

Personal theory integrated counseling



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It is important to develop a biblically based theory of Christian counseling that integrates psychology, spirituality, and theology. This model must be flexible enough to incorporate non-believers, while attempting to gently facilitate a personal relationship with God in both believers and non-believers alike. It is the author's intent to develop an integrative theory by using techniques proved valid by science, in conjunction with theological truth. This integrated approach will take into account personality structure, motivation, development, and worldview to devise a plan of change for clients. This process will allow the author to determine the appropriate amount of integration necessary in treating each client on an individual basis. Organizing the author's own personal theory will improve decision making and growth. This essay will serve as a launching pad for the author to identify individual areas of strength and development.

Personal Theory

A comprehensive personal theory of counseling should accommodate the integration of psychology, theology, and spirituality. It is important to match the client's spirit, with the scientifically proven techniques of psychology, backed by theological truths. McMinn (1996) says that counselors who fail at integration are neglectful of their client's needs. 1 Corinthians 12 explains that body parts each serve a purpose, but cannot function alone. Instead, they all work together in order for the body to work effectively as a whole. Because of this knowledge, I have developed my personal integrated theory of counseling based on a blend of the work of various authors.

Systems, Concentric Circles, and Personality Formation

In order to be effective, counselors should have a working knowledge of the differing personality types, as well as how behavior models work. Dr. Larry Crabb (1977) says, “ Whenever we dissect an organism to examine its constituent parts, we are in danger of losing sight of the whole functioning organism (p. 87).” Personality develops throughout a lifespan, as a person grows. It is unique to each individual and is a God given gift to be used for His Glory. According to Hawkins (2006), there are five factors that counselors should look at which influence and shape the human personality. They are the core, soul, body, temporal systems, and supernatural systems, and work together concurrently and affect the entire system. Counselors must be aware of all aspects of the client in order to provide effective treatments.

Knowing the structural aspects of the personality is imperative for understanding how to effectively help people in need. Crabb (1977) says that human personality is composed of two parts, the physical and personal. “ The body belongs to the physical side and the spirit and soul to the personal (p. 88).” However, Hawkins’ model is more comprehensive and takes into account all of the systems that effect the personality. He proposes the personality is comprised of several systems of circles.

The heart, mind, and soul are the core of a person, and are where life abounds (Hawkins, 2006). According to Genesis 1: 27, man is made in the image of God. At our core we are unique individuals, with different talents, dreams, and abilities. However, sin and selfishness are also a part of the first system, or core, of personality (Hawkins, 2006). It is the goal of Christian counselors to help clients seek to become more like God. Crabb (1977) says that the Holy Spirit can guide clients through a transformation of their

personality. “ Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new... (2 Corinthians 5: 17).” Personality development in a Christian occurs when God becomes the focus of an individual’s thoughts and behaviors. An accurate sense of self, and the need for God, replaces self-sufficiency (McMinn, 1996) and faulty beliefs from childhood (Crabb, 1977).

Counselors can help clients make core changes by reshaping unhealthy behaviors. This primarily includes the thoughts and emotions of the heart and soul (Hawkins, 2006). One way that counselors can help clients overcome irrational thoughts and emotions is to use Crabb’s (1977) seven stages of counseling. Crabb (1977) says counselors should help clients identify problem feelings, behaviors, and thinking. Then, clients should commit themselves to change with biblical actions and thinking. Jay Adams (1986) rejects the claim that truth has to make one feel good about his or herself. Adams stands by the biblically based notion that: “ all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” It is necessary both as a Christian coming to faith, and as the broken one coming for healing, to know that change is needed because old behaviors were not working.

The body is also a part of the first concentric circle (Hawkins, 2006).

Anderson (2000) says that environment plays a vital role in a person’s emotional wellbeing. Understanding the affects that poor physical health can have on mood and cognition is a key indicator of counselor proficiency.

