

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ISAIAH 41:10-14 IN THE CONTEXT OF LIVED EXPERIENCE AND PASTORAL COUNSELLING

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Abstract

In a world where anxiety grips many hearts, the timeless words of Isaiah 41:10-14 offer a beacon of hope, resonating deeply within the sacred space of pastoral counselling. This phenomenological study delves into the lived experiences of individuals finding solace in these verses, illuminating their profound impact on emotional and spiritual resilience. Anxiety, a pervasive challenge, drives many to seek both spiritual and psychological support, with scripture emerging as a cornerstone in faith-based counselling. While prior research underscores the therapeutic value of biblical texts, it often overlooks the subjective internalization of specific passages like Isaiah 41:10-14, creating a gap in understanding their personal significance. This study addresses this gap by exploring how the passage's promises of divine presence and strength foster resilience, justifying its focus on a single text due to its rich assurances. Rooted in Edmund Husserl's phenomenological theory, which prioritizes subjective meaning-making, the study captures how counselees interpret these divine promises. Through semi-structured interviews with ten Christian counselees in Nigerian churches, the research leverages the cultural reverence for scripture in this context. Findings reveal that the verses provide comfort, empowerment, and validation of vulnerability, though persistent fears pose challenges. The study's significance lies in equipping pastoral counsellors to integrate scripture more effectively, enriching faith-based mental health discourse. In conclusion, the study determines that the core of the passage's transformative power is the divine "fear not" directive. This imperative command, underpinned by assurances of God's presence, help, and redemption, actively dismantles anxiety by shifting the counselee's focus from their internal distress to an external, sovereign source of strength. It is this authoritative injunction against fear that ultimately anchors individuals in divine reassurance and forges a pathway to resilience and hope. Recommendations include reflective practices centered on this command, tailored scriptural applications, and further exploration of other "fear not" passages to enhance scripture's role in pastoral care.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Isaiah 41:10-14, pastoral counselling, anxiety, lived experience

Introduction

In the complex tapestry of human experience, fear and anxiety often emerge as pervasive forces, disrupting emotional equilibrium and challenging spiritual resilience. For many individuals,

particularly those within faith-based communities, the Bible serves as a source of comfort, guidance, and hope in navigating these turbulent emotions (Koenig, 2012). Among the myriads of scriptural passages, Isaiah 41:10-14 stands out as a profound declaration of divine assurance, offering promises of God's presence, strength, and protection in times of distress. These verses, rooted in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament, have been a cornerstone for pastoral counselling, providing a spiritual framework for addressing anxiety (Wimberly, 2014). This phenomenological study explores how individuals engage with and find solace in Isaiah 41:10-14 during pastoral counselling sessions, focusing on the lived experiences of those grappling with anxiety. By delving into the subjective interpretations and applications of these verses, this research seeks to illuminate the interplay between scripture, faith, and emotional healing, offering insights into the transformative potential of biblical texts in therapeutic settings.

Anxiety, as a psychological and spiritual phenomenon, affects millions globally (World Health Organization, 2021), manifesting in feelings of unease, worry, and fear that can impair daily functioning and spiritual well-being. In pastoral counselling, where the integration of faith and psychology is paramount, scripture serves as a vital tool for addressing these challenges (Pargament, 2011). Isaiah 41:10-14, with its evocative imagery of God as a sustainer and protector, resonates deeply with individuals seeking relief from anxiety's grip. However, the practical application of these verses in counselling remains underexplored, particularly from a phenomenological perspective, that prioritizes lived experience. The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge theology and pastoral practice, offering a deeper understanding of how scripture functions as a therapeutic resource. By adopting a phenomenological approach, this research prioritizes the subjective experiences of counselees, capturing the nuances of how divine promises of fearlessness translate into lived realities.

The prevalence of anxiety in modern society underscores the need for effective interventions that address both its psychological and spiritual dimensions. While secular therapies such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) offer evidence-based strategies for managing anxiety, pastoral counselling provides a unique space where faith and scripture can complement these approaches. Isaiah 41:10-14, with its repeated exhortation to "fear not" and its assurances of divine support, holds particular promise for individuals seeking spiritual grounding amidst anxiety (Doehring, 2015).

