Welcome to Week Five of COUN 506 and this first lecture on the subject “The use of the Bible in Christian counseling.” Using the Bible is both a necessity and an obligation if we are calling ourselves Christian counselors.
Here are some key questions for use of the Bible in counseling. Not whether we should use the Scripture, but in what ways should Scripture be used under what circumstances with which clients? In other words, it’s always a mistake to simply decide ahead of time that we have a certain view of the authority of the Scripture, that we love and trust the Bible as a foundation for our lives, so we’re going to use it the same way at all times in all places with all clients. That’s not at all a very sensitive or professional way, or even a godly way to use the Scriptures. The Scriptures are the living word, the Logos, the Word of God for all people for all time, but the Scriptures also contain a Rema, a personal living word to each person. This is we want to help God by being conduits through which God can act in a personal way to give a personal word to those clients we counsel. So, the question is “In what ways should Scripture be used under what circumstances with which clients?” The next three questions correlate well with McMinn’s map for effective Christian counseling. First, “Where does the Scripture fit in building a healthy sense of self?” There are many Scriptures that speak to the sense of self; both in a healthy sense, and an unhealthy, or fallen, sense of self, a selfishness with which people struggle. The Scripture does speak about in the Great Commandment about loving others as we love ourselves. This is an important biblical principle in order to have a healthy sense of self.

Next, “How do we use the Scripture to nurture a healthy sense of need in the client?” How can we help the client see that they are not a sufficient person in and of themselves? They need God. They need God’s word, and God’s forgiveness. Then, “How do we use the Scripture to build
healing relationships?“ What ways do our clients need to know about the grace of God, about reconciliation, about the very specific purpose God has for their lives? And then this fifth question: “Why am I using the Scriptures in this way at this time?” This has to do with counselors’ self awareness. Are we using the Scripture in this way at this time because we have carefully discerned that it’s in the best interest of the client, or because this is the way we always do things? Perhaps if you really get honest about your motives, you may find you are not willing to explore other means. The Bible is one of the greatest resources we have, but we must be sure we are not using it for the wrong reasons or motives.

Eric Johnson has written about the influences of the Bible on Christian counseling, and has identified at least nine ways in which the Scriptures have an impact on what you do as a Christian counselor. The Bible has an influence in a foundational way. For those who revere and trust the Bible as the source of our core beliefs, as the guide for life and practice, it is foundational. It provides our worldview, our presuppositions. The Bible has an experiential influence in counseling. It is through the Bible that we can look at our experiences and ask “What does this mean? Why did this happen? What purpose does this experience serve?” These are often the questions that counselees have. Not so much to say, this happened to me, but to
say “Why did this happen to me? What did this mean”? The Bible provides a context for answering that. It gives a contextual purpose, an understanding of what the world is like. When people are wondering, “what kind of world do I live in”? or when we’re trying to understand the nature of human beings, the Bible offers a context for understanding nature and people. The Bible is axiological, which is a term that refers to moral or ethical life. The Bible provides a moral program; it defines what is right and wrong. It gives a universal standard for ethical behavior. This is particularly important in our 21st century world, where so many people live with a relativistic worldview. They’re not really sure what is right and wrong. They are not so much immoral as they are amoral. The Bible is also anthropological. Johnson states that scripture provides a “meta-narrative of humanity,” which is to say “the big story” of how all of us yearn to feel a sense of belonging, to feel that we’re not the only ones who have gone through problems. This is especially when we’re having very painful and problematic experiences. The Bible speaks of the “big picture,” stretching from the beginning in Genesis to the end of all things in the book of Revelation. The Bible talks about the common experience we humans have as created beings.

Next, The Bible is Canonical. It provides a standard of measure for the truth. In the Scriptures it says that Jesus Christ brought us grace and truth, and that is a fundamental doctrine of belief for Christians. In Christ, we have the personification and embodiment of truth. This is a very important consideration in today’s context in which the truth is seen as a more personal discernment; what’s true for me is not necessarily true for you. The Bible provides a standard for all of this. And then, the Bible provides a Dialogical influence. It is a resource for discussion and comparison with psychology. The counselor should not forget that the psychological theories and constructs are human theories and constructs. So often, clients have trouble distinguishing
between human theories, psychological theories, and ultimate truth. The Bible provides a resource for talking and comparing those kinds of theoretical issues, and allows us to dialogue with people about truths that are universal and timeless on which they can build their lives. The Bible is creative, a resource for exploring concepts beyond psychology. Most importantly, the Bible is transformative. The Bible is the living word of God in which we become new creations. It is through which God is always working to heal and change from the inside out. Since there is such a broad influence that the Bible has on counseling, how do we go about using such a powerful tool?