Emotional problems can have physical consequences (Hart, 1999). Chemical reactions, caused by anxiety, worry, and stress, can have a negative effect on brain functions. Dr. Hart (1999) says unhealthy stress and a fast paced

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environment are the root cause of anxiety and have very physical ramifications. He suggests that humans were not made to withstand the high demands and activity that is common among American society. He adds that a panic attack can sometimes serve as a warning that a person might be “living too fast, too hassled, and too stressed-out (p. 5).”

God designed people to be in relationship with one another. “ People just don’t have relationships; they are relational (Wilson, 2001, p. 77).” The Bible is full of stories about what Hawkins (2006) calls temporal systems, or relationships. Looking at client temporal systems is a vital part of client healing. These include friends, family members, communities, co-workers, and church members. Dr. Cloud and Dr. Townsend (1999) make it clear that it is personal reactions to events that cause relationship breakdown.

Counselors must help clients learn what part of each system that they are responsible for and set healthy boundaries, or property lines, in order to protect themselves (Cloud & Townsend, 1999). There are several types of healthy boundaries, which include language, integrity, consequences, emotional or physical separation, and time. Cloud and Townsend (1999) further clarify that a boundary is a means to help us decide where another person’s power begins and ends, but not as a means to control another person. This is the way God designed healthy, temporal relationships.

Finally, there is the supernatural systems circle (Hawkins, 2006). ” In The Bondage Breaker, Dr. Neil Anderson (2000) claims that, “ some problems are physiological and some are spiritual (p. 21). He describes the forces at work on the formation of human personality, and the affect Satan has on

temperament. Anderson (2000) says that a sinful lifestyle provides the enemy an open door to do his work.

Components of Mental Illness

There are many things that cause or contribute to a client's mental illness. A breakdown in any one of the concentric circles can provide the foundation for a psychiatric disorder (Hawkins 2006). Mental health can also be affected by biological, cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and lifestyle dynamics.

Biological factors that affect mental health include genetics and chemistry. For instance, Hart (1999) says that genetics sometimes play an important role in anxiety caused by stress. He suggests that people who run on adrenaline “inherit a large part of this tendency rather than develop it later in life (p. 55).” While genetics can influence the impact of stress, chemical imbalances are to blame for most cases of depression and anxiety.

According to Hart (1999), chemical imbalances are also to blame for disorders such as schizophrenia. Some other illnesses, such as addiction, can be biochemical in nature (Wilson, 2001).

Backus & Chapian (2000) state that another cause of mental illness is cognition, or the way a person interprets events that happen to them. In fact, they add that flawed cognition is the cause of most mental illnesses. Instead of actual events, it is the client's interpretation of the events, which causes them distress (Backus & Chapian, 2000). They claim that, “Wrong thinking produces wrong emotions, wrong reactions, wrong behavior—and unhappiness (p. 222).”

Anderson (2000) warns that Satan can manipulate our thoughts, and knows that “ if he can control your thoughts, he can control your life (p. 61).” For this reason, it is important that counselors look for faulty thought patterns and work with the client to replace them with truth. Since behavior is affected by cognitions, interventions need to be based on the level of how much faulty beliefs are guiding a client’s inappropriate behavior (Backus and Chapian, 2000). They state that the best way to help clients see past wrong thinking is to train them to put thoughts in the proper perspective, with what they term “ Misbelief Therapy.”

McMinn (1996) defines mental health as having an awareness of self that is reflective of the truth. Dr. Sandra Wilson (2001) suggests that the way for clients to find the truth about who they are is to use scripture to validate their worth in Christ. Hart (1999) adds that people should use positive self-talk in order to promote truth. Dr. Wilson (2001) suggests the way to promote truth is to identify key issues, apply truth to them, decide what steps to take next, and put it into practice. When clients have an awareness of how their misconceptions can affect their attitude and outlook, they will work harder to take control of those thought patterns. Dr. Wilson (2001) puts it this way, “ new choices + consistent practice = change (p. 87).”

