

Sanctification and the Process of Counseling

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Jesus' death and resurrection are the cornerstone of the Christian faith and mark the beginning of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. God provided Jesus as a divine solution for evil and human suffering; so that imperfect Christians can personally experience a relationship with a Holy God. Upon Jesus's death, the curtain separating the Holiest of Holies, the place where God's presence dwelled the most richly, was torn in the Jewish temple. (Mark 15:38) This illustration meant that people who were not high priests or ethnically Jewish could have direct access to God's presence. God takes it a step further and declares that our bodies are his new temple, as he promises the Holy Spirit would dwell within us. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

All one has to do for God's spirit to live inside of them is believe that Jesus was resurrected and confess that he is in charge of their lives. (Romans 10:9) Christians make a deliberate effort to fear God, or discern His will in every area of their lives, by submitting their will to His will. This is the beginning of true wisdom and understanding. (Proverbs 9:10)

The evidence of this indwelling is the production of the following fruit in the lives of believers; peace, joy, patience, kindness, love, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23) Also, God promises the Holy Spirit would help us in our weaknesses, help us as we pray by interceding for us, (Romans 8:26) teach us, and help us remember what Jesus wants for us (John 14:26).

John the Baptist tells his followers that Jesus is coming to baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Matthew 3:11) Fire purifies metals by removing the dross, or impurities. Just like this, the Holy Spirit acts as a purifying fire in the lives of believers, inspiring a Christ-like character within via the process of sanctification.

Sanctification is the progressive work of both God and humanity where humankind becomes more and more like Christ and less bound to sin. (Edmonds, 2023) Sin is relational

destruction that is both systemic (ex: racism and sexism) and cyclic (ex: generational cycles of abuse). Sin corrupts the relationship humans have with God, the relationship humans have with the environment, and the relationships humans have with each other. Sin is less about breaking a set of rules per se, and more about endorsing a worldview and living a lifestyle that does not deem God through Christ as real, relevant, and authoritative. Sin hinders God's glory, and non-Christians cannot help but sin (John 8:34); and the perfect spirit of God cannot dwell inside someone who is a slave to sin.

Sanctification is a collaborative process between God and man that continues throughout the life of a Christian. The process of sanctification changes the Christian's character, personality, values, and desires, and generally changes what motivates him/her. It is an internal change of attitudes and behaviors that is not completed until death. The finished result of sanctification is thinking and acting exactly like Christ himself. (1 Thessalonians 5:23) (John 17:17-19)

Viewing sanctification as a joint effort between the Holy Spirit and God highlights mankind's responsibility for suffering and evil. God, as our creator, knew what was best for us. He did not create humanity for selfish pursuits. He knows mankind has a tendency to fill itself up with vain pursuits that would ultimately leave it hungry and longing for more. (Ecclesiastes 1:8). He knew that the human heart can only flourish by living in constant communion with himself and Christ-centered community with others. This is what satisfies the deepest longings of the human soul in the midst of earthly suffering. (James 1:2-4).

However, as Christians, we always have the option to disregard the voice of the Holy Spirit in our lives, pursuing personal satisfaction and convenience instead of God's glory. That being said, not all Christians are sanctified at the same rate. Simply put, some Christians act

more like Christ than others. Even still, God has given humanity the gift of free will to determine their level of participation in the joint effort.

The goal of a Christian life is to participate fully and wholly in God's master plan on an individual and large scale eschatological level. God's plan for every Christian is that they would be sanctified and look like Christ in every way. (John 17:23) The process of counseling is a way to usher in heightened self-reflection, self-awareness, and emotional regulation; all of these are qualities that Jesus displayed while he was on earth. Dr. Virginia Todd Holeman, in her book *Theology for Better Counseling*, outlines the following model for theologically reflective practice.