Stanton Jones has given us four strategies that allow us to use the Bible at various levels. One of the obvious ways to use the Bible is to derive techniques directly from the Bible. As an example, if we are working on issues of guilt, we can remember that in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he speaks directly about issues of guilt. He says this, “I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it, but one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead. I press on toward the goal to win the prize, for which God has called me Heavenward in Christ Jesus.” As another example, in the Gospel of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks directly about issues of resentment and forgiveness. He says in Matthew 6:14-15, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men of their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” And as a third example, Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool in the twelfth chapter of Luke. He addresses issues of
greed and money worries that had been raised by a person in the crowd. These three stories are just a few minor examples of the wealth of information the Bible directly addresses about human problems. To draw upon those and to apply them in counseling situations can be very helpful as you are dealing with clients who are open to the Bible. For many people, their Bible knowledge is so minimal that the most frequent reaction of clients is one of surprise. They were unaware that the Bible is such a practical and powerful book on these kinds of day-to-day issues and dynamics. A second way to use the Bible in counseling is to draw upon principles that are found in scripture. Not necessarily direct quotes, but therapeutic principles that are found there. For instance, many people trained in the “object relations” theory agree with the idea of dreams, and in analyzing the dreams of their clients as a way of helping them to access subconscious issues. This can be seen as a “value-neutral” technique that is supported in Scripture. Just think for a moment of all the guidance from God that came in the form of dreams to biblical characters. Joseph received any number of dreams. Daniel received messages from God in dreams. Joseph, the step-father of Jesus received a dream to leave Israel and go to Egypt, and on and on and on. Also, how often did Jesus invite his disciples to take a personal retreat away from the pressures of life, to pray and reflect on God’s work in their lives. So, the notion of using personal retreat as a therapeutic technique is another example of a principle supported in Scripture. Jesus used small groups as a strategy of working with a very limited number of people, twelve in particular. And among those twelve there was an even smaller circle of three whom he befriended in a particular way to disciple and to build them up. The power of small groups is a principle found in Scripture.
A third level of strategic use of the Bible would be to engage in practices that are consistent with biblical principles. For example, we can use the “empty chair” technique to help clients deal with grief or relational conflicts they’ve had in their lives, or to help them express deep powerful feelings in a way that is not threatening. Or inviting clients to take part in role playing as another example. These are values-neutral techniques that are in no way inconsistent with the Bible. Or to invite clients to take part in role playing as another example. And the fourth level in using the Bible really has to do more with what not to do in counseling, which is to avoid counseling techniques that are inconsistent with Scripture. For instance, a Christian, Bible-believing counselor would never encourage a client to engage in sexual sin as a therapeutic technique. Or to take revenge against someone who has wronged them. Or intentionally engage in selfish, self-centered behavior that will hurt themselves or their family.
As we reviewed it last week, two of the columns found in the METAMORPH grid are labeled “spiritual formation principles” and “biblical references.” These columns provide a resource for including the Bible in your counseling work. To the extent that their level of faith will permit it, it is important to have your clients involved in biblical reasoning. If we are working with a Christian client, it is a key principle for their growth. What often happens for those that are immature in the faith is to compartmentalize the Bible and the faith resources in their lives. The Bible is not used for understanding and reasoning about life, but is kept out of the counseling sessions, and worldly or secular ways of reasoning about problems is used most of the time. So, an important resource you can be for Christian clients is to help them to reason biblically about their problems. The biblical reference section of the METAMORPH grid gives you some beginning Scriptures for doing that, depending on the area of human functioning we are talking about. You would simply go to the biblical reference column related to that area of functioning and you find some appropriate verses. The biblical reference column also gives you some resources for encouraging clients to meditate upon the Scriptures, and to memorize certain key verses as a way of correcting their faulty thinking and beliefs. One of the most powerful processes in human functioning for good or bad in our lives has to do with our self-talk, with our habitual ways of thinking. Often when a person is having problems significant enough to require counseling, their habitual ways of thinking are quite faulty and distorted. Early on in counseling with them, it is important to help your clients identify those areas of habitual faulty thinking and beliefs. For example, remember the verses that speak of the demons that were driven from a man but then returned worse than they had been before because they found the place empty and
It’s very important that clients be guided to replace their faulty thinking and beliefs with more positive and wholesome and healing ways of thinking.

---

**METAMORPH Grid:**

“Biblical References” column

(Cont.)

- To provide an **axiological reference**: Standards of right and wrong.
- To provide a **canonical reference**: Standard for truth.
- To promote **intrapersonal formation** of the counselor.

