

Integrating Spirituality and Psychotherapy

First, I see psychotherapy as a God-given tool to help those struggling with emotional problems just as I see medical interventions as God-produced. In my view – everything we “discover” comes from God. We can either choose to accept or reject God’s healing gifts.

In my experience many people are searching for emotional healing that does not exclude their religious beliefs. A very important question I ask all who come to me for help is “Are your spiritual beliefs important for us to include in your treatment?”

Sometimes religious people believe that it is a sign of weakness or lack of faith to seek healing through counseling or medications...Yet, God most often works through people to accomplish his goals. This is so obvious in the way he wants the Christian gospel message spread – through people. (He could come down with all of his power and make us believe in him but he doesn’t).

To leave a counselor or therapist out of the equation of emotional problems is like falling out of a tree, breaking your arm and asking God to heal it instead of going to the MD.

Psychotherapy comes in many different “flavors” or styles. My education taught me to tailor the approach of therapy to the person and the problem. I believe that all forms of counseling are more effective when they include a person’s spiritual beliefs.

How do I practically integrate spirituality into psychotherapy?

1. **I'll begin with my underlying beliefs:** First, I do not see God as the “great physician”. Rather, I see Him as the “great psychologist”. This is because God has put us all on a journey to become more like his son Jesus Christ – the only person to ever embody ALL of the fruits of the spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, kindness, self-control.) THAT SOUNDS EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY TO ME! He is less interested in keeping us healthy and happy than in refining our character to prepare us for our purpose in this life and for our purpose in eternity.
2. **How are our characters refined? Through troubles and temptations** – not through having it all materially and emotionally. This viewpoint helps us to see that avoiding pain, being happy and hedonism are not the goals of living. Donald Trump may appear happy and fulfilled but true joy does not come from earthly possessions, power and prestige. Walking through our pain develops true character and the fruits of the spirit.
3. I believe that Psychotherapy and Christianity both help people meet basic human needs: self-worth and intimacy with others. Freud defined mental health as the ability to love and to work. Christianity takes things a step further - it helps people find intimacy with God. Deep inside of all of us is a universal human urge to connect with a “higher power” or a god. This urge will be met either through a personal

relationship with Christ or in some other way – materialism, sex conquests, power, etc. Psychotherapy can help a person deepen their intimacy with others and with God.

4. I help my patients realize that a life lived by our feelings can be VERY disappointing. I encourage my patients to develop spiritual discipline and obedience through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is quite a contrast to living my life according to my feelings – Instead of feeling angry, selfish and resentful toward another person, I am called to communicate with Christ via prayer or through the bible for guidance – there I will find direction for how I am to respond, despite my feelings!
5. Prayer – used both in session (not as a legalistic tool but as needed) AND out of session – I pray for my patients whether they are Christian or not. I encourage my patients to pray for their character development and healing.
6. Self-talk vs. God talk (attitude of gratitude; awareness of sin and confession “spiritual breathing”; pray without ceasing)

7. Some patients seeking help are struggling with their relationship with God. **Tell about Jan and how we developed the “Faith builder” technique to increase her prayer-life and faith.**

8. Meditation – Christian meditation is the process of filling the mind up with glorifying God, prayer or scripture (whereas Eastern meditations goal is to empty the mind). You can do this any way you like but here are some suggestions:

See handout –

9. Even deep breathing, PMR and Hypnosis are magnified when they include Christ’s power via prayer with him. **(Show how deep breathing can be used with meditation/prayer).**

10. Finally, a common problem people struggle with is emotional isolation. **Involvement in a church can be prescribed:** I encourage my patients to consider involvement in sunday school class, bible study, church activities or some other small group within their church. Many times people only attend the worship service and miss out on the true acceptance and “familyness” that can be found in small groups. The bible says that, “As iron sharpens iron so does one man sharpen another”.

Conclusions....