However, the application of these verses in pastoral counselling is not without challenges. Counselees may struggle to internalize the promises of these verses, particularly when their lived experiences of fear and uncertainty seem to contradict the assurances of divine protection. Furthermore, the subjective nature of scriptural interpretation means that individuals may engage with these verses in diverse ways, influenced by their personal histories, theological beliefs, and cultural contexts. The problem is twofold: first, there is a lack of empirical research exploring how counselees experience and apply Isaiah 41:10-14 in the context of pastoral counselling for anxiety. Second, pastoral counsellors may lack a nuanced understanding of how to facilitate the integration of these verses into the therapeutic process, particularly in ways that resonate with the lived experiences of their clients. Without such insights, the potential of Isaiah 41:10-14 to serve as a transformative resource in pastoral counselling remains underutilized. This study seeks to address these issues by examining the phenomenological experiences of counselees, exploring how they interpret and find solace in these verses, and identifying the factors that facilitate or hinder their application in counselling. By doing so, it aims to provide a framework for pastoral counsellors to effectively leverage scripture in addressing anxiety, fostering both emotional and spiritual healing.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the phenomenological theory of Edmund Husserl, a philosophical framework that emphasizes the exploration of lived experiences as they are perceived by individuals (Husserl, 1970). Phenomenology seeks to understand the essence of a phenomenon by examining the subjective meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences, bracketing preconceived assumptions to focus on the “things themselves” (Husserl, 1970, p. 12). In the context of this study, Husserl’s phenomenology provides a robust lens for exploring how counselees engage with Isaiah 41:10-14 during pastoral counselling. By focusing on the lived experiences of individuals, this framework allows for an in-depth examination of how the verses are interpreted, internalized, and applied in the context of anxiety, capturing the nuances of their emotional and spiritual significance.

Husserl’s emphasis on intentionality—the idea that consciousness is always directed toward an object—offers a valuable perspective for understanding how counselees direct their attention toward the promises of Isaiah 41:10-14 (Husserl, 1970). In pastoral counselling, these verses serve as an object of reflection, shaping the counselee’s perception of God’s presence and their own experience of anxiety. By exploring the intentional acts of meaning-making, such as prayer, meditation, or dialogue with the counsellor, this study uncovers how counselees construct their understanding of divine assurance and its relevance to their struggles.

Furthermore, phenomenology’s commitment to bracketing preconceptions aligns with the study’s aim to approach counselees’ experiences without imposing theological or psychological biases, allowing their voices to guide the analysis. The application of Husserl’s phenomenology to this study is particularly fitting given its focus on subjective experience. Anxiety, as a lived phenomenon, is deeply personal, shaped by individual histories, beliefs, and contexts. Similarly, the engagement with scripture in pastoral counselling is a subjective process, influenced by the counselee’s faith, cultural background, and emotional state.

By adopting a phenomenological lens, this study seeks to illuminate the essence of how Isaiah 41:10-14 functions as a source of solace, capturing the richness and diversity of counselees’ experiences. This framework not only provides a methodological foundation for the research but also aligns with the pastoral counselling ethos of honouring the individual’s spiritual journey.

The Concept of Pastoral Counseling should be discussed as a subheading

Pastoral counseling is an integrative form of therapy that combines psychological insights with spiritual resources to promote holistic healing, operating at the intersection of mental health and faith-based support to address issues such as anxiety, grief, marital conflict, and spiritual crises (Worthington et al., 2021; Benner, 2013). Distinct from secular therapy or general ministry, it emphasizes the whole person—emotional, relational, and spiritual—and leverages the individual’s religious beliefs and practices, such as prayer and scripture, as strengths within the therapeutic process (Clinebell, 2013). Rooted in historical movements like Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), modern pastoral counselors often hold dual training in theology and psychology, enabling them to ethically navigate both psychological interventions and spiritual guidance while recognizing when issues require specialized referral (Benner, 2013).