---

Your biblical reference column also provides you with an axiological reference, or “standards in the Bible for right and wrong,” and a canonical reference, which is “the standards for truth.” Many of our client’s questions regarding what they are struggling with are moral questions. Perhaps they had felt wronged by another, or perhaps they have engaged in wrong doing. Perhaps they’re not sure what the right thing to do is. They have come to us for guidance, so having biblical references are good beginning places to provide standards that need to help guide these troubled clients.

The last use in the biblical references is a use that is related to you. Your life as a counselor is to promote your intrapersonal formation. If you are going to be counseling other people and you see it as your ministry, the number one preparation is your own formation in the spirit of Christ. The careful study and meditation upon the Bible is one of the key resources for you; informing yourself in the spirit of Christ. And then in your clinical practice as you are spending time thinking and praying for clients, to use the METAMORPH grid as a way of focusing upon some biblical references that will help you to think about your clients in biblical terms.
Have you ever noticed that often our temptation always comes in relation to our strengths? We’re never tempted to do something that we’re not capable of doing. And the Bible is such a strong resource in counseling that there’s a temptation to misuse it. Now, I want to point to five potential problems in using the Bible in counseling. A first potential problem has to do with professional identity issues. Many times people come into counseling, even to Christian counseling, after other resources have failed them. Perhaps you’ll have clients come to you who have been to church and have even talked to a pastor, who have listened to sermons over and over, and have found that it just wasn’t enough or just wasn’t helpful at all. And so now they’re coming to you, a professional counselor, and if you begin just using the Bible with them, from their perspective, you’re just like the other resources they’ve already been to. They may say;” “Hey, I thought you were a counselor. Why are you not counseling me? I didn’t come just for you to read the Bible to me.” So it’s very important to be aware of what your client’s expectations are, and to understand how your use of the Bible fits in with your professional identity. A second potential trap is to use the Bible in a “preachy” way, where YOU do all the
talking, and where the Bible is used in an overbearing way, preventing rather than promoting dialogue with your clients. The third potential problem is using the Bible as a smokescreen to stay in a “safe zone.” As a Bible-believing Christian, you know you can count on the Word of God and you know that it is true. But this can also be a trap. You could use it as an excuse for failing to meet your clients where they are, or to not venture into those areas where you just do not know what to say or to do and you must trust the Holy Spirit to guide you. So you use the Bible to create a “buffer zone” away from areas you are uncomfortable dealing with. Then there is less chance for risky things to happen, such as the client just pouring out their feelings, or becoming very angry, or engaging in other unpredictable behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Five Potential Problems in Using the Bible in Counseling (cont.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. “Overconfidence” traps: We can always count on God’s Word, but we must be careful of our interpretations and applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Overreliance” phenomenon: Relying excessively on the Bible when other strategies might be more helpful to client at that moment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fourth potential problem has to do with overconfidence. Overconfidence is always a trap. We know we can count on God’s word, but we must be very careful of ourselves. The Bible in its application is an interpretive process, so we have to be very careful to not just slap a Bible verse onto someone’s problems, or make a comment on something because we are sure the Bible supports us without reflecting on the context of the verse. We have to show some wisdom and humility, not overconfidence. The fifth potential area is overreliance on the Bible. This may sound strange since we as Christians depend on God’s living word in our lives. But it is quite possible to rely excessively on the Bible in counseling when other strategies may be
Welcome to this second lecture in Week five of COUN 506. This time we are going to focus on principles related to using the Bible for spiritual formation. It is critical that Christians counselors read the Bible on a regular basis, that we have some sort of daily rule for a quiet time and reading the Bible. But for all of us, we can always become better students of the Bible, and we can all learn better ways to use the Bible as an open door for God to form us more into the image of Christ. This is also true for our clients for whom we know that the Bible can be a life-changing experience, they will need some specific guidance about how to study the Bible. While we hope that none of our clients will be spiritually immature in their use of the Bible, counseling
is an opportunity to show them better ways in which the scriptures can come alive and become a tool for their spiritual formation.

