

Distinctives of Exchanged Life Counseling

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We believe the wisdom and clinical confirmation of a Christ-centered counseling approach deserves to be clearly defined and differentiated from other models. The goal of this article is to assist the people helpers to notice these distinctives and the reasons behind Exchanged Life Counseling (and Spirituotherapy in particular). Let's consider five distinctive qualities of this biblical counseling model.

Distinctive 1: Clarified Message

Every counseling model is based on a *message*. This message includes the core values and principles that guide the people-helping process.

Even in a non-directive approach, the counselor's message is that the solution is subjective and not absolute. The counselee is assumed to have an adequate answer within him/her that the conversation would hopefully surface, identify, and apply.

Biblical counselors, on the other hand, are by definition "directive." God's Word is recognized as "a lamp to our feet and a light to our path" (Psalm 119:105). The revealed truth of the Holy Bible transcends cultural, national and religious differences (2 Tim. 3:16,17). Whatever the presenting problems may be, these can be diagnosed in light of the root issues of sin, self, and strongholds. Our observation is that organically-based mental and emotional problems are rare. Yet, even when brain chemistry is a factor, this Christ-centered process can help the counselee alleviate behavioral/psychological/spiritual conflicts). Although the counselor accepts the counselee unconditionally, his guidance reflects a biblical

and eternal value system. Since we all have been created to know God and express His life, every adjustment to experiencing His will and wisdom is in the counselee's ultimate best interest.

Every Christian counseling model should have a message that reflects the helper's understanding of *sanctification*. For example, if the counselor sees the Christian life as trying harder to live for God, that will be reflected in a “*doing* in order to *be*” counseling approach. By way of contrast, the Grace Fellowship International model is well summarized by the message of Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” This *union with Christ* emphasis has a grace perspective that conveys a “*being* in order to *do*” counseling approach (cf. Eph. 2:10).

Years ago I was visiting a pastor in his office at church. I noticed on his bookshelf the primary textbook of Spirituotherapy (after the Bible), which is *Handbook to Happiness*, by Charles Solomon. I commented on the value of *Handbook* and the pastor replied, “That volume could be renamed *Sanctification Counseling*.” That was very perceptive!

When mainstream writers consider the Keswick emphasis, they typically point to two objections. (We consider both objections as unnecessary and prejudicial.) First, they assume that the “not I, but Christ” life requires passivity. However, this complaint is misguided. We seek to have the balance of the New Testament which does not teach passivity, nor self-effort. Instead, the believer is to actively, dependently *cooperate* with God. We are to abide in Christ, for apart from Him we can do nothing of spiritual value (John 15:5). The second objection is that those who teach that the “old man” was really crucified and put off (Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9), thereby imply that the believer has no struggle with sin and/or can be sinless in this life. This conclusion also misunderstands new covenant sanctification. Although the old person in Adam was spiritually cancelled at Calvary, the flesh, world, and devil continue as spiritual enemies. We cannot be sinless (1 John 1:8,10), but we can sin *less* as we walk according to the Spirit (Gal. 5:16). ¹

Devotional literature about the deeper Christian life usually has a particular emphasis. In his book, *Understanding the Deeper Life*, Dr. Elmer Towns categorizes these three themes: the Abiding Life, the Crucified Life, or the Spirit-filled Life.² These themes are complementary, not mutually exclusive.

	<u>Abiding Life</u>	<u>Crucified Life</u>	<u>Spirit-Filled</u>
<u>Life</u>			
<u>Godhead:</u>	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
<u>Role:</u>	Cause	Crisis	Continuity
<u>Authors:</u>	Andrew Murray	Watchman Nee	R. McQuilkin
<u>Scripture:</u>	John 15:1-8	Rom. 6:4-14;	Eph. 4:30;5:18
<u>Emblem:</u>	Vine	Cross	Dove

Each emphasis is precious and true: the Father's work as Gardener is often preparatory, and the Spirit-filled Life is vital for ongoing growth and victory.³ Yet, the Lord has blessed the Crucified Life emphasis in Spirituotherapy. This is because the counselee's spiritual journey can be evaluated by the checkpoints of *salvation* (Christ's sacrifice for us), *surrender* (the believer's commitment as a living sacrifice), and *identification* (the believer appropriating by faith his/her co-death and co-resurrection with Christ). As the person is "crowded to Christ" as Savior, Lord, and Life, the presenting problems typically are reduced or resolved. As the counselee *loses* his/her life for Christ's sake, he/she ends up *saving* it (Matt. 10:39).