Clients can also have emotional scars that stem from their temporal systems, or the hurts of others. Backus and Chapian (2000) say that Satan uses relational deceptions to keep God’s children from building healthy temporal systems. The most common deceptions include: trying to win the approval of others, having the attitude of a victim, manipulation, beliefs about being needed, and old habits or behaviors. Anderson (2000) claims

that the sources of unhealthy emotions are defense mechanisms such as denial, regression, projection, rationalization, and fantasy. Use of these defense mechanisms can cause hurtful behaviors in ourselves, as well as others. In her book, *Hurt People Hurt People*, Dr. Sandra Wilson (2001) says that emotional wounds cause people to wound others. She feels that this cycle is strongest between parents and their children, stating that parents often unknowingly repeat the same hurtful patterns that they experienced as children. Until clients learn to find their worth in Christ, and not in these temporal relationships, they are doomed to repeat this cycle.

A final way that mental health can be compromised is by sin. Jay Adams (1986) says that counselors who dismiss the affects of sin are being neglectful. Sin infiltrated human nature when Adam and Eve were disobedient in the Garden of Eden. Since that time, Satan has used our human vulnerabilities to prey on God's children. Anderson (2000) says that the loss of control happens gradually and leads to the emotional bondage of God's children. According to Wilson (2001), food, comfort, sex, and rest are areas of weakness that Satan preys on. She adds that these are the roots of many mental health issues, and succumbing to these temptations lead to destruction. Satan is working in deception, and only God's truth can break his power.

It is important for counselors to know their clients inside and out according to the systems approach outlined by Hawkins (2006). This allows them to reach clients on a level that is most effective for their personality types. Clients may need emotional, spiritual, physical, or cognitive based approaches, according to their differing needs (Hawkins, 2006). Client weaknesses must

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be looked at as well, in order to find the sources of any hurts, scars, sin, imbalances, or misconceptions.

Integrated Personal Theory

McMinn (1996) defines the ability to contemplate and utilize a blend of theories at once as multi-tasking. My integrated personal theory of counseling includes the ability to multi-task with clients in a way that accommodates the entirety of their lives. I feel the way to do this is by using techniques that have been proved valid by science, in conjunction with theological truth. It is important for me to develop a biblically based model of counseling that integrates psychology, spirituality, and theology that is also flexible enough to incorporate non-believers.

It is my professional goal to gently facilitate a personal relationship with God in both believers and non-believers. I will strive to seek treatment methods that can be tailored to individual needs, such as Hart's (1999) method to break the worry habit, Hawkins' (2006) concentric circles model, Adams (1986) teaching in the milieu, and Anderson's (2000) steps to freedom. This integrated approach will take into account personality structure, motivation, development, and worldview to devise a plan of change for clients. I feel my personal method will allow me to determine the appropriate amount of integration necessary in treating each client on an individual basis.

Creating an environment that is conducive to healing is a key factor in the therapeutic process. Dr. Larry Crabb (1977) says that the best way to assist clients in identifying problem feelings is to create an atmosphere of acceptance and genuine empathy. The best way to do this is by creating an

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inviting space and using body language that is open and receptive (McMinn, 1996). Counselors should also use limited self-disclosure, humor, empathy, and modeling in order to build a positive rapport. Clients will feel removed from the threat of being judged and trust will be established, allowing the client the freedom to look at themselves honestly (Crabb, 1977). According to Dr. Wilson (2001), this is a very important step in helping a client find motivation to create change for themselves.

Finding what motivates clients to make change is a task all counselors must face. Neil Anderson (2000) says that while we are born into the world physically alive, we are spiritually dead. Man begins to seek his purpose outside of God, with pride, greed, and envy – leading to spiritual bondage. It has been my experience that people make successful change when the old way is not working for them any longer. I believe this is where clients, and Christians in general, are when Jesus lovingly meets them and says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11: 28).” Clients have the choice to fight the exhaustion and struggle that the old way has brought, or they can accept Jesus’ invitation. Cloud and Townsend (1999) expound on this by saying, “We must be free to say no, before we can wholeheartedly say yes (p. 49).”

