

**DYNAMIC
MULTI DISCIPLINARY
JOURNAL OF NIGERIA**

ISSN: 2955-0564

VOL. 3 NO. 1, 2023

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THE 21ST CENTURY CHRISTIAN COUNSELLING EFFECTIVE TECHNIQUES FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

By

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Abstract

Christian counselling techniques for stress management have been helpful tool for effective stress management. Many Christians and non-Christians alike have benefited from this important tool that helps to overcome or reduce stress. Stress is a plague that can destroyed lives if left unmanaged. The good news is that stress can be effectively managed with Christian Counselling. The work analyses the importance of Christian Counselling in order to reshape lives from stress. The research uses descriptive method to explain types of stress, symptoms and causes of stress. The work meticulously analyses the 21st century effective Christian Counselling techniques and various Christian counselling techniques for stress management.

Keywords: Christian, Counselling, Techniques, Stress

Introduction

Christian Counselling is effective for strengthening one's relationship with God and managing stress. It has been at various times used to manage stress and mental health problems. It has been a veritable tool in the hands of pastors to help their members out of many problems ranging from marital, depression, drug addiction, and uncontrollable children to mention but a few. It is Christ's centred. It uses God's word as a basis for Counselling clients with any type of problem.

Brief Definition of Christian Counselling

The word Counselling comes from the word 'counsel' which translates to 'advice', or 'suggestion' in English. It was later extended to the term the 'king's counsel' which indicates the adviser to the king on state matters, (National Open University of Nigeria, 2008).

The idea of giving wise counsel has been old with us. This can be traced to the fourth century when Christians approach the priests for guidance and direction on issues of their faith and daily living. Modern Counselling has its root in the work of Sigmund Freud in Vienna in the 1880s, (National Open University of Nigeria, 2008).

The 'Christian' addition to 'Counselling-' indicates a field not only to cater for the Christian faith, church workers or way of church impacting its communities. This can also be in the form of a

social work. Christian Counselling began between late 1960s and early 1970s with the Biblical Counselling movement led by Adam. The book *Competent to Counsel* authored by Adam, advocated a Christian-based approach to Counselling which differed from the Psychological and Psychiatric solutions of the time (Wikipedia, 2014).

Christian Counselling, otherwise called Pastoral or Biblical Counselling, focuses on the care for the total being; body, spirit and emotion and maintains the values taught in the Bible. Christian Counselling is geared toward the overall goal of helping people to regain a sense of hope for their life that is found in Jesus Christ. Counselling combined the disciplines of theology as well as psychology during counselling, Christian counselling practitioners intertwine Biblical scripture and teachings to direct clients through difficult issues. It focuses on helping clients achieve a better understanding of themselves and their relationship with God while adopting Counselling concepts to overcome anxiety, depression, grief, problems in their relationships, and trauma (Real life Counselling, 2017).

Importance of Christian Counselling

1) Christian counselling recognizes God

While many secular counsellors may update themselves in contemporary psychological books on a particular issue, Christian counsellors accept that the inerrancy word of God provides principles that can lead to abundant life in Christ mentioned in scripture. Christian counsellors do not count on life journeys alone (Shaw, 2018).

2) Christian counselling digs into the root of the problem

Christian Counselling will not only look into the mental, emotional, and relational aspects of your life, but will also examine the spiritual side of these facets. With this, you will not only learn to manage certain aspects of your life well, but you will be able to dig into the roots of the many problems. Including the spiritual perspective will help to have a bigger of these roots and discover even more healing (Hope Connection Counselling & Therapy, 2020).

3) Christian counselling helps to set faith goal

A greater proportion of Counselling is problem-solving and goal setting. In traditional Counselling service goals that relate to your personal behaviour or relationships with others are set. But within Christian Counselling, you also have opportunity to set faith goals. Christian Counselling does not eliminate other important goals you make in your life but only includes other steps that you want to take to help you face a problem.

4) Christian counselling approaches healing holistically

Christian Counsellors acknowledge the fact that healing is multi-dimensional which means that it involves physical, mental (emotional), and spiritual health. Christian Counselling will address any issues emanating from all of these fronts and find the healing you are looking for (Hope Connector Counselling & Therapy, 2020)

5) Christian counselling offers real hope

Christian Counselling looks beyond here to a blessed hope, a wonderful eternity with God in heaven. Christian Counsellors

make the clients see life beyond here available in Christ Where there will be no pain or sorrow. The peace and joy there are beyond human comprehension. Being in the realm of this eternal life you will find hope for a beautiful and fulfilling life here now.

6) Christian counselling emphasizes forgiveness.

Christian Counselling introduces clients to a life of forgiveness, a major teaching of the Bible. It helps clients focus on healing and any damaged emotions being faced by encouraging them to forgive themselves and others who might have offended them. Through your faith in the abundant life and grace of God, healing in your emotional being can now occur (Applegate, 2020).