Let’s look at the “formative” idea of reading of the Bible. This is NOT the same as informative reading. When you do your personal Bible study, that can be seen as “informative” reading. However, when we engage in personal Bible reading, this is more formative for us. Here, we are not so much interested in knowing what the Bible says as in learning what the Bible says to us. So, it is important to know that formative reading of the Bible is less like reading a textbook and more like reading a letter from a close friend. When we read a letter from a close friend we enjoy the feeling of it, we meditate upon it, we save those letters and savor the words, we look for the meaning between the lines. Reading the Bible is more like that. We want to know what the Bible says about our lives, or not just reading the Bible but allowing the Bible to read us. To be asking as you move through the scripture, “What does this say about me?” Where is my life? Where is my part of this story? As you can see, when you read in this way you cannot be rushing through, because to read formatively is not to read for volume. It is to read for the quality of the experience, not the quantity of how many chapters you can cover in a single sitting. This means it may be just a verse or two at a time, and then reading it many times. Sometimes it may just be a word that grabs your attention, through which God is speaking to you. It is learning to abide, really abide with God. Also, reading the scriptures formatively is an
experience of receiving. As a counselor, you spend your day giving and giving and giving; sometimes to the point that you have nothing more to give. For many of the clients that you see, their lives are completely spent. They feel that they are being pulled down by forces all around them. This may come from major stresses, or being in dysfunctional relationships, or because of overwhelming addictions. This may also come from trying to deal with any mental health problems they have, such as depression or anxiety, that have become like bondages in which they are now stuck. They need more than anything else to receive grace and guidance and transformation of the heart. This is what the experience of formative reading is really all about.

We do face some significant obstacles to formative reading. These are habits of thought, of the heart, of attitudes that get in the way of a fresh experience of God’s spirit through the Word. Sometimes we approach the Bible with unrealistic expectations, such as when we are trying to use Scripture in a way that it was not designed to be used. For example, the Bible talks about personalities, but we would not use it as a textbook on personality. Our expectations need to be that God is going to speak to our hearts, but that it will not have a magical quality to it. God will exercise the spirit’s freedom and speak to us as He sees fit. Sometimes we get impatient for
results. We want instant results in everything we do. Now this is a very common quality you find in clients who come for counseling. They want to meet with you once, or at the most twice, and find answers to deep problems that they have been troubled with for years. They expect a few good words from you, a Bible verse here or there, a prayer, and they’re fixed and done. That is not the way that deep problems are solved and it is rarely the way God works. Let’s be honest; sometimes, we’re just lazy. We have become complacent which results in a “spiritual deafness” regarding God’s Word. It’s when we pick up the Bible to read, it’s just empty words to us on the page.

Deep learnings and deep truths of life cannot be learned overnight. They can’t be learned by hearing them one time. **They require spiritual discipline.** They require a return to the Word over and over. As you’re working with clients in formative reading, one of the keys is to help them develop beginning discipline, even just five minutes a day, to learn to spend time in the Word of God. Sometimes, we are not able to engage in formative reading because we have control issues. We are unable to let go, and so we start trying to use the Bible as a tool to solve all our problems. And it is not that we are trying to learn to give control of our lives to God, but we are trying to use the Word of God as one more tool for us to stay in control, and to control our own problems.
Sometimes we have what the desert teachers referred to as **depreciative desires**. Desires like competing and comparing and analyzing, or excessive attachment to consolations. We just want someone to take care of us, or to have things our way. Often we’re just plain exhausted. Sometimes one of the most spiritual things that post-modern Americans can do is to go take a nap. You may feel that yourself as you do this class while having a job, raising a family, and having a life. You must take as good care of yourself as you can. So as you read the Bible, if you find that there is just not an openness to it, or you just find that it is a lifeless book for you, it may be that you are simply exhausted from your over-active life. Sometimes we deny our limitations. We can have a tendency to believe we are more able to do things and have more understanding than we really do. We may need a dose of humility when we come to the Word to realize that God can teach us, but we will never teach God. Sometimes we are over-serious or we pre-judge the scriptures. We think we know what it says, or that we must figure out everything that is in the Bible. There are many troubling texts that scholars have tried to understand for years with no resolution. But we must believe that God is revealing it day by day and moment by moment to His people, so it is important to let go of that kind of those attitudes towards the scriptures.

Now that we’ve talked about obstacles, let’s look at some positive conditions to formative reading. Positive qualities, such as humility, gives us an openness, a teachability, and a realism about the Bible. An important verse for our consideration here is that: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” We also need patience. Formative reading is
reading and re-reading, it is a waiting upon God. To believe in the many promises in the Bible, that “those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.” Positive respect for the Bible initiates positive respect for God. An obedient spirit is an important positive condition. It goes right along with trusting God, knowing that God is able and that God is working. There is also the knowledge that we can let go of our strict reliance on ourselves, and not feel that we have to figure everything out, or think everything through until it makes sense. In formative reading, a positive condition is to trust the Holy Spirit to guide us as God sees fit, and to loosen our reliance on our own intellect and analysis. One thing we can be sure to expect is the experience of Grace. So for each text we come to, we know it is good news in some way. Now the opposite condition of complacency is persistence in studying the Bible, and to not give into boredom even when the biblical text you are reading does not seem to be the most exciting. Reading though Numbers may not be as interesting as Genesis, but both books serve a purpose. Reading the Bible formatively requires courage. It requires the willingness to ask the hard questions about how to apply it to our daily lives. The last positive condition when reading is to have attitudes of hopefulness and joyfulness. To be ready to receive whatever God is going to give you, to expect a surprise, to believe that God is going to do something in the here and now that exceeds anything you might have thought about.

