

Pastoral reflection paper



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After returning home from the mission field and going on staff at a Church, it wasn't long before I found myself being used by God to counsel people. There was a lot of fear involved in the counseling, not from those who were being counseled, but from me, because I never had any formal training. Different life situations have caused me to receive counseling, but that was the extent of my counseling experience. After seeing God use me, an unqualified servant help marriages be restored, I felt the call to return to school to obtain a formal education in Pastoral Counseling.

I will share how it all came about, what I have learned and what I expect the Lord to do through this formal training from taking PACO 500 Introduction to Pastoral Counseling. LIFE EXPERIENCES CHANGED MY FUTURE Fear doesn't describe what I went through while serving the Lord as a M, in Northern Africa. My family and I were in the middle of a civil war, between Rebels and the President's forces after being in the country for only three weeks. Gunfire, sounds of tanks shooting their guns and RPG's flying through the sky happened throughout the day.

The first night of the civil war, thieves decided to take the opportunity to invade our home while there was no police force; because they were helping the army fight the war. After going through a home invasion and being shot at during the invasion, three days later we were finally evacuated out of the country by the French Military. My family and I along with other expats arrived in France to a crowd of reporters and a small group of counselors. THE CHANGES My first experience with any type of counseling came that day we exited the plane in France.

My family and I had gone through more than we signed up for as M, living through those three days of a civil war. The personal emotions we went through from that experience, at that time I did not know how to describe, but after reading *The Pastor's Guide to Psychological Disorders and Treatments*, I now know we went through a form of anxiety attack. The authors, Johnson and Johnson (2000), define anxiety as “ a universal human emotion. It is a general feeling of apprehension about possible danger. ” (p. 8).

Reading through the symptoms of anxiety described by Johnson and Johnson (2000), “ sweating, rapid heart rate, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, hot or cold flashes, trembling, dry mouth, and difficulty swallowing. ” (p. 9) we experienced almost all of them to a certain extent during the war. After sitting with the counselors while in France over a five day period, having opportunities to share all that had happened to us, allowed us to exhale and realize someone cared about what happened to us. Those days of meetings, along with a period of five months, we were allowed to return to the country we had been evacuated from.

Not only did we return to the same city, but to the same house that we experienced the home evasion. God used that counseling team to help restore us so we could return to the work we were called. Upon our return we were able to see four different people come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. After the two years we spent in Northern Africa, we returned home and I went on staff at Church as a Associate Pastor. One of the major things I learned while living overseas, you need a spiritually strong family to have a

spiritually strong ministry. If your family is not healthy your ministry or job will not be healthy.

Over the past four years while living in the states, I have noticed a great need to help family become stronger. After being approached by the second family, asking me to help them grow their family spiritually, I asked them why they were coming to me? Their answer opened my eyes to the truth about how God uses bad situation for His glory. They told me after hearing about all my family had gone through while living overseas and seeing how we had not just survived, but we thrived as a family, they wanted to meet and talk. I could not call it counseling, but in my heart knew that is what it would lead too.

Then as my eyes were opened to all the men in my church who were struggling with pornography, addiction, and anger issues, I knew I could not just sit back and watch them walk that road of darkness. I started meeting with these men alone at first, and then when I met with them and their wife, I would invite my wife into the meeting. It was at that point I was labeled the unofficial counseling Pastor of the Church. As I looked back on the way I handled those meetings as a unqualified counselor with those different men and their wives, I have realized I did some things right and a lot of things wrong.

Because of this time of reflection and feeling the Lord's leading, I enrolled back in school to obtain my degree in Pastoral Counseling. In doing this, I know God will use this class to teach me different methods, style and techniques to better help people and families in need. Since enrolling in PACO 500, I have been reflecting back on those unofficial counseling times,

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and I have realized that listening to the counselee is just as important as having a personal quiet time daily with God. In Petersen's (2007) *Why Don't We Listen Better?* Rev. Dr. Petersen shares one of the things he has learned.

He states, " I have learned the value of communication balancing: listen awhile, talk until the other person stops hearing, and listen until the person calms enough to hear again. " (p. 5). While I was meeting with these different families, I realized I did not have a balance in my listening skills. I would battle with the feeling of wanting to interject my thoughts or opinions. Petersen's (2007) statement " real listening gets us inside each other and there seems to be something in such human connection that touches and changes us. " (p. 7) This statement taught me that if I want to follow my

heart's desire to truly help people, I must become a better listener. Looking back on my time when I went through counseling in France, I realize the counselors had a great amount of balance in their sessions. Reflecting upon my life experiences with counseling sessions, I am excited to learn how to be a better listener and how to ask the right questions to show I care. One of the things I am expecting out of this class is to learn how to effectively use the Solution - Focused Counseling taught in the first edition of *Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling: An Effective Short-Term Approach of Getting People Back on Track*.

Kollar's new edition (1997/2011), because it offers a different approach to counseling. Dr. Kollar states that much of the time within sessions, counselors use the process of remaining centered on the problem, he calls this, " problem-focused" (p. 14). I am looking forward to learning how to change the focus from the problem, to visualizing the outcome first. Dr.

Kollar states when we do this, “ we become solution-focused rather than problem focused. The outcome dictates the process rather than the process dictating the outcome. ” (p. 15).

That method was during my session while I was in France. The counselors had my family and I focus on the call on our life by the Lord to minister to those people in Northern Africa, who needed to hear about Christ and what would it take to get us back there. CONCLUSION The things I have learned already from the reading assignment required in PACO 500 are invaluable. I cannot wait to dig deeper into the different methods and ideas taught in my reading assignments. God has a plan for everything that happens and prepares us for His will to be done.

As families and individuals deal with different life issues, with the training I will receive through this class and with the Holy Spirit’s guidance, I pray God will allow me to be equipped to help them have victory of those issues. I know God has given me a heart to help individuals and families grow closer to Him. With the Lord’s blessing, maybe one day I may be that counselor on the mission field helping others through difficult times, just as my family and I went through.