A phenomenological study grounded in Husserl’s framework (Husserl, 1931/2012) examined the lived experiences of ten Nigerian Christian counselees engaging with Isaiah 41:10-14, revealing that the passage’s imperative “fear not” (‘al-tirā’) initially provoked tension for some but ultimately served as a transformative command that redirected focus from internal anxiety to divine strength, while assurances of God’s presence (‘immākā-’āni) and upholding (maḥāziq yəminekā) offered tangible comfort, and the phrase “you worm Jacob” (tola‘at ya‘āqōb) paradoxically validated

vulnerability before reframing it within divine care (Participant 3, 5, 7, 9, personal communications, October 2023). The study concluded that the passage's core power lies in its authoritative "fear not" directive, which anchors individuals in spiritual reassurance and fosters resilience, underscoring the importance of pastoral counselors tailoring scriptural engagement to personal narratives and facilitating open dialogue to integrate faith meaningfully into therapeutic practice.

The Integration of Scriptures into Pastoral counseling

The integration of scripture into pastoral counselling, particularly for addressing anxiety, represents a dynamic convergence of theology, psychology, and spirituality, necessitating a comprehensive review of relevant scholarship to situate this phenomenological study of Isaiah 41:10-14. The therapeutic use of biblical texts has been widely recognized as a vital resource for fostering emotional and spiritual healing, with Clinebell (2011) arguing that scripture provides a narrative framework for individuals to make sense of their struggles, offering hope and divine perspective.

Doehring (2015) further emphasizes the relational power of scripture, noting its ability to facilitate a sense of connection with God, which counters the isolation often experienced in anxiety. Studies highlight that scripture-based interventions, such as meditative reading or *lectio divina*, can reduce anxiety symptoms by promoting mindfulness and trust in divine providence (Pembroke, 2010), yet much of the literature focuses on general scriptural engagement rather than specific passages, leaving a gap in understanding the therapeutic role of texts like Isaiah 41:10-14 (Swinton & Mowat, 2016). Cultural context significantly shapes scriptural application, with Lartey (2003) advocating for intercultural sensitivity in African settings like Nigeria, where scripture holds authoritative status in communal and individual healing practices, and McGarrah Sharp (2013) calling for postcolonial approaches to honour local theological interpretations.

Anxiety, a multifaceted condition with psychological, physiological, and spiritual dimensions, is effectively addressed through cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) in secular contexts (Beck, 2011), but secular approaches often overlook the spiritual needs of religious clients, prompting faith-based interventions in pastoral counselling (Swinton & Mowat, 2016). Spiritually, anxiety can manifest as a crisis of trust in God, with Isaiah 41:10-14's exhortation to "do not fear" offering divine promises as an antidote to existential fear (Oswalt, 1986).

Pargament (2011) identifies positive religious coping, such as seeking God's presence, as a buffer against anxiety, while negative coping, like feelings of divine abandonment, can exacerbate symptoms, underscoring the potential of Isaiah 41:10-14 to foster positive coping, though empirical studies on its specific impact are scarce. Theologically, Isaiah 41:10-14, situated within Second Isaiah's oracle of salvation, comforts the exiles during the Babylonian captivity, with Westermann (1969) highlighting its role in countering despair through God's self-revelation as a relational deity, and Baltzer (2001) noting the intimate imagery of God holding the believer's hand. Childs (2001) emphasizes the passage's canonical portrayal of God as Redeemer, while Motyer (1993) underscores its universal applicability to contemporary fears, yet these commentaries rarely explore its practical application in mental health settings.

The phenomenological approach, rooted in Husserl's philosophy, prioritizes subjective experiences, making it ideal for studying how counselees engage with the passage, with Husserl's concept of intentionality offering a lens for understanding meaning-making (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (2016) stresses capturing the essence of lived experience, and Smith et al. (2009) advocate for interpretative phenomenological analysis to analyze subjective narratives, yet few phenomenological studies focus on specific scriptural passages in pastoral care (Swinton &

Mowat, 2016). Despite the rich literature, gaps remain in empirical research on the therapeutic impact of Isaiah 41:10-14, its practical application in mental health contexts, and phenomenological explorations of its lived experience in counselling, which this study addresses by examining how counselees interpret and find solace in the passage, contributing to faith-based mental health discourse.