For some Protestant Christians, the very word meditation raises warning alarms, because meditation has been spoken of in new age and spiritual materials that are not connected with
Christian meditation involves learning to let go of the need to always understand in favor of trusting God’s character and promises. A common complaint of clients in counseling is that they just want to understand. Take for example a client who comes for counseling to deal
with the grief, anger, and depression at having suddenly lost their spouse. Often someone in such a circumstance will say, “I just want to understand why? But some things are not going to be understood, at least not immediately. Christian meditation is an important technique for helping people to relinquish that need to understand in favor of trusting that God is working and that He has only the best in mind for us. Finally, Christian meditation is an important way to overcome our preoccupation with clock time and to learn to relax. So many of us have an “urgency addiction.” We spend much of our lives rushing around with more commitments than we can possibly honor, that living in such an urgent, frantic way becomes a way of life, similar to an addiction. In Christian meditation, we intentionally let go of urgency and distractions in our lives, and simply focus upon the Word of God. To finish up this segment, one last thing is to begin to find a helpful and brief scripture which you can teach your clients to memorize and on which they can meditate. If they are not prepared to memorize it you can write it out on a little flash card for them and they can use it in that way. One such scripture is Psalm 42:10, “Be still and know that I am God.” Short and to the point. I hope this lecture on the use of the Bible for spiritual formation has been helpful to you as a counselor, and will provide some helpful resources for your clients.

