

Nyack College- Alliance Graduate School of Counseling

GCN618.OA: Theology in Mental Health Counseling

**Position Paper #3- Change, sanctification, and the role of the Holy Spirit and clinical skills
in facilitating change**

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In childhood, I remember being taught that the Holy Spirit is our gift from God here on Earth. We recognize that God is three persons in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I love to think of God as the Sun, Jesus Christ as the light from the Sun and the Holy Spirit as the heat. In scriptures we are taught that along with the Holy Spirit we were given many fruits and gifts.

1 Corinthians 12:7

⁷The Holy Spirit is given to each of us in a special way. That is for the good of all. ⁸To some people the Spirit gives a message of wisdom. To others the same Spirit gives a message of knowledge. ⁹To others the same Spirit gives faith. To others that one Spirit gives gifts of healing. ¹⁰To others he gives the power to do miracles. To others he gives the ability to prophesy. To others he gives the ability to tell the spirits apart. To others he gives the ability to speak in different kinds of languages they had not known before. And to still others he gives the ability to explain what was said in those languages. ¹¹All the gifts are produced by one and the same Spirit. He gives gifts to each person, just as he decides.

I believe that the same way our experiences shape us, our decisions can also open us up to receiving gifts from the Holy Spirit. This is not to say that if a person has not experienced a certain trauma or moment, they cannot be empathetic and help another person out but by experiencing certain things we can understand the client better. Becoming a counselor can very well be a calling from God but it really takes being open to the Holy Spirit and that decision to go through with the work in order to make it happen. According to Holeman, V. (2012) "When Christians counsel, the Holy Spirit precedes them into the counseling room. No human counselor can be more interested in a client's well-being than the wonderful Counselor, the Holy Spirit. Christian counselors respond to the presence of the Spirit in their personal lives, rely on the

Spirit's support and guidance in their work lives, and remain open vessels through which the Spirit of God can work as they recognize God's fingerprints in their clients' circumstances".

I believe that because we have free will and many times make decisions based on our feelings in the moment or other reasons that are not necessarily from God, we experience certain things for God to be able to open us up for what we need. Change is inevitable and some may struggle with accepting changes that we cannot control. But when we are open to the Holy Spirit, we are granted the ability to discern from our own feelings to what God needs us to learn. This is also key when in a session with a client. Counselors encounter different people with situations that they may have never come across before or are not necessarily familiar with. So, when in a session it is important to be open to the Holy Spirit so that the counselor could discern between their own thoughts, what the client is relaying and how-to best help.

When considering the process of change and how the Holy Spirit plays a role in facilitating, it is very important to consider the setting on the counseling sessions. In the case that the sessions take place in a secular setting it is vital to know if the client is comfortable with speaking about God/religion. If the case is that the counselor is a Christian, but the client is not and does not want to incorporate God in the sessions, the counselor can still be open to the Holy Spirit and use the gifts to help the client. According to Holeman, V. (2012) "While counselors need explicit consent from clients to work with spiritual and/or religious themes, the Holy Spirit needs no permission to work in clients' lives. The Holy Spirit of God superintends the Christian counselor's work." When in therapeutic settings the counselors can be empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak hard-to-hear truths in loving and respectful ways, to produce hope and to be channels for God's work in the client's life.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit go hand in hand with the clinical skills that are required for change in a therapeutic setting. One of the gifts being wisdom. This is an important gift when dealing with people especially in a therapeutic setting. The Holy Spirit can provide counselors with the wisdom necessary to create a therapeutic alliance that can get the client to be open. Wisdom can also be beneficial when it comes to guiding the client to change behaviors or thought processes. Wisdom is important in therapy when communicating effectively with the client through motivation interviewing, mirroring, critical thinking, communicating effectively and empathy. Another gift that is vital in a successful therapeutic alliance is understanding. IN many case clients come into the therapy session feeling rejected, alone and judged and so it is important for them to feel understood and heard. This is not to say that the therapist must agree with whatever the behavior or problem is. Counsel also know as right judgement is another gift of the Holy Spirit. This essentially knowing right from wrong and can be beneficial in therapy because it can guide the therapist to getting the client to have break throughs. Fortitude is also a gift and known as courage. With the gift of fortitude, fear is taken over and there is more willingness to take risks. Risks can be beneficial in a therapeutic setting but as long as they are to benefit the client.

Though counseling can take place in different settings, it is important to note that the Holy Spirit is a great guide. The Holy Spirit provides us with wonderful gifts that contribute to change in a therapeutic setting. According to Holeman V, (2012) “Counselors can rely on the Holy Spirit when they meet clients that are particularly hard to love.” The reality is that in counseling, the clients encountered are not always going to be easy cases to work with. They may have situations go on that could be difficult to understand. This is when relying on the Holy Spirit for its gifts and guidance is beneficial.

References

Bible Gateway passage: 1 Corinthians 12 - New International Version. (n.d.). Retrieved December 2020, from <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12>

Holeman, V. (2012). *Theology for better counseling*. Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press. [ISBN 978-0-8308-3972-8].