

Position Paper #3: Process of Change and Sanctification

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God's creation is a process, and the perfection of the creation will only be achieved in the end time when God returns and rules the world (McMartin, 2015). Humankind and the earth are ever-changing in the natural growth process facilitated by the active participation of the Holy Spirit (McMartin, 2015), and believers are going through lifelong sanctification. This paper discusses the process of change, sanctification, and the role of the Holy Spirit and clinical skills in facilitating change.

Process of Change

Clinically, change is not a one-time event but is conceptualized as a gradual process that an individual goes through to modify behavior and achieve growth (Prochaska & DiClemente, 2005). Prochaska et al. (1992) propose that the process of change can be classified into five stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance, where the needs of an individual vary in different stages, and recycling through the stages is imperative. Psychotherapy facilitates the process of change and contributes to therapeutic outcomes by using various skills to clarify the client's needs, instigating motivation to change, identifying techniques that can foster change, instilling hope in clients' hearts, and relapse prevention.

Theologically, God's creation is also a process, with every creature having its own purpose and destiny, and the work of creation will only be completed and perfected according to God's design in the end time (McMartin, 2015). Thus, humankind and the earth are changing according to God's will in this natural growth process to their destiny (McMartin, 2015). This natural process of growth happens in both believers and unbelievers and is facilitated by the active participation of the Holy Spirit to work against the power of sin because sin keeps humans

from forming a right relationship with God and achieving God's ordained telos (McMartin, 2015).

Sanctification

When people accept Christ as their savior, they are justified and declared righteous once and for all because of the sacrifice of Christ (Kirwan, 1984), and they are thus filled with the Holy Spirit. Sanctification, however, is a gradual change process that takes place within believers to be made righteous continuously and become more like Christ (Kirwan, 1984). Believers are sanctified through the active work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, identifying sins in the heart, healing, and restraining the power of sin through common grace and special grace (GordonConwell, 2018). Kirwan (1984) adds that God's goal in sanctification is for each believer to develop their unique talents and gifts as fully as possible so they can continue their spiritual growth towards Christ-like maturity.

Most theologians believe sanctification entails struggles and growth and is a lifelong process of following God's calling in faith (Kirwan, 1984). The process of change in psychotherapy can be used to understand sanctification, which all believers also go through five stages, including pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. God uses struggles, delays, difficulties, or seemingly dead ends to grow believers' faith and character. During this faith-building process, when believers face struggles, they are likely in the pre-contemplation or contemplation stage, and with the help of the Holy Spirit and calling from God, they can move into preparation, then action to follow God, and result in the increase in faith and enter into the maintenance stage. However, when new challenge surfaces, which requires a higher level of faith, the process of change will once again repeat itself. Thus, this faith-building

process will be repeated over and over in believers' life as God moves them toward spiritual maturity.

Role of the Holy Spirit and Clinical Skills in Facilitating Change

The Holy Spirit, as one of the divine persons in the Godhead, is the key agent in God's work in the world who "actively takes part in creation, revelation, salvation, and empowerment in fulfillment of God's plan to call a people to himself" (Bird, 2016, p. 189). The doctrine of common grace explains that Holy Spirit, through common grace, is actively involved in human life and offers undeserved grace despite the fall for humankind to live and enjoy his goodness in creation until the end time (Daalen, 2012). Furthermore, through common grace, the Holy Spirit draws non-believers to God and prepares them for salvation by allowing people to experience the goodness of God, promoting the development of science and art, restraining sin and the destructive power of Satan on earth so orderly life is possible and creation can proceed towards the destiny as ordained by God, reducing suffering, and facilitating the progressive sanctification of believers (Daalen, 2012; GordonConwell, 2018). Therefore, after the initial creation, God continuously "preserves for, cares for, and guides the world by the Holy Spirit" (p.221) with the ultimate goal of having his creation fulfilling their telos in this natural progress of growth (McMartin, 2015).

As mentioned, common grace includes aspects of arts and sciences; psychotherapy is a type of science in which people use "experiences and empirically derived principles in order to bring change in a person's situation" (Daalen, 2012, p. 232). The clinical skills and counseling knowledge developed through the efforts of researchers and therapists are blessings from the Holy Spirit to provide healing and promote the natural growth process in humankind.

Holeman (2012) mentions nonspecific mechanisms of change that all schools of therapy disregard a therapist's skills or techniques, facilitate emotional regulation, cognitive reframing, and behavioral shifts, which achieve similar therapeutic change in clients toward a more healthy lifestyle and overall well-being. The focus is that these change mechanisms activate common factors, including client characteristics, therapist characteristics, therapeutic alliance, and hope, which are primarily responsible for therapeutic change (Holeman, 2012). Therefore, therapists, whether Christian or non-Christian, despite their theoretical orientation, are enabled by the Holy Spirit, disregard their awareness of the involvement of the Holy Spirit by utilizing their clinical skills to promote a psychological growth process moving clients towards health, well-being, and God's ordained telos for humankind (McMartin, 2015). These positive outcomes reflect the beauty of the restoration work of the Holy Spirit. However, because Christian therapists can be more attuned to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the process, they may be better positioned to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and facilitate their clients for a future saving relationship with Christ (McMartin, 2015).

Specifically for believers, the Holy Spirit may use psychotherapy to help them understand the reasons for their behavior, relationship patterns, and thinking processes or to restrain sin and promote moral good, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, they can be blessed with the restoration of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and spiritual brokenness (Daalen, 2012) and attain relational, mental health, and even spiritual healing so that they can become more like Christ in during sanctification.

Though therapists can use their clinical skills in nurturing clients towards psychological growth and health, therapy is an open process and is not the end of itself; it is part of the process of change because complete healing towards perfection and completion of our telos can only be

accomplished by the salvation of Jesus and will only be complete at the end time when Jesus returns (McMartin, 2015). McMartin (2015) summarizes therapy as a life-giving process empowered by the Holy Spirit and is consistent with the purpose of the Triune God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, with the understanding of the process of change, and in particular, the sanctification process for believers, this writer is reminded that the Holy Spirit is always at work in the counseling process to facilitate the identification of clients' current stage of change, meet them where they are, and help them grow towards health and ordained purposes by utilizing clinical skills and through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

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