



European Leadership Forum 2022
Pastoral Counsellors Network

PRACTICING DISTINCTLY CHRISTIAN COUNSELING STRATEGIES

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All Good Counseling Has Similar Characteristics

- Called “common factors”
 - A strong therapeutic alliance
 - A sense of solidarity
 - Agreement about goals
 - Agreement about tasks
 - Moderate value congruence
 - Counselor features
 - Ability to form a loving, collaborative relationship
 - Emotional wisdom and empathy
 - Couselee features
 - Readiness to change
 - More psychological resources (i.e., greater ego strength)
 - Less perfectionism
 - Greater psychological mindedness/self-awareness

What Are Some of the Redemptive Grace Resources Unique to Christian Counseling?

- Reconciliation with God, leading to a personal love relationship with all three persons of the Trinity
- Union with Christ and all its blessings (moral and spiritual perfection in God's eyes; adoption into his family)
- Forgiveness of sin and removal of its shame and guilt
- The indwelling Holy Spirit
- A transcendent source of meaning, purpose, identity, and power
- Training in "active receptivity"
- Spiritual reading from the Bible and the Christian tradition(s)

What are some goals of Christian Counseling?

- Bringing God into the “healing journey”
- Utilizing redemptive grace blessings given only to believers
- Training people in how to meditate
- Helping people listen to their hearts
- Becoming aware and undermining defenses/self-deception
- Helping people take responsibility for their behavior
- Modeling Christian love/friendship so counselee can get healing and become a better friend
- Becoming conformed to the image of Christ

Christian skills that counselees can cultivate

- Helping people to get into their hearts
 - Silence and solitude
 - Christian meditation
 - Experiential prayer
 - Self-awareness: listening to one's body, one's emotions, one's heart
 - Using one's imagination to get deeper healing
- Helping people communicate productively
 - Listening to others with less defensiveness
 - Differentiating oneself from the other

Distinctly Christian Strategies for Homework

- Training people to pray with God in a meditative state
 - Mental prayer (talking with God in normal wakefulness, *from the head*)
 - Affective prayer (talking with God with emotion, *from the heart*) “Pour out your hearts before God” (Lam 2:19)
 - Confession
 - Lament
 - Imprecatory prayer about one’s enemies
 - Eventually, one will be ready to forgive one’s enemies
 - Surrender
 - Contemplative prayer (communion with God: believer sharing his thoughts, desires, emotions, and story, and receiving God’s thoughts, desires, emotions, and story)

The Relative "Depth" of Personal Christian Spiritual Practices

Subjective Perspective	Reflective Focus using Words and Images	Relational/Dialogical Focus	Brain Wave Frequency
Mostly Mental Activity	Bible Study	Vocal or Mental Prayer	Beta brain waves
Mind and Heart Are Both Active	Lectio Divina	Affective Prayer	Alpha and Theta brain waves
Mostly Heart Activity	Contemplation	Contemplative Prayer	Alpha and Theta brain waves

} Requiring a Meditative Brain-State/ State of Consciousness

What does a 20-30 minute devotion time look like?

3 steps in Christian meditation (R, R, & R)

- ⦿ **Read** the Bible *spiritually—in the heart*
 - Different from academic reading: slower, more personal
 - Relate it to yourself or your story
- ⦿ **Relax** one's body and breathe slowly to help get into a meditative state
 - Move throughout body, relaxing each part
 - Breathe in 5 sec. and breathe out 5 sec, from your diaphragm
- ⦿ **Rest** in Christ
 - Focus on something from your reading and relate it to *you*, or
 - Address a problem with Jesus's help (e.g., use your imagination)
 - Finish by praying with Jesus about your concerns



Distinctly Christian Strategies for Homework

- Addressing sin
 - Confession
 - Repentance
 - Mortification/Letting God destroy it on the cross
- Building the creation self/new self
 - Make a list or journal about one's created gifts and practice gratitude to God for them (1Ti 4:3-5)

Distinctly Christian Strategies in Session

- Reading Bible passages together slowly
 - **Mt 11:28-30**: “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
 - **Matt 19:13-14**: “Let the little children come to me.” Imagining that Jesus is inviting oneself—as a child—to him; crawl up on his lap.
 - Reading a healing miracle (e.g., imagining one is being healed from leprosy)
 - Reading a parable (e.g., the prodigal son)
 - Read about Christ going to the cross or on the cross