I agree with Crabb (1977) that creating self-motivated change in a client’s needs, behaviors, ideas, beliefs, or personality is the main goal of the healing process. All of my education and experiences have provided me with techniques that are centered around assisting clients in reaching the point of change. Real, lasting, and valid change must change the heart of a client to make them want to become more like God.

It is important that counselors provide clients with the tools necessary to sustain lasting change (Adams, 1986). When client's motivation changes from finding their own purpose, to finding God's purpose, they find the maturing guidance of the Holy Spirit, which resides in their core (Hawkins, 2006). McMinn (1996) advises counselors to use prayer and scripture in order to help clients to make a connection with Biblical truth. This is modeling for clients another tool that they can use to seek and make changes, long after therapy has ended.

Once clients have reached a level of positive self-motivated change, they should begin to seek participation in healing relationships “ with God and others (McMinn, 1996, p. 59).” This fits in with Hawkins (2006) temporal systems. The goal at this stage of Christian counseling should be a steady progress of becoming more Christ like. I feel it is important to teach clients models for setting healthy boundaries, so that they do not continue to allow themselves to be hurt by others or build resentments. Dr. Hawkins (2006) says that people are not alone, but are “ constantly swimming in a sea of influences (Week one, step five).” It is the counselor's job to work with clients to ensure they have a healthy temporal system.

Humans face challenges that are physical as well as spiritual. A headache can cause slower cognition, as well as emotional turmoil. Because of this, it is vital that counselors make sure that clients are healthy when they are doing a general assessment (Hart, 1999). Healthy clients are those who can function on all levels and maintain balance by utilizing healthy coping mechanisms. In order for clients to reach overall mental and physical health, they must strive for positive personal growth. Dr. Wilson says, “ as long as
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we're shuffling, or stumbling, in a new, healthier, more truthful direction, we're making positive progress (p. 233)." There are many practical and healthy ways of dealing with life. Dr. Hart's (1999) goal in *The Anxiety Cure* is to provide individuals with alternative methods of coping, which include learning to use the body's natural tranquilizers, and reorganizing a hectic lifestyle.

He encourages anxiety sufferers to "create a tranquil life in the midst of an anxious world (p. 4)." Christian Counselors need to have an understanding of their own worldview because it affects treatment and the progression of the healing process (McMinn, 1996). I value my relationship with Christ and have a Biblical worldview. All client issues will be reviewed from a Scriptural standpoint. It is my belief that any issues which are not addressed specifically in God's word must be compared in light of Scripture. This will prepare me to wage a professional war with dysfunction and mental illness in the children of God, with a goal to restore client relationships with God, allowing them to find their identities in Him.

Adams (1986) says that scripture is inerrant and totally sufficient in providing the wisdom for counselors. I believe that this is still true, even for those who do not believe in Jesus as their personal savior. When dealing with clients who are non-believers, I will offer prayer and guidance without forcing my worldview on them. In fact, I view this as a challenge to build trust, and perhaps later have the chance to share the Good News. St. Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words." I believe this applies to counseling. The nature of counseling is very interpersonal and because of this it is a great platform for transformation.

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Conclusion

The unification of psychology, spirituality, and theology in counseling allows professionals to look at all of the aspects of human behavior when making client assessments (McMinn, 1996). Psychology provides scientifically proven theories and techniques. Spirituality provides a need for change, guidance, and hope. Theology provides a lens through which theories and techniques should be judged. In creating my personal integrated counseling theory, I pondered over which aspect was most important. I agree with Crabb (1977) that “ psychology must come under the authority of Scripture (p. 49).” However, there is a risk of using personal interpretation of Scripture, instead of the way God intended. Because of this, I think it is important to utilize the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Christian counselors who are able to use the three disciplines in McMinn’s (1996) multi-tasking model will have the most comprehensive strategy for helping client’s to change.