

# **Ten Human Needs**

## **A draft discussion paper on the central goals and purposes of Christian counseling**

André H. Roosma

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### **Introduction**

Throughout the last decades – in fact: since the rise of psychotherapy, a lot of Christian counselors and other scholars have struggled with the question:

#### **What *is* Christian counseling?**

They have come up with a variety of answers. Some have adapted some existing – secular – form of psychotherapy; others have opposed all secular psychotherapy. Some have started in theology, others in their practice of helping people cope with trauma. Etcetera.

The result is that there now exists a wide and colorful variety of approaches and views on Christian or pastoral counseling.

Not always clear in these approaches is the answer to the underlying question:

#### **What *is, or should be, the aim or focus of* Christian counseling?**

Christian counseling is to be centered in Christ – the Messiah Yeshu‘ah and the Great Pastor, and in what He does. What that entails, I discuss in the paper [‘Seven Goals of God’](#).

In this brief paper, a second to the paper [‘Seven Goals of God’](#), I will address the subject from the human side. I will do so by looking at some basic needs that I have seen in us, human people. In the course of about three decades of involvement in Bible study, study of pastoral and psychotherapeutic literature, and active pastoral care, I have observed what can be summarized in ten human needs. If these needs are not fulfilled, it leads to all kind of problems and difficulties in life. Good Christian counseling as well as recovery programs need to be aware of these needs in order to succeed and be truly helpful.

So much for an introduction. A large part of this article, along with a lot of illustrations from the pastoral and psychotherapeutic literature, can – since many years – also be found in [‘My Psycho-Pastoral Kitchen’](#).

This is a living document. If you think I left out something that deserves to be included here, please write to me and I will investigate it seriously.

## Ten human needs and Christian counseling

Human needs – a much-studied subject! Categorizations and overviews abound. Famous is Maslov's hierarchy of human needs. Here, I have chosen a more pragmatic and less structured approach. I have focused on needs that I saw reflected in Bible stories, psychological theories and – simply – in my own daily psycho-pastoral practice. I have summarized and grouped them into ten main needs. Below I discuss them, with a brief reference to where I have encountered them in the literature.

- 1 First, there is **the need for safety, for belonging and for connectedness with God** (Who is the ultimate Source of safe connection and belonging), an answer to which I encountered most clearly in the Bible itself, and in the *Share Immanuel* approach of Karl Lehman, E. James Wilder et al. I also recognize it in Leanne Payne's teachings on practicing the presence of God, and in Téo van der Weele's *Powerful Peace* concept and his concept of sharing God's Presence and Shalom through the act of blessing. Experiencing safety is linked to experiencing that God or a safe authority figure (like good parents in the life of a small child) is 'in control'. Such 'being in control' is sometimes signified through singing or humor. I think that is (part of) why humor or singing can have such a therapeutic effect. I encounter this also in Henri Nouwen's first experiences of working together with mentally handicapped people – it took some of the 'theological weight' off his original approach and made him more 'human' and more 'connected'.
- 2 There is **the deep need for grace, for restoration, for hope, for a new perspective and a new life**, as only Jesus and His crucifixion and resurrection provides. As He took the penalty of our rebellious separation from God on the cross, He made a way for us to become intimately connected to God, to each other and to ourselves again. Besides that, He can identify with our suffering as He underwent the worst suffering ever. The fact that He conquered even death, not just then and there but also here and now, and the fact that He will come again in glory and restore everything to His purpose, is the most hope giving message I can think of. In this, I learned much from Leanne Payne and through her Pastoral Care Ministry schools. Through her work and that of her colleagues, I got a new symbolism that helped me face traumatic content in my own memory as well as empathize more effectively with the traumas of my counselees and friends.
- 3 There is **the need of 'being heard', of 'being given space'**, that is addressed in the works of people like Anna Terruwe and Lewis Smedes as well as in the approach of the narrative therapists and in Thomas Gordon's active listening seminars and books. Many others have similarly pledged for the sake of survivors of serious abuse or neglect and how it is vital that they are given the opportunity to talk about all that happened – however gruesome it may be. This builds further on the previous issues: The concepts of *Sharing Immanuel* and *Powerful Peace* have given me a way to help people to allow these terrible memories to surface and experience peace at the same time (what Téo van der Weele calls: 'a stereo experience'). The Cross is a powerful symbol of Jesus coming into our 'pit', and taking all the pain, as well as a great symbol for God's anger over the sin of abusers. This creates space for the abused or neglected to talk about that what God has demonstrated to be so terrible as to have His Son die for it on a cross.
- 4 Important as well is **our need to learn how to live with the existence of good and bad in this world**. Brokenness is a reality in this world, and so are darkness, pain, unfulfilled dreams and desires, etc. Many times these things are not removed from us – not even when we devote our lives to God. The person living with God may even see more brokenness as it contrasts so heavily with the peace and light of God. In the meantime, the encounter with any form of brokenness can be very challenging for those who experienced life-threatening aspects of brokenness earlier in life, as is the case with those who suffered any forms of severe abuse, early childhood neglect, etc. (psychologists sometimes speak of Post Traumatic Stress in this case – see the articles by Bessel van der Kolk and others on this topic, given in [My Psycho-Pastoral Kitchen](#)). We have to resolve the inner tension we experience in the midst of brokenness, and come to grips that we are not helplessly given over to the waves that swept us away in the past. Concepts like Téo