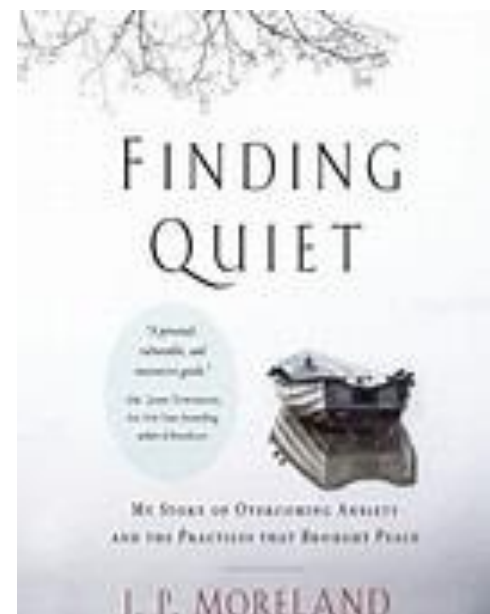
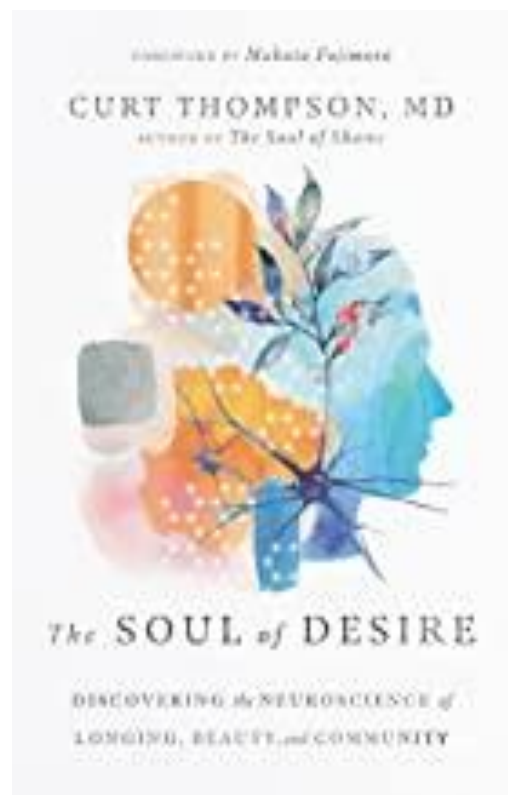
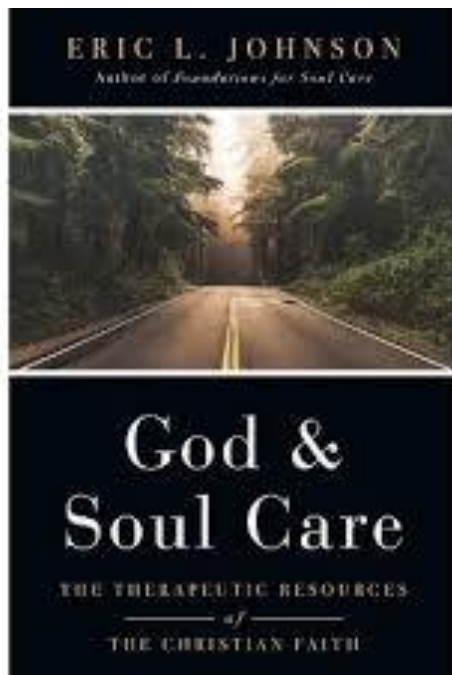
Let's try it!

Distinctly Christian Strategies in Session

- Guiding counselee's imagination in meditation
 - Imagine oneself before the cross, and Christ is taking away one's anxiety, sorrow, anger, guilt
 - Imagine Christ washing away all one's shame and guilt
 - Imagine Christ protecting oneself from the wounds of others, like a shield
 - Imagine Christ fighting one's enemies and overcoming them
 - Imagine Christ trains one's new self to kill or shrink one's old self
 - Imagine Christ holding oneself and speaking into one's soul
 - After much trust-building and therapeutic preparation, invite Christ into a past trauma to change the memory

Distinctly Christian Strategies in Session

- Counselor speaking on behalf of Christ
 - Counselor can role model what Christ might say
- If trained, using chairs as locations of different persons or parts
 - Have counselee move into another chair to speak for Christ as the divine, perfect Father, Brother, Lover, Friend, in response to something that happened or one's behavior or statement
 - Have Christ speak to a parent or a perpetrator
 - Have counselee's old self and new self speak to each other, with as much legitimate emotion as possible
 - With counselee's guidance, set chairs around the room that represent different parts of the counselee (one's inner critic, false self, in an earlier stage of life), including a chair for Christ



We currently have two residential programs: an M.A. in Christian Psychology and an M.A. in Christian Counseling
Online M.A. in Christian Counseling starting August, 2022



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