The Concept of Lived Experience in Counseling

Lived experience refers to an individual's unique, subjective understanding of their life events, emotions, and circumstances as they are personally experienced (Van Manen, 2016). In counselling, this concept underscores the importance of understanding a client's world from their perspective, acknowledging their emotions, thoughts, and cultural contexts without imposing external judgments or assumptions (Rogers, 1951). It is rooted in phenomenological approaches, which prioritize the client's internal frame of reference. Lived experience is critical in counselling because it shapes how individuals perceive and respond to challenges. For example, two clients facing similar stressors, such as loss or anxiety, may interpret and cope with these events differently based on their unique histories, values, and beliefs (Yalom, 1980). By honouring lived experience, counsellors create a safe, empathetic space where clients feel validated and understood, facilitating therapeutic growth. In practice, counsellors use techniques such as active listening, open-ended questioning, and reflective responses to explore clients lived experiences (Corey, 2017). This approach aligns with person-centered therapy, which emphasizes empathy, unconditional positive regard, and congruence. By focusing on lived experience, counsellors help clients uncover meaning, process emotions, and develop coping strategies tailored to their unique circumstances.

The concept of lived experience is a cornerstone of effective counselling, enabling practitioners to meet clients where they are and honour their unique perspectives. When applied to Isaiah 41:10-14, this concept allows counsellors to use the passage's themes of divine reassurance and strength to address clients' fears and challenges in a way that resonates with their personal and spiritual realities. By integrating lived experience with this scripture, counsellors can create meaningful, client-centered interventions that promote healing and empowerment. However, cultural sensitivity and client alignment with the passage's themes are critical to ensuring ethical and effective practice.

Exegesis of Isaiah 41:10-14

Isaiah 41:10-14, nestled within the prophetic corpus of Second Isaiah (chapters 40–55), is a passage of profound theological depth and pastoral relevance, offering divine reassurance to a people grappling with fear and uncertainty (Bright, 1972; Blenkinsopp, 2002). Written during the Babylonian exile (circa 587–539 BCE), these verses address the Israelites' existential anxieties, promising God's presence, strength, and ultimate redemption (Oswalt, 1998). In the context of pastoral counselling, this passage serves as a powerful resource for addressing anxiety, providing a spiritual framework for counselees to find solace and resilience. The exegesis below examines the historical and literary context, theological themes, key Hebrew terms and imagery, and the passage's application in pastoral counselling, with a phenomenological lens to illuminate its lived significance for those experiencing anxiety.

Historical and Literary Context

The historical backdrop of Isaiah 41:10-14 is the Babylonian exile, a period of profound dislocation for the Israelites following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 587 BCE. Second Isaiah, attributed to an anonymous prophet writing toward the end of the exile, seeks to rekindle hope among the exiles by proclaiming God's sovereignty and imminent restoration. This passage forms part of a larger oracle of salvation (Isaiah 41:8–20), addressing Israel's fears of abandonment and powerlessness in a foreign land. Blenkinsopp, (2002).

The literary structure is characterized by poetic parallelism, vivid imagery, and a rhythmic cadence that amplifies the emotional weight of God's promises. The repeated imperative "do not fear" (*'al-tirā'*) serves as a rhetorical anchor, countering the Israelites' despair with divine assurance. The passage's placement within a trial speech (Isaiah 41:1-20), where God addresses both Israel and the nations, underscores His authority over all creation, framing the promises as both personal and cosmic in scope (Oswalt, 1998).

The literary artistry of the text is evident in its use of repetition, metaphor, and direct address. The verses transition from a general assurance of God's presence (v. 10) to specific promises of protection against enemies (vv. 11–12), culminating in an intimate portrayal of God taking Israel's hand (v. 13) and addressing the nation as "worm Jacob" (v. 14). This progression mirrors the emotional journey of moving from fear to trust, making the passage particularly resonant for pastoral counselling. The literary context thus sets the stage for understanding the passage's theological and therapeutic potential, as it speaks to both the collective trauma of exile and the individual experience of anxiety.