Qualities of a Christian Counsellor

1.) A Christian counsellor must be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Academic qualifications are needed for virtually every profession but it cannot take the place of a Christian Counsellor's personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. He needs to have personal encounter with the Lord Jesus. He must accept Him as a Saviour. He will have accurate knowledge of God through Jesus Christ to Counsel the clients.

2.) A Christian counsellor must have a listening ear.

People like to go to Counsellor who will listen to them. Thus, a Christian Counsellor should have a listening ear to hear problems brought to him and be able to help his clients.

3.) A Christian counsellor must be prayerful.

No problem is above prayer. For a Christian Counsellor to have a breakthrough in his Counselling work, he must be a prayer warrior, one who devotes time to prayer. Complexes are some problems

brought by clients and some of these problems have spiritual colouration and only fervent prayers can grant victories over such problems, (National Open University of Nigeria, 2008).

4.) A Christian counsellor must be peaceable

Peace is an uncommon virtue needed by a Christian counsellor to deal with different clients with various problems. An effective Counsellor must be peaceable. Peace marks the presence of Christ in the Counsellor. He will quarrel with clients but peacefully deal with them, (National Open University of Nigeria, 2008).

5.) A Christian counsellor must be a spiritually mature man.

Spiritual maturity is not just having Biblical knowledge, it is growing through life of Christian experiences and applying Biblical knowledge to one's own life. It consistently demonstrates wisdom, humility, holiness, and forgiveness with people he relates with and people who wrong him.

6.) A Christian counsellor must be filled with compassion.

One of the qualities of a Christian counsellor is Compassion which set him out from others. Christ's Compassion sees beyond the surface and situation of the heart that is suffering and it is Compassion that helps others see their own lives in Christ and experience true healing.

What is Stress?

Stress is defined as a state of worry or mental tension caused by difficult situation. It is a natural human response that calls us to address challenges and threats in our lives. We all experience stress to some degree. However, the way we respond to stress makes a difference to our overall health (World Health Organization, 2023).

Types of Stress

1.) Acute stress

Acute stress can arise from your body's reaction to a new or challenging situation. For example, it is a feeling you have from an approaching submission of an assignment or when you narrowly avoid being hit by a car. We can also experience it as a result of something we enjoy. Like an outstanding personal achievement. Acute stress is seen as a short time usually, emotions and the body returns to its normal state relatively soon, (Walters, 2022).

2.) Episodic acute stress

It is the occurrence of acute stress frequently. This can be because of repeatedly tight work deadlines. It can also be a result of frequent high-stress situations experienced by pastors and some health professionals. With this kind of Stress, relaxation and calm state is not returned. And the effects of the high-frequency acute stresses accumulate. It often leaves us feeling like we are moving from one crisis to another.

3.) Chronic stress

Chronic stress is a result of stressors that continues for a long period of time. An example is constantly fighting with your life partner. This type of stress feels never-ending. We often have difficulty changing the situation that is the cause of our chronic stress, (Walters, 2022).

Symptoms of Stress

Stress can affect many aspects of your health and well-being without knowing it. Here are some signs and symptoms of each type of Stress.

Acute Stress

1.) Heart rate increases.

This is another part of the fight-or-flight reaction that can be disconcerting if it feels like heart palpitations.

2.) Anxiety.

This is the feeling of worry and fear that results from exposure to a stressor.

3.) Poor sleep

The average normal sleep for an adult is between 7-8 hours daily. When we have acute stress, our sleep is often compromised by our anxiety and by the fight-or-flight reaction that hormones produced.

4.) Fast and heavy breathing

This is a result of the fight-or-flight reaction. This helps to introduce more oxygen into the body's systems so it can adequately react to stress.

5.) Emotional Imbalance

There is what is called irritability and mood swings.

6.) Perspiration.

When we are stressed, our body temperature is raised, which causes us to sweat more, (Walters, 2022).

Episodic acute stress

1) Hypertension

A lot of people in this category of stress who are with hypertension do not know. The only way to know is to check high blood pressure regularly.

2.) Uncontrolled anger and irritability

We find ourselves overreacting more often with less provocation. We can also find ourselves reacting strongly to things that normally we would tolerate.

3.) Feeling overwhelmed

This is when we demonstrate a feeling of not being able to cope or discover effective solutions to the causes of stress.

4.) Muscle tension

This happens to help our bodyguard against injury and pain. When exposed to an episodic acute stressors, our muscles don't get the opportunity to relax.

5.) Migraines

These are often the result of muscle tension. The frequency and severity of migraines are likely to increase under episodic acute stress, (Walters, 2023).

Chronic stress

1.) Chronic headaches.

It is serious frequently occurring headache which occurs more than 15 days a month.

2.) Panic attacks

Sudden onset of feelings of fear and anxiety followed by symptoms of acute stress.

3.) Weight gain.

This can be a result of 'stress eating' and also can result from long-term hormonal Imbalances caused by chronic stress.

4.) Emotional fatigue.

This is a state of feeling emotionally worn out and drained. This happens when stress begins to accumulate from challenging and negative events.

5.) Insomnia.

This is a situation where you find it difficult to fall and stay asleep. It is as a result of not feeling rested from whatever sleep you did get, (Walters, 2023).