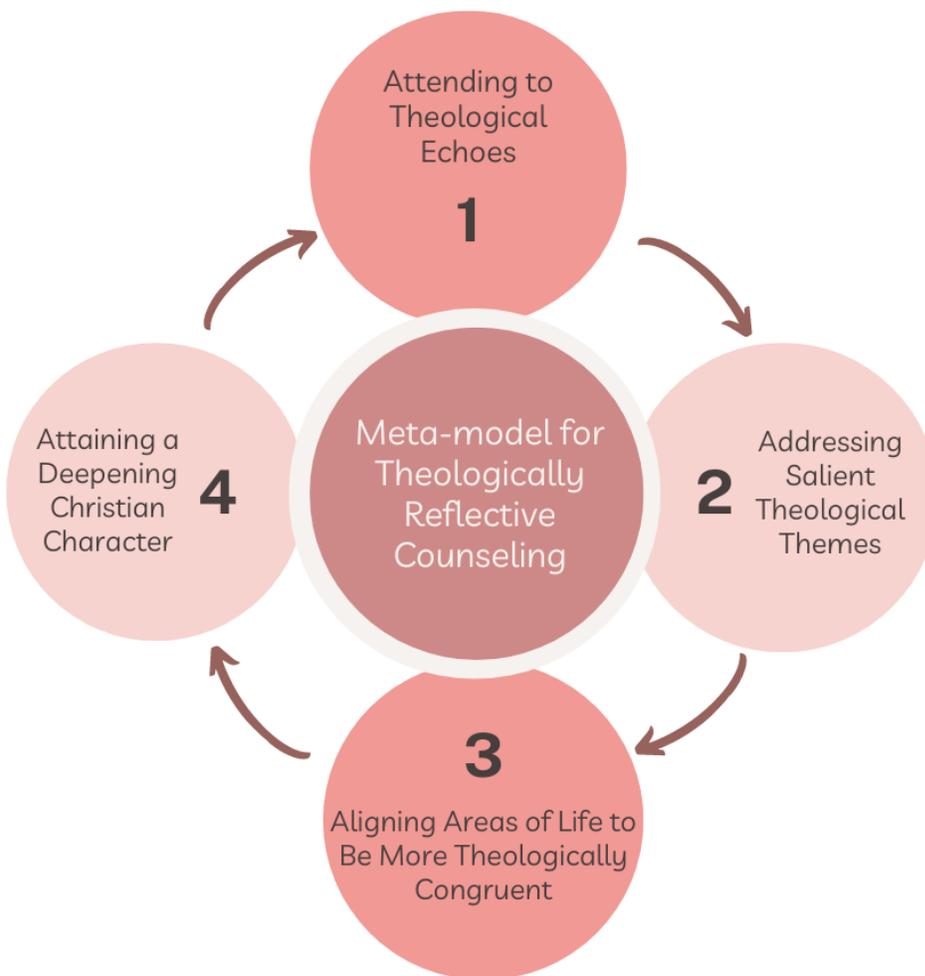


Figure 1 Meta-model for Theologically Reflective Counseling (Holeman, 2012)

- 1) Attending to Theological Echoes: A counselor can attend to theological echoes in a client's story when they take stock of the client's nonverbal and verbal cues during a session and build a trustworthy and collaborative therapeutic alliance. Ultimately, the therapist would gather how clients view God, what clients expect from God, how their relationship with God has been in the past, and how the client uses religion and/or spirituality as a coping mechanism.
- 2) Addressing Salient Theological Themes: This pertains to the naming of certain theological themes (ex: resurrection, death) and discerning the extent to which the client is able to take their fair share of personal responsibility for their issues, the degree to which the client fears the Lord, the degree to which the client is able to confront the ways they have not loved others well, and the degree to which the client can focus on the hope Jesus provides.
- 3) Aligning Areas of Life to Be More Theologically Congruent: For this step, the therapist provides structure to support the client in reaching their goals; whether it may be changing thought patterns, getting to the root of certain emotions, or behavior modification.
- 4) Attaining A Deepening Christian Character: This is the fruit of the work of both therapist and client. When another issue arises, and suffering strikes the client again, the cycle begins again.

Dr. Holeman's model expands upon a theistic worldview and is fertile ground for the Holy Spirit to further his work of sanctifying Christians. In conclusion, sanctification is a necessary process in the life of a Christian, even though it might be painful at times. Therapy can aid in deepening self-insight and further disciplining one's life to look like the life of Christ.

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