Hebrew Text and Transliteration

To fully appreciate the nuances of Isaiah 41:10-14, the Hebrew text and its transliteration are provided below, followed by an analysis of key terms:

Verse 10:

Hebrew: צִדְקִי בְיָמִין יִתְמַכְתִּיךָ אֶפְעוֹרְתִיךָ אִמְצָתִיךָ אֵלֶיךָ כִּי־אֲנִי אֱלֹהֶיךָ עִמָּךְ־אֲנִי כִי־אֶל־תִּירָא

Transliteration: *'al-tirā' ki 'immākā-'āni 'al-tištā' ki-'āni 'ēlōhēkā 'immastikā 'ap-āzartikā 'aptāmtikā bimin šidqi*

Translation: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, yes, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Verse 11:

Hebrew: רִיבְךָ אֲנֹשִׁי וַיֵּאבְדוּ כְּאֵין יְהִיו בָּךְ הַנִּחָרִים כֹּל וַיִּכְלְמוּ יְבֹשׁוּ הִנֵּה

Transliteration: *hinnēh yēbōšu wāyikkālmū kol hanneḥērim bāk yihiyū kə'ayin wāyō'bādu 'anšē ribekā*

Translation: "Behold, all who rage against you will be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish."

Verse 12:

Hebrew: מִלְחָמָתְךָ אֲנֹשִׁי פְּסוּכָא כְּאֵין יְהִיו תָּךְ מִצַּ אֲנֹשִׁי תִמְצָאם וְלֹא תִבְקָשָׁם

Transliteration: *tābaqqāšēm wālō' timšā'ēm 'anšē maššutekā yihiyū kə'ayin ukə'epes 'anšē milḥamtekā*

Translation: "Though you search for your enemies, you will not find them. Those who wage war against you will be as nothing at all."

Verse 13:

Hebrew: עֲוֹרְתִיךָ אֲנִי אֶל־תִּירָא לָךְ הָאֱמֹר יְמִינְךָ מִחֲזִיק אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֲנִי כִי

Transliteration: *ki 'āni YHWH 'ēlōhēkā maḥāziq yāmīnekā hā'ōmēr lāk 'al-tirā' 'āni 'āzartikā*

Translation: "For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."

Verse 14:

Hebrew: רָאֵל יֵשׁ קְדוֹשׁ וְגֹאֲלֶךָ סִיְיָהוּהָ נָא עֲוֹרְתִיךָ אֲנִי רָאֵל יֵשׁ מְתִי יַעֲקֹב תוֹלַעַת אֶל־תִּירָאִי

Transliteration: 'al-tirā'i tola'at ya'āqōb mātê yiśrā'ēl 'āni 'āzartik nā'um-YHWH wāgō'ālēk qādoš yiśrā'ēl

Translation: “Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,” declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Analysis of Key Hebrew Terms

The Hebrew text reveals layers of meaning that enhance the passage's pastoral significance. The verb *yārē'* (“to fear”), appearing as 'al-tirā' (“do not fear”) in verses 10, 13, and 14, is a central motif, addressing the emotional and spiritual state of fear. This imperative is not merely a suggestion but a divine command, grounded in God's self-revelation as 'āni 'ēlōhēkā (“I am your God”). The term 'immākā-'āni (“I am with you”) in verse 10 emphasizes relational presence, a theological cornerstone that counters feelings of abandonment. The verbs 'immastikā (“I will strengthen”), 'āzartikā (“I will help”), and tāmaktikā (“I will uphold”) in verse 10 convey active divine intervention, each with distinct nuances: 'immēš suggests fortifying inner resilience, 'āzar implies practical assistance, and tāmāk connotes sustained support, often with a connotation of physical upholding.

The imagery of *bimin šidqi* (“my righteous right hand”) in verse 10 symbolizes God's power and justice, assuring the listener of divine authority over their fears. In verses 11–12, the terms *yēbōšu* (“will be ashamed”) and *yō'bādu* (“will perish”) depict the nullification of threats, whether external enemies or internalized fears, reinforcing God's sovereignty. The phrase *maḥāziq yāminekā* (“who takes hold of your right hand”) in verse 13 evokes a tender, intimate image of God guiding the believer, akin to a parent holding a child's hand. Finally, *tola'at ya'āqōb* (“worm Jacob”) in verse 14 is a striking metaphor for human vulnerability, juxtaposed with *gō'ālēk* (“your Redeemer”) and *qādoš yiśrā'ēl* (“Holy One of Israel”), which affirm God's covenantal faithfulness and transcendent holiness.