**Week Six Lecture One**

Welcome to week 6 of COUN 506. This week’s focus is on prayer and Christian counseling. In this and the second lecture, we will look at specific ways that prayer is used in counseling, and seek to understand how we can become a more prayerful people and how we can help connect our clients with God through prayer.
A starting point for us is to focus on a working definition of prayer as we might use in Christian counseling. There have been thousands of books written on prayer. The Lord himself was approached by His disciples with a simple request, “Teach us how to pray.” Now these men had watched Jesus raise people from the dead. They had watched Him calm a raging sea and stormy weather. They had watched Him multiply bread and fish to feed a multitude. They had watched Him heal lepers and the blind, and drive out demons. But somehow they perceived that the real source of power in Jesus came from His prayer life, so they didn’t ask “Teach us to do miracles, teach us to calm the weather,” they said “Teach us how to pray.” And that is still our request today that more and more on a daily basis we might turn to Christ Himself as our Teacher in prayer. Along the way, many people have been used by Christ to teach us about prayer and the life of prayer. St. Augustine was one of those great teachers. In summarizing much of his thinking and teaching about prayer he said: “True whole prayer is nothing but love.” He was cutting through layers of discussion about techniques of prayer, about proper wording or posture, places or methods of prayer, to say that prayer is our connection with the love of God. Now there is a difference between the practice of prayer in the name of Jesus, and human prayerfulness. Some of you may remember the days following the September 11 terrorist attacks? Churches and chapels were nearly full even with people who claimed to believe in nothing, but were there praying for relatives, friends, and loved ones who had yet to be found in the rubble of the World Trade Center destruction. There was a tremendous out-pouring of human prayerfulness, an instinctive response in times of great crisis and overwhelming need for a contact with something or someone “Greater than us.” There was a strong desire for a transcendent experience, for help from beyond. But Christian prayer is more specific than that. To pray as a Christian is to believe in the power of the name of Jesus. To pray as a Christian is to pray through Jesus. Thanks be to God that the only Intercessor we have is Jesus Himself, who is described as being at the right hand of the Father, and He is always interceding for the His people.
Now there is a great paradox in prayer as we seek to define what it is. Prayer is both something we do and something we couldn’t possibly do; it is a gift we receive. In church you’ve heard stories of believers who were called “prayer-warriors,” or that they had the “gift of prayer.” That is an accurate way of speaking of a praying person; some people do seem to have a special anointing, a special gift for prayer. But prayer is something that all Christians can do, and are commanded to do. It is an activity that we can learn and that we can teach others to do. Prayer is a basic receptive attitude. This is not what we say, nor in our posture, or any special words we use, but it is waiting on God, waiting to receive what He has for us. Also, prayer is a listening attitude. It is responding to the Divine Voice and Call in our lives. Christian counseling always involves God as the powerful third party in healing and change. So prayer is that ultimate therapeutic relationship in which we are connected to God in the work that we do. Dallas Willard summarized prayer by describing it as “the way of the request.” He offers the Biblically-grounded insight that prayer is really a matter of asking for what we need. “Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you.”
NOW, Some have asked, if clients are paying for their therapy, should we pray with them? Well McMinn points out that the more appropriate question is, “which forms of prayer should we use with which clients, and under what circumstances?” As Christian counselors, we should pray as part of our work. The real questions revolve more around: “How should we pray? How should we draw our clients in? In what ways can prayer be used to open up the hearts of people so that the Holy Spirit might speak powerfully into their lives?” Part of the training and supervision we receive should teach us ways to show appropriate caution so that we do not violate the empowerment of the client’s ability to self-direct, or so that we do not attempt to draw people into praying in ways that are not appropriate to their level of spiritual development. What about if we’re dealing with nonbelievers, do we still pray for them? We certainly do, but how? “Do we pray out loud with them in the session? Do we pray silently? Do we pray outside of the counseling session?” Those are just some of the questions you must wrestle
On the next several slides are laid out a few points that compare the processes of “outside-in” change with “inside-out” change. For long-term, transformational change and redemption, the “inside-out” process is key. This is not intended to dismiss or do away with the importance of therapeutic techniques that work from the “outside-in.” Those are very important to help move clients towards “inside-out” change. When speaking of “outside-in” change, people often go through what therapists refer to as dislocating experiences, such as the death of a loved one or a terrible tragedy. The counselor hopes to use a dislocating experience to create a moment in which a person might be teachable, to use it as a way to break through the numbness in their life, or to break habits that are causing problems. Another way people may go through “outside-in” change is the idea of hitting bottom. You hear this term used in addiction circles, such as in the belief that an alcoholic will finally go for alcohol rehab or start getting involved with Alcoholics Anonymous when they can go no lower. But hitting rock-bottom varies with each person. Sometimes it takes the loss of a job. Sometimes the bottom comes when a spouse has had enough and walks out, taking the children with them and leaving them alone. Or maybe the individual has been arrested for a number of DUI’s and now has lost their driver’s license. Sometimes the bottom comes when family and friends confront the alcoholic in the form of an intervention. Interventions can be very useful because they are intended to create a bottom without all of the dire consequences that might happen later on. Change therapies are methods that are actively involved in helping people to connect with their external pain so that they are more willing to change. The idea is that there is an internal balance that all of us have where we will continue doing the things we’re doing until they become so painful that the cost is too high to keep doing them, and then we’re willing to pay the cost to change.
Sometimes you hear speakers talk about acting your way into feeling and thinking. This can be a powerful “outside-in” type of change showing clients they can achieve the things they need by helping them to change their behavior. Recall that one of the nine dimensions of human functioning on the METAMORPH grid is action, or behavior of a person. So often a starting point when we want to help people see some immediate results and begin to build motivation through those results, is starting with their actions. We can do this by helping them through cognitive-behavioral therapy to identify troublesome behaviors. Now the remarkable thing is that as our behavior changes, our feelings and thinking can change too. We find that we now feel differently about ourselves. We now think in a clearer way, because we changed some small actions. Sometimes “outside-in” change also takes the form of what Willard refers to as condemnation engineering, meaning that in much of our lives we experience condemnation. That all around us we find judgmental attitudes, guilt-trips, nit-picking over every little thing. So we want to make sure we do not that to our clients. The one thing we can be sure of with every client we see is that each of them has experienced some form of condemnation in their life. We need to practice praying for them, as well as praying for ourselves that we would not have a condemning or judgmental attitude towards them either. It can be a real professional challenge when you see clients who have engaged in behavior that you consider to be repellent, to be able to receive them with true hospitality, to really be able to pray for them as an act of grace. However, if you find that you cannot get past a sense of condemnation toward a client because of what they have done, the professional and ethical requirement is to refer that person to someone else. You are not required to counsel every person that walks through your door. Now there are two downsides to “outside-in” change. One is if we misread our clients’ motivations, our efforts can come across as trying to force upon others good things. It is similar to the principle Jesus refers to when He talks about not casting your pearls before swine. What happens when you feed pearls to pigs? Well, it makes them sick because they can’t digest them.
So, you’ve not only lost your pearls, now the pigs are sick. This is what happens when we force good things on people that they’re not yet ready to receive. The second is that we have to be careful to not be more motivated than our clients, or we end up working harder than they do, and they still do not receive the change.

