

BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND PRAYER

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When the subject of prayer is brought up as a point of discussion among some counselors, there is usually various opinions about its place in counseling sessions. Some practice praying only with a counselee if asked to do so. Some feel it may be out of place based on the ethnicity or cultural background of the counselee. Differing religious beliefs between the counselor and counselee may cause a reluctance to pray, or not to pray at all. Many secular counselors don't engage in prayer at all; one reason is that they don't believe in God or prayer power to effect change.

It seems that some counselors are more hesitant or skeptical about prayer than most people in America feel about prayer. Surveys document the importance religion and spirituality are in the lives of many people. Some mental health workers are advocating that more attention be given to issues related to a person's religious beliefs, which includes prayer. A new word is being heard more and more in counseling circles: HOLISTIC. "Using all means to minister help to the whole person." More and more counselees are requesting prayer as part of their therapy. One reason is because of their own religious beliefs, another is because of the positive articles they have been reading about the power of prayer.

It was amazing how prayer was turned to after the terrorist attack of 9-11. From the White House to the home on the corner of Main Street USA: for about 3-months prayer was a common and accepted occurrence. It was being practiced in schools where before 9-11, prayer had been prohibited. But that has passed and we are back, as a nation, to prayerlessness. Yet, the majority of Americans still believe in prayer.

Trying to practice biblical counseling, or Christian counseling, without prayer being a focal point, is anti-biblical. It's like having a car without an engine. Tacking on a few Bible verses and calling it Christian or biblical counseling without prayer is an insult to God. It is a rejection of what His counseling manual teaches. Prayer is not just a psychological issues, as some believe; it is contact with the One Who created man in His own image. It is going to the One Mediator—Christ, for help. It is help from the Holy Spirit as He interprets our groanings to the Father in heaven.

BIBLICAL VIEW OF PRAYER

Since the Bible is our counseling manual for biblical counseling; and since it furnished us with everything we need (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:15-17); it is, therefore, imperative that we turn to it for instruction and guidance in a study of prayer in counseling. Here are a few truths from the Bible about prayer:

1. **Prayer works:** *Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you might be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16).* A counseling session is a wonderful environment for prayer to be uttered.
2. **Prayer is a command:** *Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord (James 5:14).*
3. **Prayer secures wisdom:** *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given him (James 1:5).* In order for biblical counseling to be effective, it must be approached and practiced in wisdom. God gives wisdom in answer to prayer. Wisdom is needed in counseling others.
4. **Prayer seeks God's will:** *Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that (James 4:13-17).*
5. **Prayer brings results:** *Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Matthew 7:7, 8).* What could be a better motivation to pray in counseling than this one given by Jesus?
6. **Prayer is asking God for help in every area of life:** *In this manner, therefore, pray: 'Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive our debts, as we*

forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen (Matthew 6:7-13).

There are no problems too small or too big that can't be prayed for and about. The biblical counselor many times will share lessons about the efficiency of prayer; as well as pray for the counselee. It may be part the counseling agenda.

7. **Prayer is perpetual:** *Don't stop praying (1 Thessalonians 5:17).* These three words remind us of the perpetual nature of prayer. It reminds us that prayer can be engaged in no matter where we are or what the circumstance may be; prayer is always relevant and needed. This is why the biblical counselor has prayer assignments for the counselee.

These few verses are shared as examples of why prayer is essential in biblical counseling, and we should always use prayer in helping others. We need to remember that biblical counseling is not a magic formula, quick cure, or solution to every problem. It is part of the solution

CORRECT VIEW OF PRAYER:

It must be remembered, by all parties involved in biblical counseling that prayer needs to be kept within the boundaries set by God. Here are some truths that we must remember:

1. Prayer is not a "psychological Band-Aid" that'll immediately cure spiritual wounds. It is part of the solution God has given us to seek His help regardless of the problem, but it is not the only solution.
2. Prayer is not a 911 call to heaven; used only in times of emergency. Both the counselor and counselee must have the "Don't stop praying" habit.
3. Prayer is not an "incantation or mantra" we recite over problems. It is a heartfelt sharing with the heavenly Father. A belief He hears and answers prayer according to His will.
4. Prayer must not be forced on the counselee. It is essential that the place and importance of prayer be discussed in the beginning of the counseling session. The counselee must understand and agree to, the usage of prayer. Each counseling session may begin with a prayer. During a counseling session, prayer may be engaged in; counseling sessions always end with a prayer. Guidelines may be shared with the counselee.
5. Prayers in a counseling session don't have to be long drawn out practices where you do teaching and rebuke. The less you say may be the key to effectual praying.

6. There may be times when it is appropriate in a counseling session for the counselee to pray. Many times a counselee will ask God for forgiveness for things he or she wouldn't share with the counselor. The counselee must not be put on the spot or embarrassed relative to being asked to pray. Not everyone is able to pray in "public."
7. Prayer is not used as "the last resort" in helping a person in a biblical counseling session. It should, if possible, be woven into the fabric of the counseling session. The counselee should be told up front that prayer will be used frequently during the counseling session.
8. While it is true that prayer is a powerful tool in biblical counseling; it is an essential element in the counselor's daily life; it is part of his continual preparation as a counselor.
9. Prayers in counseling sessions aren't public displays of eloquence and Bible knowledge. There needs to be an avoidance to "holier than thou" nasal tone or pitch. Remember it is a simple conversation with God on behalf of self and another person.
10. Remember prayer is not just an "included ritual" just to give the counseling session the atmosphere or flavor of being biblical or Christian counseling.

Biblical counselors realize and understand that we are involved in the daily struggle described by Paul: *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12, NIV)*. The counselor and counselee must be aware of the fact that spiritual warfare is going on in the counseling session. The word of God and prayer are two major weapons to use in winning. **DON'T STOP PRAYING; THE ANSWER IS COMING.**

APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Write an essay on your prayer life.
2. Why do some counselors ignore praying with counselees?
3. How can prayer be used to help a person seeking help?
4. How may prayer be abused in a counseling session?
5. What additional observations do you have?
6. How do you plan to intentionally use this lesson?