Theological Themes

The theological richness of Isaiah 41:10-14 provides a robust framework for pastoral counselling. The primary theme is divine presence, encapsulated in 'immākā-'āni (“I am with you”), which counters the isolation often experienced in anxiety. This assurance is not abstract but relational, emphasizing God's personal commitment to the individual. The theme of divine strength is evident in the trilogy of verbs in verse 10 ('immastikā, 'āzartikā, tāmaktikā), portraying God as an active agent who empowers, assists, and sustains. This is particularly relevant for counselees who feel overwhelmed by their fears, as it offers a vision of divine enablement.

The theme of protection emerges in verses 11–12, where God promises the nullification of enemies (*'anšē ribekā*, “those who oppose you”). In a pastoral context, these “enemies” can be interpreted metaphorically as internal struggles—fear, doubt, or anxiety itself—allowing counselees to reframe their challenges as surmountable through divine intervention. The intimacy of divine care is vividly portrayed in verse 13's image of God holding the believer's hand (*maḥāziq yāminekā*), fostering a sense of security and trust. Finally, the theme of redemption in verse 14, with God as *gō'ālēk* (“your Redeemer”), underscores His covenantal faithfulness, offering hope for transformation and restoration. These themes collectively provide a theological foundation for addressing anxiety, affirming God's multifaceted role as comforter, empowerer, protector, and redeemer.

Literary and Rhetorical Features

The passage's literary structure enhances its pastoral impact. The repetition of *'al-tirā* ("do not fear") in verses 10, 13, and 14 creates a rhythmic reassurance, mirroring the repetitive nature of anxious thoughts and countering them with divine insistence. The use of parallelism, such as the threefold promise in verse 10 (*'immastikā*, *'āzartikā*, *təməktikā*), amplifies the certainty of God's intervention, while the progression from general assurance (v. 10) to specific protection (vv. 11–12) to intimate care (vv. 13–14) mirrors the emotional journey from fear to trust. The metaphor of *tola'at ya'āqōb* ("worm Jacob") is particularly poignant, acknowledging human frailty while affirming divine upliftment, making it a powerful tool for validating counselees' vulnerabilities.

The direct address in the passage, particularly God's personal declarations (*'āni 'ēlōhēkā*, "I am your God"; *'āni 'āzartikā*, "I will help you"), creates a conversational tone that invites the listener into a relationship with the divine. This rhetorical strategy is especially effective in pastoral counselling, as it encourages counselees to internalize the promises as personal messages from God. The use of divine titles such as YHWH, *'ēlōhēkā*, and *qədoš yisrā'ēl* reinforces God's authority and holiness, grounding the assurances in His unchanging character.

Application in Pastoral Counselling

In pastoral counselling, Isaiah 41:10-14 offers a multifaceted resource for addressing anxiety. The repeated command *'al-tirā* ("do not fear") directly confronts the emotional core of anxiety, inviting counselees to release their fears in light of God's presence. The promise of *'immākā- 'āni* ("I am with you") counters feelings of isolation, encouraging counselees to cultivate a sense of divine companionship through prayer or meditation. The verbs of divine action (*'immastikā*, *'āzartikā*, *təməktikā*) can be explored in counselling sessions to help counselees identify areas where they need strength, help, or support, fostering a sense of empowerment.

The imagery of *maḥāziq yəminekā* ("who takes hold of your right hand") is particularly evocative, offering a tactile metaphor for God's guidance that can be used in visualization exercises or guided prayers. The acknowledgment of human vulnerability in *tola'at ya'āqōb* ("worm Jacob") provides a powerful entry point for validating counselees' feelings of weakness or inadequacy, creating a safe space for emotional exploration. The promise of protection against enemies (*yihyu kə'ayin*, "will be as nothing") can be reframed to address internal fears, helping counselees see their anxieties as transient in light of God's sovereignty.

