily conducted in my home site: 7208 Overland Trail Colleyville, which is essentially in the middle of the DFW area and thus a convenient location for most. One other site is in southwest Fort Worth at Trademark Church 7101 Trail Lake Dr., which I only utilize on Sundays after the first church service. I also will conduct audio or virtual sessions, utilizing FaceTime, Duo, Skype, and Zoom. 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.

**CANCELLATION OF A SESSION/MISSING A SESSION: If you must cancel, please give me an 8-24-hour notice so I can place someone else in that appointment slot—this is a strict policy with no exceptions. 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 minimum $50-$75 fee (since your missed session could have been utilized by another). EVEN IF YOU BECOME SICK OR DON'T FEEL WELL, YOU STILL MUST GIVE ME ADVANCED NOTICE. You do have the option of doing a virtual session, if for some reason you cannot attend your session in-person. If you are stuck in traffic, we can begin the session while you are driving or waiting for the traffic to clear up. If it's couples counseling, one partner can at least have the session. I will usually text you the previous day to remind you of your session.**

**Inclement Weather:** Ultimate Life will send out a text notification cancelling sessions due to severe weather. If you do not receive a text, and you choose to cancel a session, and the weather is drive-able, you will be charged for a missed session/late notice fee. You do have the option to do a phone session if the weather is inclement.

**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. At the end of every session, I will text you the following ***sample form***: [following page]

**DR. F. ALAN PICKERING**
M.A. MFT, M.Div., D.Min. Ph.D (in progress)
dralan@ultimatelifenow.org
www.ultimatelifenow.org | 817.807.6869

Description of Counseling Services: _____The **fee** for this session: $_____
Please make your check payable to **NTPCC (North Texas Pastoral Counseling Center)**. Cash and credit cards accepted (MasterCard, Visa, American Express, Discover, Venmo, Cash App, PayPal, and Apple Pay).

*A session with Dr. Pickering ranges between **45-50 minutes.***

Our **next session(s)**: _____ @ _____AM/PM
_____ @ _____AM/PM
_____ @ _____AM/PM

- Fort Worth/Trademark Church (7101 Trail Lake Dr. 76133) _____
- Audio/Phone Session, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Duo _____
- Colleyville (7208 Overland Trl. 76034) _____
- Other: _____

**IMPORTANT:** Please give at least an **8-24 hour advanced notice** if you are unable to make your appointment. **Failure to do so will result in a $75-$85 missed session fee.**

Your **growth assignment(s)** to accomplish before our next session include(s):

- _____
- _____
- _____

Personal Note to You "He will guide you along the best pathways of your life." **Psalm 32:8**

**Please be sure to read this assignment sheet after every session, which I will text to you.**

**This above Sample Form you will receive by text the end of every session.** Please be sure to review it at the end of every session.

**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:

☐ My/our combined income is less than $40K—the fee is $75/session

☐ My/our combined income is between $41-60K—the fee is $85/session

☐ My/our combined income is between $61-80K—the fee is $90/session

☐ My/our combined income is between $81-100K—the fee is $95/session

☐ My/our combined income is between $101-150K—the fee is $105/session

☐ My/our combined income is between $151-199K—the fee is $120/session

☐ My/our combined income is between $200-299K—the fee is $130/session

☐ My/our combined income is $300K-$499K—the fee is $150/session

☐ My/our combined income is $500K-$799—the fee is $165/session

☐ My/our combined income is $800K and greater—the fee is $175/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, Apple Pay, 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 a check or hold processing a credit card, 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. I'm not a bill collector, and spending time making calls or sending texts to get clients to make a payment for their session is not the best use of my time (and frankly irritating given the enormous load of responsibility I have), so, please pay your session immediately after services. If you are in a struggle financially, please let me know and we will work things out. If there is a dereliction with payments, I will have to start charging an additional fee.

**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 $125). *Payment is required before* the event.

**Court Cases** I discourage being called into court cases. I generally do not like the experience for many reasons. However, 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. A charge of $125 per hour with a four-hour minimum ($500) will be charged for all court appearances. This payment must accompany the subpoena. Ultimate Life will not testify for/against you or to third party conversations but only to the facts presented during the counseling session.

**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 *TwoTogether* in Texas certificate, which will give them a 90% discount on their wedding license. The minimum fee for conducting a wedding is $500. But in most cases, it usually takes me a full day to prepare and conduct a wedding. In that case, the usual fee for conducting a wedding in the DFW area is $1200. For Destiny Weddings, there must be a compensation for any time that would have been utilized for counseling sessions. Room and board, flights and car rental (or uber if necessary) must be covered. Payment for the services must be made before the wedding. If interested in conducting your wedding, please request the Wedding Policy Document.

**Funerals** My approach with funerals is to make the experience a very significant time together, honoring and reflecting on the deceased beloved's life. This involves considerable preparation time with the bereaved family, which will require appropriate compensation. The minimum fee for conducting a funeral in the DFW area is $500 but could be as high as $1200—it depends upon the amount of time I utilize in serving your family.

**Correspondence** Writing letters or emails for special situations (e.g., court cases, ESA/Emotional Support Animal, college entrance, scholarship, as a personal reference, etc.) will involve meeting in session with me to draft and finalize the letter. I have very limited time

outside of my counseling practice to expedite correspondence for a client, so composing written missives must be accomplished while we are in session together.

**Request of Copy of File** It is labor-intensive to produce files for attorneys, court facilitators, social workers, etc. To do so, there is a $45 charge that must be paid before the file copies are released.

**Additional Work Outside of a Session** I am often asked to review documents, letters, emails, podcasts from clients and for the benefit of clients. My time is very limited as I'm sure yours. Therefore, any review of items must be done in a session with you.

**If You Need to Contact Me in Urgent Situations:** You may contact me on my cell phone at 817.807.6869 before 9PM. 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 (usually around 8:30PM). The quickest way to communicate with me is through a text message.

**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: _____
[Please Print legibly]

Phone (best number to reach you): (_____)_____

_____ _____
Counselor's Signature/Dr. F. Alan Pickering Date

Revised October 30, 2026