Another aspect of the message of Christ-centered counseling is one's understanding of the biblical *doctrine of man*--biblical anthropology. (The older term is biblical psychology.) Most theologians follow Augustine and Calvin in concluding that we have only two parts in our makeup (material and immaterial). This dictates that there is no ontological distinction between human soul and spirit. This view is known as *dichotomy*. However, those who accept the view of the early church and Luther see man as one in personhood with two separable parts, yet with three distinguishable parts. The view that the human soul and spirit are distinguishable is known as *trichotomy*. One's interpretation of man's makeup affects other biblical doctrines, such as the meaning of Adam and Eve's fall, the

nature of regeneration, and the dynamics of sanctification. Most practitioners of Spirituotherapy take 1 Thessalonians 5:23,24 literally: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it" (cf. Heb. 4:12). ⁴

Without the clarity of trichotomy, identification with Christ is only positional; there would be nothing in a person's constitution to be crucified, buried, raised, or ascended. Thus, there would be less to "know" and "reckon" in Romans 6:6, 10,11.

As you read biographies of great men and women of God, a pattern usually emerges--that of salvation, surrender, and the deeper life. For example, Hudson Taylor left England as a saved person who had also surrendered to God's call for world missions. Yet, it was about 15 years later that the truth of his co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ became more experiential. He then "reckoned" as personally true his spiritual oneness with Christ (Rom. 6:10,11). What God had accomplished at the new birth (taking him out of Adam and baptizing him into Christ) was illumined by the Holy Spirit. Taylor called this "head to heart" process "the exchanged life." (It was Hudson Taylor who challenged Amy Carmichael at the Keswick Convention.)

Therefore, those who believe in, and appreciate, the fuller message of the cross need to relate this message to the strategic discipleship and counseling process. Otherwise, the counselor may inadvertently be trying to help someone to help themselves, rather than facilitating their discovery of the "not I, but Christ" abiding life.

One of the primary goals of counseling is to instill *hope*. The Christ-centered message uniquely provides this optimism for the counselee: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13).

Distinctive 2: Simplified Methodology

Psychological observations (not taken from humanistic sources) are used in a *diagnostic* way. As Dr. Solomon puts it, "psychology can be *descriptive*, but *not prescriptive*."

If the Taylor Johnson Temperament Analysis (TJTA) is used, the resulting profile is *not* used (as psychologists typically do) to outline a counseling agenda. Rather, the profile helps counselees see how they have been affected by rejection and how their "self-life" tends to malfunction. The answer is not self improvement in one or more of the nine scales; the answer is the great exchange!

Rather than starting the counseling by addressing the major symptoms as the problem, Spirituotherapy uses these issues to help the counselee be "crowded to Christ".⁵ These pressures become providential motivators to more completely surrender to God and appropriate identification with Christ. Clinical discipleship would usually facilitate a general freedom in Christ process as well. After "phase three," any remaining counseling problem is lessened and is dealt with on the resurrection side of the cross. Counselees may already have experienced resolving of the presenting problem(s) as a byproduct of identification and freedom.

The Holy Spirit is honored as the real Counselor. The clinical discipler should be under His control, dependent on His leading, and praying for His illumination (John 14,16). The Holy Spirit's role is the basis of the term "Spirituotherapy." This is not to say that other approaches to Christian counseling do not depend on Him, rather, this model makes His role explicit since the answer is based on His inspired revelation and illumination. He alone can accomplish transformational change in the counselee and counselor (2 Cor. 3:18).

