

## Counseling, Coaching, and Spiritual Direction **FAQs**

This FAQ was made using quotes and ideas from a conversation between a coach, a counselor, and two spiritual directors. If you are wondering what the difference is between these three types of resources and which is a good fit for you now, this guide should help. We have grouped parts of the conversation to answer the following questions:

- What is similar between counseling, coaching, and spiritual direction?
- How would you describe counseling, coaching, and spiritual direction?
- Do I need to pay?
- How often do they meet?
- Can I meet with more than one?
- Why talk about these distinctions?

Thank you, Tim Austin, Katie Brown, Lori Ferrell, Lane Arnold, and Amy Young for this conversation. You can listen to the conversation in its entirety [here](#).

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What is similar between counseling, coaching, and spiritual direction?

“The beauty of all three of these professions is that they really are looking at the heart and the soul care of each individual.” - Lane Arnold

“There’s an element in life of feeling like you have to sort your things out alone. And I think that's not true. And so there's this component of *I have to get my stuff together all by myself*. Each one these areas shares that you don't have to be alone. You can journey with somebody.” - Katie Brown

“What I’m hearing is the theme of partnership on the journey. You can feel isolated at times, but you don’t have to be. There’s ways to partner with a fellow journeyer who also has some skills and expertise in a certain area that can ask the right questions, come alongside, and facilitate a process of supporting you through conversations that will help you in your journey.” - Tim Austin

How would you describe counseling, coaching, and spiritual direction?

### COUNSELING

“Counseling was able to help me in areas of the emotional, psychological, the mental aspects of the burnout.” - Lori Ferrell

“Counseling can be seen as ‘I need some tools to help me where I’ve got an empty toolbox.’” - Lori Ferrell

“I kind of look at counseling as if you've been running on bad fuel for a long time and then all of a sudden, the engine won't work. And that's an extreme measure. I mean, that's a crisis type of situation. But I think all of us, including myself, we keep doing things. We just keep doing them because this is way we know how to do them and it's working okay. But it's causing injury, but we don't necessarily recognize it. And then all of a sudden, something doesn't work, your relationships don't work. And so, I think with counseling specifically, you often you hit a lower point. But that's not always the case. I try to go to counseling any time I start to see my tank coming down because it's, to me, a part of healthy living. And I would rather tank up when I have plenty of fuel left than when I don't have anything left.” - Katie Brown

“Counseling is trying to hit on the emotional side, the psychological side, then mental health piece, the communication piece, the relational piece.” - Katie Brown

“There's a rigidity to seeing a counselor. And I say that in the sense that I think there's very clear boundaries about what a counselor is and what a counselor isn't. And so that's one of the differences as far as from spiritual direction and coaching that sometimes I think it's hard on clients because there's such a rigidity. And what I mean by that is we can't have a relationship outside the counseling relationship. And for each one, there's different things. But it's very, ‘Hey, I'm going to meet you at this time for this period of time.’ And that's our session and this is what that looks like.” - Katie Brown

“If you need a really safe place for a period of time to work through really intense issues, then maybe counseling is that place. But, if you need something that moves a little bit more, then counseling might not be exactly where you want to start with.” - Katie Brown

“But, I know that that skill set of a counselor is very important to offer the tools and offer the healing for the wounded places in our past.” - Lane Arnold

## COACHING

“Coaching is more present and forward focused.” Tim Austin

“Likewise, I think there're times when I have a client that comes in and they are very much oriented towards ‘I'm moving from this place in my career to that place in my career,’ or this place in this world to that place in the world, or wanting to make a change and not knowing how. And I can talk about that as a spiritual director. But often, I can put on my life coaching hat or send them to somebody else in the life coaching world to say, ‘Let's look at what particular skills you need for this, and what your goals are during this time.’” - Lane Arnold

“Coaching is more outcome based or goal oriented. Whenever I have an introductory session, for example, with a potential coaching client, we will talk about some of their history, what are some of the things



they're trying, what's something they're trying to get through to move toward, what's the destination? And so it's really kind of forward focused looking.” - Tim Austin

“I think a lot of people misunderstand coaching as only being about efficiency and productivity. Or achieving more. There is space in coaching for a more reflective internal processing. I go deep into core values and what's important.” - Tim Austin

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

“I think spiritual direction is one of the most complicated of these three to explain. And it took me studying to be able to have words to even begin to say what I do. But, I'd say companion, spiritual companion, is a word I like to use. Because direction tends to assume that we direct. But, companion gives a different image of someone coming alongside in the spiritual journey, and seeing the Holy Spirit as the director. I like to see spiritual direction as a way of how I see my role as coming alongside people in their spiritual journey.” - Lori Ferrell

“I really see spiritual direction as being how do we move through the story of God within our own story. And what are His movements. So, that's what I'm really looking for and enjoying when I meet with women as I come alongside them.” - Lane Arnold

“From that season of my life, counseling was able to help me in areas of the emotional, psychological, the mental aspects of the burnout. But there were definitely views in my Christian faith of God and myself, and how God wanted me, as a person, in my ministry that were distorted. And that, I think, just sitting with a spiritual director as I talked through that there was an aspect of beginning to encounter God's love for me that I needed to heal and begin to see that God was not seeing me as a failure in that burnout. And so I think that they're very complimentary, but they come to us in just different angles. And sort of in a sense, you could say it's like a holistic approach.” - Lori Ferrell

“I suggest is that people try spiritual direction for a couple of months because it is meeting just once a month. And so, it takes a little time to get some traction. And the first month or two, I'm also wanting to hear the story of God with them. Where have they walked? So, I can understand where they're coming from. So, to give yourself some space to say, "This feels uncomfortable." And uncomfortable is okay. But, not to quit instantly because oh, this is a little too much. This is just a little too weird. But, also to know from a Christian perspective that this is Christ based. It's not new age. It's not touchy feely. It's not letting go of all conversation for the sake of just sitting there in the silence. There's some purpose to what we're doing. And to talk about some of that purpose.” - Lane Arnold

“I've not stopped spiritual direction once I started. I actually am a strong believer that spiritual direction is something we can take to the grave with us.” - Lori Ferrell



Do I need to pay?

In all three, you can expect to pay for a professional's time, and you can expect that your counselor, coach, or spiritual director are in some form of supervision or professional accountability. The first session/conversation may be free with a spiritual director or coach, finding out if they are able to help and if you are a good fit for each other. In counseling, you are also figuring out in the first session if they are a good fit, but it is expected you will pay for all sessions. A counselor, coach, or spiritual director may offer ministry rates.

How often do they meet?

- Spiritual Direction tends to meet once a month.
- Counseling is based on the needs of the client. You could meet once a week, twice a month, once a month, or as needed to “fill your tank,” as Katie Brown said.
- Coaching typical is every two weeks or twice a month, then generally after a season of coaching those who want to continue opt for a monthly check-in. In the beginning some clients like to get the momentum going by meeting weekly... so it's flexible!

Can I meet with more than one?

Yes.

“I work with a number of clients who are actually engaged with me as their coach and with someone else as their counselor. And maybe they're working on some marital issues in their counseling, but they want to work with a coach around transition and change. Or one of the individuals wants to work on that with me. And so, I think they very much can complement each other.” - Tim Arnold

Why talk about these distinctions?

“Conversations like this unpack and explain what each is, what it's not, and how each could enter your story. These kinds of conversations help create clarity. I think confusion is from the enemy. And a conversation like this takes all that chaos and brings clarity, helping people to know what resources are available, and how to go forward.” - Amy Young