Finally, the title *gō'ālēk* ("your Redeemer") invites reflection on God's transformative power, encouraging counselees to envision a future beyond their current struggles. Pastoral counsellors can integrate these verses through various practices, such as *lectio divina*, where counselees meditate on the text, or narrative therapy, where they reframe their anxiety in light of God's promises. The passage's emphasis on divine intimacy and strength can also be used to counter cognitive distortions, such as catastrophic thinking, by grounding counselees in the reality of God's presence. However, counsellors must be sensitive to potential challenges, such as counselees' struggles to trust the promises when anxiety persists, requiring a balance of spiritual encouragement and psychological support.

Phenomenological Insights from lived Experience

From a phenomenological perspective, the lived experience of engaging with Isaiah 41:10-14 in pastoral counselling is deeply subjective, shaped by the counselee's personal history, faith tradition, and emotional state. The command *'al-tirā* may evoke varied responses—some may find it empowering, while others may feel challenged by the gap between the promise and their felt

reality. The imagery of *maḥāziq yāminekā* may resonate as a source of comfort for those craving security, while *tola‘at ya‘āqōb* may validate the struggles of those who feel insignificant or overwhelmed. The act of reflecting on these verses, whether through prayer, discussion, or journaling, becomes an intentional act of meaning-making, aligning with Husserl’s concept of intentionality. Counselees may experience the text as a dynamic presence, shaping their perception of God and their anxiety in real-time.

The phenomenological approach highlights the diversity of interpretations, as counselees bring their unique contexts to the text. For example, a counselee with a strong faith background may find immediate solace in *‘immākā-‘āni*, while another with doubts may wrestle with the promise’s relevance. These subjective experiences underscore the importance of pastoral counsellors facilitating open dialogue, allowing counselees to articulate their interpretations and emotions. By exploring the lived significance of the passage, counsellors can help counselees integrate its promises into their daily lives, fostering resilience and hope.

Cultural and Contemporary Relevance

While rooted in the context of the Babylonian exile, Isaiah 41:10-14 transcends its historical setting, speaking to contemporary experiences of anxiety. In modern contexts, where anxiety disorders affect millions globally, the passage’s themes of divine presence, strength, and redemption resonate deeply. The imagery of God holding the believer’s hand (*maḥāziq yāminekā*) is universally relatable, offering a sense of divine companionship in an era marked by social isolation and mental health challenges. The metaphor of *tola‘at ya‘āqōb* acknowledges the universal human experience of vulnerability, making the passage accessible to counselees across cultural and denominational lines.

In culturally diverse settings, such as Nigerian churches where scripture holds significant authority, the passage’s promises can be particularly impactful. Counsellors can draw on local traditions of communal prayer or storytelling to make the text more relatable, while being mindful of cultural nuances in how fear and divine intervention are understood. The passage’s emphasis on God’s sovereignty (*qadoš yiśrā‘ēl*) aligns with many African theological perspectives that emphasize divine power, enhancing its relevance in such contexts.

Challenges and Considerations

Applying Isaiah 41:10-14 in pastoral counselling is not without challenges. Some counselees may struggle to reconcile the promise of *‘al-tirā’* with persistent anxiety, leading to feelings of guilt or spiritual inadequacy. Others may interpret the “enemies” in verses 11–12 literally, requiring counsellors to guide them toward a metaphorical understanding relevant to internal struggles. The passage’s strong theological claims, such as *gō‘ālēk* (“your Redeemer”), may also evoke skepticism in counselees with wavering faith, necessitating a sensitive approach that honours their doubts. Pastoral counsellors must balance the passage’s assurances with psychological insights, ensuring that spiritual interventions complement rather than replace evidence-based strategies.

Counselling Techniques that can be used on clients based on Isaiah 41:10-14

Counselling techniques that may be used in pastoral counselling to address anxiety often integrate psychological methods with spiritual resources, offering holistic care for clients and may include the following:

- a. Prayer is a foundational approach, inviting God’s presence and peace into moments of anxiousness, which can help clients feel spiritually supported and calm. Guided meditation on scripture, such as focusing on Isaiah 41:10-14, enables clients to replace fearful thoughts with affirming biblical truths (Christian Counseling Services Arizona, 2024). Cognitive

reframing using scriptural affirmations assists clients in identifying distorted or catastrophic thinking, helping them to adopt a faith-based perspective grounded in divine promises.