When we went over the METAMORPH grid, remember that the meta-theory behind it is a spiritual formation and soul-care model of healing. That is a model of healing based on an “inside-out” change. This is where prayer works within the “core self”; those areas of the person’s will, their conscience, the awakening of the image of God and the Holy Spirit within the person, the power to be found in a changed heart through Jesus. One key area of the core-self is the conscience, which is that area of our inner life in which we discern right from wrong. Now the problem is that true conviction must flow from the “inside-out.” If we’re trying to make someone feel convicted with our words, or trying to force “outside-in” change, then people make comments like, “Don’t preach at me!” or “You hypocrite, stop looking down on me!” For true conviction to work, people must feel like it is coming from them. In the same way, conversion to faith in Christ is an act of the will of a person; it must flow from a person’s heart. Paul, writing about this in 1st Corinthians 12 says, “No one says, Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” He was acknowledging how the Spirit of God alone works on the heart of a person to draw that person to the faith. So, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, stirring up the image of God through which each of us are created that really begins to move a person toward conviction then conversion, and toward the great purpose for which they were created. We help this “inside-out” change through prayer. Prayer is the divine request, and is a way for us to request a changed heart. We never demand, but are persistent and passionate about making our request known to God that He might change a person for their good, for His good, and for the good of the world. I hope this information has been useful. Continue to ponder the power of prayer in the lives of our clients.
Welcome to the second presentation of week 6 of COUN 506. Now we will look more carefully at therapeutic uses of prayer for psychological and spiritual health. We noted in the first segment that all Christian counselors are praying people, so our challenge is to discern the best ways to pray with and for our clients.

Here is the belief in a Trinitarian relationship in Christian counseling. This is the powerful truth that God is always the third party in what we do. It is God who provides all healing and who speaks through our prayers to connect with the Client. So we acknowledge that all healing comes from God as we pray, whether we are praying outside of sessions for clients, praying within counseling sessions, or using prayer as homework. Prayer is also an openness, an attitude of receptivity. Remember in the previous lecture that prayer is both a request and the ability to
receive God’s answers to that request? Prayer is also discernment. Sometimes we can be so obsessed with rationality and thinking and logic that we often forget that there are other forms of discernment. People use forms of intuitional and imaginative discernment, but God also provides Christians with prayerful discernment.

Prayer can be strong way to discern many aspects of life that elude our logical abilities.

Willard writes that “Prayer is also an adventure from false certainty to true uncertainty.” It sounds strange, but think for a moment about people you know who have been absolutely positive about certain facts in their lives that that turn out to be false or misreadings of what really happened. Or they have faith in a “can’t miss” stock or a business deal, and end up losing their investment. But in prayer we move from those types of false certainties in the material life to the true uncertainties of the spiritual life. The paradox we have is that the greatest certainty we can have is faith in God, which is an uncertainty because we do not know all the details and timing in the way that God will work. Prayer is intimacy with God and others. Theophan the Recluse developed a simple diagram many years ago. He drew in the sand a circle with lines running from the outside edge of the circle to a point in the center of the circle. Picture in your mind what a bicycle wheel looks like. He pointed out to his disciples that this diagram is the way in which our relationship with God works. As we move from our lives on the outside edge of the wheel on one of the lines, or “spokes,” towards God as the hub in the center, we are drawn closer to other people, the other spokes on the wheel. You cannot move towards the hub in the center, or God, without moving closer to others. So as we develop intimacy with God we also develop intimacy with other people. There are many way this happens, but prayer is one of the most powerful ways for this to take place.
Let’s review McMinn’s map for counseling again in which he focuses on helping clients to develop a healthy sense of self, a healthy sense of need, and a healthy openness to healing relationships, but now apply this map to prayer in counseling. When we are focusing on a healthy sense of self in a client, we are helping people to move beyond their self-absorption to focus on God. People WHO are depressed or going through times of real self-doubt are often drawn into being self-absorbed, only able to see themselves and their situation. However, this is in essence a negative form of pride. As Proverbs 3:34 says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” To be humble is to turn our focus away from ourselves and look to God to provide for us in ways that we cannot do so. Do you remember that phrase from an earlier lecture regarding Nouwen’s book, Reaching Out, when he talks about moving from “illusion to prayer?” Prayer helps each of us with our negative sense of self by breaking through the illusions of our immortality. We have these illusions that we are going to live forever, or that we are different from other people. Prayer helps us to see that our dependence in life is ultimately on God because He is the pathway to authentic intimacy. Now, there are some CAUTIONS regarding prayer that we need to keep in mind in the healthy development of self. Our goal in counseling is not to make clients dependent on us but to help them seek to become dependent on God. For instance, if we are the one who always prays in the counseling session, we may inadvertently create the image that we are the intercessor for the client, creating dependency issues. We can also feed inferiority issues if we are always praying and the client feels second-rate when they pray because of their lack of experience in praying out loud. This can also occur when we run into the paradox of trying to draw the client out in prayer actually makes them more uncomfortable, and they withdraw from us.
Developing a healthy sense of need in individuals is enhanced through prayer. Another therapeutic paradox is that in order to begin to heal we have to become aware of our brokenness. We have to realize that the way that we have been trying to help ourselves is never going to work. So, we need a power greater than ourselves, we need God in our lives. Jesus used an example of this dynamic when he told the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the book of Luke: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evil doers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. Why, I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But, the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to Heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” It is that kind of helplessness that can be found in true prayer. Helplessness in prayer is an openness to God. Also as we pray, we begin to build a true and healthy self-confidence based upon our confidence in God. Remember Jesus’ words in the 7th Chapter of Matthew: “Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened unto you. For everyone who asks, receives. He who seeks, finds. And to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” We can have a powerful confidence in the reliability of God’s character that when we have a need, God has an answer. Through prayer we can help our clients to catch a vision that God has for their lives. We can help them move from their grandiosity and self-centeredness to catch the real vision that God has for them. Now the CAUTION here is to help clients to avoid wallowing in their guilt and shame. It is imperative to work with them on issues of forgiveness, both that of forgiving others and receiving forgiveness.
It is also important to avoid the pitfall of magical thinking that if people would just pray in the right way they will get what they want when they want it, on their timing and on their terms. As a final caution, it is quite easy to fall into using prayer as a motivational pep-talk to help people feel momentarily better. While prayer does help make us feel better, we need to help clients understand that the real purpose of prayer is to connect with God.

