



*An Integrative Model
for Practitioners*

P. GREGG
BLANTON

EXCERPT

IVP Academic

Contemplation and Counseling ***An Integrative Model for Practitioners***

April 2, 2019 | \$24, 232 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-2865-4

What is contemplative prayer? What does it mean for counseling?

As interest in contemplative thought is growing among Christians, it is time to consider the place of contemplative prayer within the field of counseling. Can contemplative prayer be integrated into therapeutic work? If so, how? How can this spiritual practice be used as a counseling intervention? Is the counselor's own practice of contemplative prayer important? If so, why? What exactly is contemplative prayer?

As we entertain these questions, an even larger issue inspires us. Can contemplative prayer actually serve as a foundation upon which to build a new approach to counseling? Does it provide clear insight into the client's situation? Might it offer us sound guidance for establishing a therapeutic relationship? Can contemplative prayer illuminate the purposes of counseling and suggest interventions for accomplishing these goals?

A robust model requires the use of many parts, and the integration of these various elements is essential. Because of their differences, these diverse components may not fall easily into place. The very essence of these divergent features can create tension, but my goal in this project is to achieve some degree of equilibrium and complementarity between these different pieces. And, as a result, I hope that we will create a sound and effective way of working with clients.

This new paradigm brings together many disparate components. It works to build an alliance among science, theology, and Christian contemplative thought in an effort to create a dynamic approach to counseling. It balances various dimensions of the human person: emotion, cognition, and action. It highlights and honors both the conscious and unconscious functions of the mind. And, by understanding the power of both words and silence, it equalizes and harmonizes their functions.

Ultimately, contemplative prayer leads us to the power of love. At each step along the way, as we construct a contemplative way of counseling, we are confronted with the healing capacity of love. How we view our clients, the ways we relate with them, and the strategies we use to help them change are all informed by our loving search for God in contemplative prayer.

In chapters one and two, I introduce the three voices that you will hear throughout this book. They are science, theology, and Christian contemplative thought. As we listen to the dialogue between these three disciplines, we discover complementary ideas that form the structures for this novel approach to counseling.

Chapters three and four offer an integrative understanding of the client's situation. The human person is multidimensional: physical, mental, spiritual, soulful, and relational. How does this viewpoint help us assess the client's relationships with God, others, and self? And, what mechanisms of change are revealed by our balanced perspective?



Alisse Wissman, print publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or awissman@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, broadcast and online publicity
800.846.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com

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In the fifth chapter, we arrive at seven qualities needed of counselors. We discover that these traits are the product of a regular and consistent practice of contemplative prayer. So this raises the following questions: Do counselors who employ this new contemplative model need to engage in contemplative prayer themselves? If so, how do they go about establishing their own practice?

Based upon a multidimensional and integrative understanding of counseling, chapters six and seven reveal the core skills of this innovative paradigm. We see how a contemplative view of the human experience sheds light on the therapeutic process. Eleven fundamental interventions are examined in detail, one of them being the hallmark of this original approach: teaching contemplative prayer.

Bringing together the principles, practices, and basic tenets of the contemplative-oriented method of counseling, chapter eight sets forth a four-stage process for helping clients change. At each step along the way, we consider basic questions: (1) What is the client's process? (2) What are the counselor's objectives? (3) What is the nature of the counselor-client relationship? (4) What interventions are employed?

Chapter nine examines the element that pervades every aspect of this new method of counseling: love. This is a model by and for love. Once again, we approach our discussion from three angles: scientific, theological, and contemplative. We discover how love informs our view of human beings, the therapeutic relationship, counseling strategies, and the goal of counseling.

Speaking in unison, theology and science are calling counselors to a deeper engagement—on both personal and professional levels—with Christian contemplative prayer. This is my invitation to you as well. I have two wishes for you. First, I hope you will experience contemplative prayer for yourself. Second, I trust that the ideas of this book will support you as you venture into a contemplative-oriented approach to counseling.

—Taken from the introduction



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