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**LE 4:** Triad Paper

The eight triad counseling sessions were a very new experience for me. I always found it easy to have deeper conversations with close friends and family, but I never utilized a lot of the listening methods and teachings we learned in class. I never met my group members, Charmaine and Dale, before and we all came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, upbringings, and life stages. However, I was astonished at how quickly our group was able to talk about the deeper things that we struggle with and some of the “shadows” of our lives. In the beginning it felt a little forced to talk about things we wouldn’t normally talk about on a regular basis, but the sample questions from the triad instructions and my group member’s openness and curiosity made me feel very comfortable to share. I also found that playing different roles as a speaker, listener, and observer allowed me to pick up on the finer details of what it means to be a good counselor and active listener. I would give both my triad members an “A” because they each asked great questions and were able to really pick up on the non-verbal cues and provided plenty of verbal and non-verbal encouragements. During a session where I was the speaker and Dale was the listener, Dale noticed how my tone shifted every time I was talking about my sister. Even before I shared anything about my sister, he picked up on my tone and asked an open-ended question of what my relationship was like with my sister. That simple question, led me to share much deeper about my relationship with my sister and gain insight on the process of forgiveness. One thing I noticed immediately about Charmaine was her inviting and calming presence. She gave a lot of verbal and non-verbal encouragements such as head nods, good eye contact and body language, and validations throughout the session. When she asked questions, I was able to hear the genuine

curiosity and concern in the tone of her voice. Overall, I was able to learn a lot from both Dale and Charmaine through observing how they listened and through their feedback.

One major take-a-way I had was to understand the importance of facial expressions, body language and non-verbal cues. For some reason, I always had a habit of crossing my arms as it was a comfortable position for me and Dale pointed that out. It never came across to me how my body language and how I cross my arms can give off to someone that I am disinterested or closed off on what they are sharing. As I observed both Dale and Charmaine when they were listeners, I noticed how they always positioned their bodies to whoever was speaking and leaned in a little closer to show that they are attentively listening and curious. I hope to utilize these techniques in my role as an intern pastor at my church. I want to focus and be attentive to how my body language and non-verbal cues can affect how I counsel my church members.

Another take-a-way I had through the triad sessions, was recognizing my habit of wanting to solve someone's problems or give good advice. As I shared earlier, I always found it easy to talk with friends and have deeper conversations, but in a lot of those conversations, I always ended up sharing advice or a similar situation that I personally went through. I thought that by being vulnerable and sharing my own personal story I was somehow being a good listener and counselor. Throughout the sessions, whether I was a listener or an observer, I found it very difficult to silence my thoughts and ideas to give advice and share personal stories. Every time I thought about what I might say in response to one of my members sharing a difficulty they were going through, I realized that I missed out on being present with the person sharing and noticing the verbal and non-verbal cues. One example was in our 3<sup>rd</sup> session where Dale was the speaker, Charmaine was the listener and I was the observer. Dale shared about a time where a close family member revealed to him that she had same sex attraction and I immediately thought

about my own experience when one of my close friends told me that he was attracted to the same gender. Luckily, I was able to withhold my own personal story, and I observed how Charmaine was still actively listening. Charmaine was patient and allowed Dale to finish his story and then at the end asked a spot-on question, “What was your reaction when your family member shared that with you?” This question helped Dale tap into the emotions he felt when he heard the news and led to deeper discussions. Through observing Charmaine, I was able to learn the importance being present, actively listening, and asking thoughtful open-ended questions. I learned that empowering the speaker and helping them to find their own solutions and steps to growth and life change is much more effective than a listener giving good advice and sharing personal stories. In my church, I always felt that I had to step up and serve because no one else was going to and this led me to taking on a lot of responsibilities and eventual burnout. When members came to me to talk about what they were going through, I wouldn’t really listen to them and I would often resort immediately to problem solving. I realized that I developed an attitude where I thought I was the one who had to solve all of their problems. Throughout the triad sessions and lectures, I learned the value and importance of being present and guiding and empowering the individual to find their own solutions. I hope to utilize this more in my conversations with my church members moving forward.

Overall, the triad sessions were a great starting platform to learn how to be a better listener and counsel others. I found this process extremely helpful in utilizing the concepts and teachings we learned in class. I hope to incorporate many of the things we learned in the lectures as well as what I learned from my group members in my church community and with those outside of my church.