Now let’s look at how prayer affects our healing relationships. When we pray in ways that are appropriate to a client’s level of development, it creates a healthier, more biblically-accurate view of God. It also draws attention to God as the only agent of transformation. Remember that in an earlier presentation we spoke about “inside-out” change. Specifically, prayer helps us to change our attitudes that are upward towards God, attitudes that are outward towards other people, and attitudes that are inward towards ourselves. CAUTIONS in this area are really a reminder about the dangers of dependency and concerns about breaching boundaries. Because prayer is an intimate activity, we always want to be very careful in terms of physical contact with clients when we pray. A final caution is that the focus in prayer should always fall on God, not the counselor.
On the next two slides are a number of forms of prayer, but note that the order in which they are listed is a very intentional. The list starts with forms of prayer that pose the least risk and moves to those forms that can have the most risk when used in counseling. Now what is meant by risk? Here we are talking in terms of prayer having a downside, of the possibility of creating negative consequences of dependency, or of fracturing the therapeutic relationship, or breaching a boundary, or prayer used to “bully” clients. For example, if you have a client who is not ready to pray in an deeply intense way and you are insisting that they do so, this can be an unethical decision on your part. So, let’s look at these forms of prayer. Certainly the counselor can pray outside of sessions for every client, and we don’t need their permission to pray for them. As a matter of fact, sometimes the client who would not understand and who would not give permission may be the one who most needs prayer.

Using this mode of prayer allows us to intercede, or pray for discernment about how to understand this client or how the Lord might want us to work with them. And, we can also pray for a deeper compassion if we are dealing with a client where we are struggling with a spirit of condemnation or feeling judgmental. We also have the ability to pray silently in the session. One of the great fears, usually for those who are new to counseling, is what to do with silence in a session. The tendency is to rush in and feel we have to have to say something. It is much better to let silence do its work and to use that time to pray for your client. Now a third way is to use prayer as homework by encouraging them meditate outside of the counseling sessions.

We spoke about this earlier, and this can be a very helpful way of teaching people who are dealing with anxiety or despair or compulsions to learn how to meditate in a way that is not only physically and psychologically relaxing, but in a way that creates an open door to the heart for the Lord.
Meditation and imagery in the session is riskier, but yet another way to use prayer. It offers opportunities for the healing of emotions, for forgiveness to take place under the direction of a therapist, and is a way to specifically work with thought restructuring. Praying the Scriptures is a method of using the Bible to help clients claim specific promises that build confidence in the character of God. But we do need to teach them that God’s timing is not their timing. And the last form of prayer is intercessory prayer in the session. Here is where we pray specifically with the client for their healing, for the therapeutic relationship, and to ask God to be the one to change and to heal. I hope that these presentations on prayer in Christian Counseling have been helpful to you, and I encourage you to review these slides again for more insights.