Some ministries with a spiritual warfare emphasis agree with the exchanged life emphasis of identification with Christ, However, they usually assume that if the person knows about Romans 6:4-14 et. al., that the cross has become an experiential reality. They see the freedom steps as a *process* but convey identification as *information*. This approach inadvertently overlooks that "crossing the Jordan" as *process* that needs to be facilitated. If the truth of our identity in

Christ is presented in counseling as apart from knowing and reckoning identification as its basis, the counselee would attempt to live out of the identity in his/her own strength (trying to live Christ's life *for* Him), "Death" needs to precede Life (Matt 16:24,25).

In the early years, Dr. Solomon would challenge the counselee to appropriate Christ as life, but leave the *how and when* somewhat open ended. Then, he began to invite the prepared and willing client to have his/her "funeral" during the session. "The Selfer's Prayer" was prepared and used as a guideline to help the believers "enter in" through personally giving up on themselves, reaffirming surrender and claiming-- in a faith transaction-- their identification in death, burial, resurrection, and ascension with Christ. (The counselee is given the option to do business with God where and when they are prepared to do so from the heart. However, many take this opportunity to express their response with a "selfer's prayer" of their own, or one facilitated phrase by phrase by the counselor.)

The counseling process is to be Christ-centered and grace-oriented. The four phases focus on to His ministry in our lives as Savior, Lord, Life, Liberator, and Leader. Through abiding in Him, the victorious life is *being in order to do*, instead of doing in order to be. Bibliotherapy may seem adequate because of the Bible's foundational role, however, if Scripture is used to exhort change apart from identification and freedom, it functions more in a law orientation rather than a grace orientation (Gal. 5:1-6).

Distinctive 3: Illustrated Materials

Just as the Lord Jesus used parables and object lessons in His teaching, so counselors can benefit greatly by effective diagrams and their use in counseling. God has used Dr. Solomon's engineering background to clarify many aspects of exchanged life counseling. One of the primary contributions is the diagrams in his books. Although daughter ministries have been using a modified set of these, we advocate using these original Wheel and Line diagrams because they are backed up by the foundational books such as *Handbook to Happiness* and *Handbook for Christ Centered Counseling*. These diagrams help the counselee track with the Spirituotherapy process and concepts. They also are a helpful memory and review tool. Since GFI diagrams are important in the counselor training process, they are

instrumental in making this approach transferable and more easily grasped as additional generations of counselors are equipped for this kind of ministry.

When counselees read *The Ins and Out of Rejection*, they often begin to discern the sources and dynamics of their inner struggles. When the counselor summarizes the observations of the history-taking process, the counselee's symptoms of rejection are recognized and personalized. When the client understands the root issues through this process, they usually gain hope that the counselor also knows the Solution!

By the preliminary reading of *Handbook to Happiness* chapters 1,2, and 5, the overall pattern of the counseling message begins to become more familiar to the counselee. This helps them follow the counselor since they have a "head start" through reading the designated chapters in advance.

Additional Bible reading, literature, CDs, DVDs, etc. should be assigned to reinforce and deepen the counselee's faith journey.

Distinctive 4: Personalized Meaning

Although a clarified message and illustrated materials can be beneficial in public ministry, there is a great advantage in sharing these truths in the context of a personal discipleship/counseling process. By understanding a counselee's presenting problem and taking his/her personal history, the counselor seeks to *personalize the victorious life message in a way that is meaningful and practical* in the recipient's life. Through a prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit (the Ultimate Counselor), the discipler seeks to guide the struggling person to "connect the dots" and discover how the fuller message of the cross is relevant in resolving their problems primarily at the heart level.