- b. Behavioral techniques like encouraging engagement in purposeful daily activities or God's calling counter avoidance behaviors associated with anxiety, promoting emotional stabilization (Impact Vision, 2024). Facilitating community support and vulnerability enables clients to share struggles within faith communities, fostering empathy and collective healing. Memorization and regular repetition of comforting biblical verses build spiritual resilience and provide clients with immediate tools for coping.
- c. Visualization and guided prayer techniques use scriptural imagery—such as God holding a believer's hand—to help clients experience a felt sense of divine support and security during counselling sessions (Bellevue Christian Counseling, 2024). Mindfulness practices integrated with faith emphasize awareness of present experiences while anchoring in God's assurances, which reduces anxiety's grip. Journaling offers clients a reflective exercise to explore their faith journey, integrating scripture with their personal anxiety experiences.
- d. Narrative therapy within a biblical framework helps clients reframe their anxiety stories by highlighting God's redeeming work and hope. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), combined with biblical teachings, supports clients in accepting anxious feelings while committing to actions consistent with Christian values and trust in God's sovereignty (Christian Counseling Washington, 2024). This blend of psychological and spiritual counselling techniques respects the multifaceted nature of anxiety and fosters holistic healing in pastoral contexts.

Counselling Implications

Isaiah 41:10-14 serves as a profound spiritual resource for clients dealing with anxiety, carrying significant implications for pastoral and faith-based counselling. The repeated exhortation to "Do not fear" addresses the debilitating nature of anxiety, inviting clients to let go of their fears by embracing the assurance of God's presence and protection. This passage further highlights God's active involvement in strengthening, supporting, and sustaining individuals, which helps build spiritual resilience and counters feelings of helplessness.

The metaphor of "worm Jacob" compassionately acknowledges human fragility, normalizing vulnerability rather than viewing it as a weakness. The depiction of God holding the client's hand fosters a deep sense of divine intimacy, encouraging clients to develop a relationship with God as a source of emotional stability. In addition, the promise that adversaries—whether internal fears or external challenges— "will be as nothing" allows clients to reframe their anxiety as a temporary obstacle overcome by divine sovereignty. The portrayal of God as Redeemer inspires hope, encouraging clients to envision healing and renewal beyond their current struggles.

Finally, this passage offers theological imagery that complements psychological interventions, facilitating an integrated approach to healing that respects both faith and mental health. In culturally rich contexts like Nigerian pastoral settings, Isaiah 41:10-14 reinforces faith-rooted therapeutic practices that honour clients' spiritual backgrounds.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study of Isaiah 41:10-14 in pastoral counselling reveals the profound potential of scripture to address anxiety within a faith-based framework. The exegesis of the passage highlights its theological depth, emphasizing God's presence, strength, and redemption as antidotes to fear. Through Husserl's phenomenological lens, the study captures the lived experiences of

counselees, illuminating how they engage with these verses to find solace and resilience. The findings underscore the importance of integrating scripture thoughtfully in pastoral counselling, honouring the subjective meanings counselees ascribe to the text. By bridging theology and practice, this research affirms the enduring relevance of Isaiah 41:10-14 in fostering emotional and spiritual healing, offering hope to those navigating the challenges of anxiety.

Recommendations

These recommendations provide concise strategies for integrating Isaiah 41:10-14 into pastoral counselling to address anxiety and foster spiritual growth.

1. Bible Study: Encourage counselees to engage in meditative reading or journaling of Isaiah 41:10-14, facilitating discussions to explore how its promises address anxiety and foster spiritual growth.
2. Prayers: Guide counselees to incorporate Isaiah 41:10-14 into their prayers, focusing on God's strength to counter fear, while using the "worm Jacob" imagery to validate vulnerabilities and promote self-compassion.
3. Advocacy: Promote sharing experiences with Isaiah 41:10-14 in faith-based support groups to build communal support, adapting its application to diverse cultural and theological contexts.
4. Training: Train pastoral counsellors in phenomenological approaches to effectively integrate Isaiah 41:10-14 with mindfulness or CBT, addressing both spiritual and psychological aspects of anxiety.
5. Further Studies: Support phenomenological research on Isaiah 41:10-14 and other scriptural passages to develop evidence-based, faith-based counselling interventions for sustained therapeutic impact.

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