Causes of Stress

1.) Unmet financial obligations

When humans can meet daily financial obligations they pose no stress. The moment you are unable to meet financial obligations is a big stressor for a lot of people.

2.) Relationship problems

Every relationship creates stress in a mild and easily to deal with type. But when larger problems within relationships, such as unhappy marriage or divorce is involved, that produces a lot of stress for the people involved.

3.) Workplace problem

Workplace stress can be common among working parents and women in male-dominated industries. Regardless of any reason, though, constant stressors at work can cause burnout for many employees.

4.) Traumatic events.

These kinds of unforeseen and unpredictable events naturally create a lot of stress and even post-traumatic stress disorder, (Walters, 2023).

5.) Death of a beloved

Most of us have experienced the devastating emotional impact of the death of a beloved one. For many, it is not just only grief that we feel but as well as stress from a major loss. Some people also experience a mix of other emotions such as disappointment, loneliness, and even anger.

6.) Emotional well-being struggles

All of us at one time or another other are subject to low moods and experience worry. If not regulated well, these emotional states can lead to chronic stress.

The 21st Century Effective Christian Counselling Stress Management Techniques

1.) Meditation

Meditation may be taken as non-Christianity spirituality practice. Psalm 46:10 admonishes God's people to “be still and know that I am God.” Meditation allows us to quiet our minds amid a chaotic world and rest in the knowledge of who God is. Many guided Meditations exist, some drawing from scripture, while others focus on a more generalised approach to the reduction of stress. Taking a deliberate breaks from normal daily activities to be alone with the Lord is a thing what while. Taking time out to reset our minds and body allows us to approach life from a calmer, more grounded perspective, (Blain, 2022).

2.) Scripture and Prayer

This may not just be considered as a Technique but an act of obedience to keep our hearts and minds aligned with God, regular time in scripture and prayer. God calls us into a relationship with

Him. If we cut ourselves from our relationship with God, we can quickly lose sight of what should be most important in our lives.

A right relationship with God protects us from being consumed by the stress, anxieties, and pains in this world. Though we may not be immune to them, with our hearts in a good relationship with God, our view of the world and ourselves are put in the right perspective, only by being in tune with God's promises can we truly have peace, (Walters, 2022). All these forms of dealing with stress can help us experience greater calm and prevent stress from our lives.

3.) Exercise

Another technique for managing stress is exercise. The health benefits of regular exercise are endless. Incorporating exercise increases brain functioning and reduces anxiety, helps with weight management increases energy (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

4.) Intentional breathing

Breathing is of course, essential to survival as it is how oxygen is transferred to the blood and throughout the body (Cleveland Clinic, 2018).

There is, therefore, a great benefit to practising intentional breathing as well. Intentional breathing involves being aware of our breath as we inhale, hold, and then exhale. The best way to do this is to breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, exhale for four seconds and repeat. This type of breathing engages the parasympathetic nervous system, which slows the heart rate and disengages the fight-or-flight response in our brain. Engaging in this technique can bring us back to the present moment and help quiet the anxiety.

5.) Religious Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

It is highly included in Christian Counselling as it is more effective than others. It helped people in processing their negative thoughts as feelings of guilt or as religious doubt. The problems people with stress and other problems faced are mentioned above. When Religious Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is applied to all these bad thoughts and doubts increases stress. Stress will disappear or reduce, (Blain, 2022).

6.) Delegate authority

One of the problems humans are faced with is wanting to do everything. Jethro counselled his son-in-law to divide responsibility among the people of Israel and only administer important cases. The principle still applies today. Try to delegate responsibilities, it helps the work to move fast and helps you to live a life out of stress. A lot of people who practicalize this live a life devoid of stress. Christian Counselling will use this technique to embrace the division of labour.

7.) Time

“All work without play makes a dull boy” As effective techniques for Stress Management, Christian counselling explore all avenue to encourage you to rest and relax on daily basis. Rest will not only help you manage stress but disorders and problems.

7) Faith-based community

One of the problems stressed individuals may be facing is loneliness. Loneliness can easily induced stress-related illness or other types of illnesses. The Bible encourages Christians to meet for fellowship. It is not only antidote for Stress but other ailments.

8) Establishing boundary

Many Christians do not recognise their limits when it comes to

adding more work above their own. It is good that we establish a boundary to remove stress.

9.) Christian music and dance

Christian music and dance can be veritable Christian Counselling techniques to eliminate stress, instead of you to have distorted thoughts, gather your thoughts through Christian music and dance. While Christian music and dance are full of spiritual uplifting and encouragement. The more it is practised with other techniques the more it helps you to get rid of stress.

Conclusion

The 21st Century Christian counselling effective techniques cannot be over-emphasized. They can be efficacious because they are rooted in Christ. If embraced they will not only serve as antidotes to our stress but to other illnesses we have. It may be initially difficult to practice at first but when we allow God at the centre and discipline ourselves they become easy to practice. Our health must be placed above all pleasures. We must be able to leave our comfort zones to enjoy robust healthy free of stress.

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