This process aims at personalizing the counseling message in various ways. The counselee benefits from discerning his/her personal version of the flesh (Rom. 7:18). Just as the unsaved person is convicted of *sin* as a prelude to repentance and faith for salvation (Acts 20:21), so the struggling Christian needs to be convicted of his/her unique version of "*self*" as a prelude to wholehearted appropriation of identification with Christ (Gal. 2:20). The counselee may have primarily well-

adjusted flesh or maladjusted flesh. He/she may be held back by self righteousness or self rottenness (or a combination of both). In order to deny oneself and take up the cross (Luke 9:23), one needs to know what "self" means at a personal level.

Other aspects of personalizing the sanctification process include assisting counselees in recognizing:

- *their natural sense of identity,

- *how they have been rejected and the effects that this has had in their life and relationships,

- *what coping mechanisms they have developed,

- *what values they have acquired,

- *if there are "idols" in their life (depending on something or someone to meet needs that only God can meet),

- *how traditional religious views, such as legalism, may have distorted their view of Christian living,

- *what degree they seek to function independently of God, and

- *how they may be attempting to control their life and circumstances, instead of yielding to God and fully trusting Him to be in control.

Through personalizing the remedial discipleship process, counselees are assisted in appropriating their identification with Christ. When they reckon as personally true their co-death-co-burial, co-resurrection, and co-ascension with Christ, they find freedom from besetting sins, healing for their hurts, and empowerment to face life challenges as overcomers (Rom. 6:3-14; Eph. 2:4-7; Rom. 8:31-37).

Distinctive 5: Demonstrated Ministry

The nature of this counseling methodology is to help counselee discover and appropriate the indwelling Christ as their ultimate source of sufficiency. Therefore, the process is usually limited to between two and ten sessions. The extended weekly sessions of Christian and secular psycho-therapists is markedly different. Clinical discipleship is short term; it is not our role to take the place of the local church in ongoing discipleship. We want the client to depend on Christ, not us.

In other counseling models the counselor may seek to diagnose, support and guide in coping strategies without needing a first hand testimony of an abundant life. In Christ-centered counseling, however, the counselor needs to have experienced the

cross. As Dr. Solomon puts it, "Exchanged life counseling is not so much a technique to be learned as a relationship to be shared." God's love needs to be our motivation. This is not to say the counselor "has arrived," or is perfect. Although we need to be in fellowship with God and minister in integrity, we nevertheless have this treasure "in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7).

Conclusion

This approach to Christ centered discipleship personal ministry is usually referred to as Exchanged Life Counseling. In 1970, Charles Solomon, trademarked his foundational model as Spirituotherapy. We have commended this model with these distinctives:

- a clarified *message*
- a simplified *methodology*
- illustrated *materials*
- personalized *meaning*
- a demonstrated *ministry*

If counselors in training are convinced of these distinctives and principles, they will have a sound basis for evaluating if/when to include material from other ministries and perspectives. Additional content should then be screened as to is whether it would reinforce, or distract from, the Christ-centered counseling ministry.

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Footnotes

¹ See Melvin Dieter, ed. *Five Views of Sanctification*, (Zondervan, 1987). Criticism of the Keswick perspective is usually derived from a dichotomous model of man, a mutual lack of clarity in terminology, or an assumed imbalance that is *not* integral to the teaching. For a biblical exposition and implicit defense, see Stephen Olford, *Not I, But Christ* (Crossway Books, 1995). See also the article by John R. Van Gelderen, *Keswick--A Good Word or Bad?* at www.elcmatters.org/ under "Ministry Articles."

² See Elmer Towns, *Understanding the Deeper Life*, www.ElmerTowns.com/ (Books).

³ Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ*, (Christian Literature Crusade).
Jessie Penn-Lewis., *The Cross of Calvary*, (Christian Literature Crusade).
Robertson McQuilkin, *Life in the Spirit*, (Zondervan, 1987).

⁴ See John Woodward, *Man as Spirit, Soul, and Body: A Study of Biblical Psychology* (Grace Fellowship International), and John E. Best, *Exploring the Treasure of Your New Human Spirit* (www.AbundantLivingResources.org)

⁵ L. E. Maxwell, *Crowded to Christ*, See also the Solomon School lecture, *Determining a Counseling Model* (John Woodward).