van der Weele's 'stereo experience', and Jim Wilder's 'looking out of the window to your pain' have helped me a great deal in this. In the 'stereo experience', one side of us is experiencing the brokenness, while the other side is listening to the peace of Jesus. I have also compared it to standing in the sea at the shore, your feet firmly 'rooted' on the rock below the water. There is the water – unsteadily going up and down, but the solid ground remains fixed. As long as I do not go in too deep, I can always put my feet down on that solid ground and prevent being swept away by the waves. John Townsend (in *Hiding from Love*) has a good chapter on resolving the good and bad in ourselves and others, too.

**5 The need for dignity** is great where there was neglect, abuse, being treated as worthless dirt, or taken for granted, et cetera, with their associated feelings of shame, powerlessness and infirmity. The reality of a God Who takes us into His family, Who regards us as worthy of His love and care – as mediated to us either directly or through the care of an empathic friend or counselor – already is a source of dignity itself. I learned from this most by reading the Gospels and paying special attention to the way Jesus communicated with the people around Him. The Psalms were a great source for me here as well. But also Jim Wilder's teachings and those of Leanne Payne, John Townsend and Aiden Wilson Tozer implicitly speak of great dignity. Henri Nouwen's concept of the wounded healer spoke to me about dignity in a special way – both my own dignity despite past wounds and faults, and on how to impart dignity to counselees and others with whom I am in contact. There is dignity in the experience of being a wounded healer – an 'experienced worker' who is more easily trusted by other survivors because '(s)he has been there too' and can identify with their pain. In this way, experiences of woundedness change from being a source of shame and separation into a source of dignity and connection.

Seeing others as 'experts' on their own life – a concept advocated particularly by a number of post-moderns – also returns to them some dignity.

**6 The need for identity, for 'a sense of being'**, is addressed very adequately in the approach and seminars of Leanne Payne. The Biblical notion of the social nature of identity and our innate need for spiritual as well as human connection has fortunately been recognized by many in the last decades: the writings of John Bowlby as well as postmodern social constructionists are worth mentioning here. Identity formation simply cannot take place without adequate safe, empathic and attentive connection. Too long have anti-Christian modernistic tendencies of individualism reigned and spread their poison. It is time for a new Christian psychotherapeutic setting, where this need for connection is acknowledged and where there is place for warmth instead of 'professional distance'. I love to re-read what Anna Terruwe wrote about this already decades ago. And in this respect I love Isaiah's credo too: "You have taught me to speak as pupils do" [i.e. asking questions, not taking an 'I am the expert' stance].

David Seamands and Lewis Smedes also uncovered our natural tendency to 'perform' in order to earn the love and gain the affirmation we craved and needed for our identity formation. The antidote of God's grace, giving us peace to just 'be', is just another aspect of what we need in this respect.

**7** In order to learn and receive these things, and in order to grow, there is also **a great need for good role models** – people who show God's love in a unity of their life. The broken life is characterized by division. Sometimes the outside looks nice and pretty, what is being said sounds well, but broken people feel the lack of unity and depth in it all. There is so much untrustworthiness and hypocrisy – also amongst Christian leaders. Then, there is an enormous need to see that unity – in the way it can be seen in God, for God is One, as the Jewish creed rightly says.

**8** There is **the need for being empowered**; for a new sense of power and ability. This is closely linked to the need for being heard, as described above. The fact that God listens to us, as illustrated in a counselor actively listening to us and taking serious what we say, already is a most empowering experience. Another form of empowerment I found in the way David Augsburg couples emotions of anger – often a source of shame and

withdrawal in silence – to the concepts of active engagement in love, care, justice and dignity.

- 9 There is also **a need for clear boundaries** – a safe context in which new behavior can be experimented and learned, and in which to learn what truly satisfies and is fitting to the own personality and values. Without safe boundaries, various aspects of a recovery process can be threatening to the person him-/herself or to others close by. For the person him-/herself, because re-traumatization occurs easily – either by others (the behavior of the person may unconsciously elicit or provoke it), or by the person him-/herself in the form of sinking into (and re-living!) traumatic memories again (see e.g. '[Applying the Brakes](#)', by Babette Rothschild) or by self injury (see the article by Bessel A. van der Kolk, '[The compulsion to repeat the trauma](#)'). For others, because the person may have insufficient insight in the effect of his/her behavior on others, or may have insufficient control over his/her own behavior (see '[Attachment: Key to Healthy Living through Adequate Affect Regulation](#)' and the references therein to Fonagy and Schore).
- 10 That brings me to still another **need**: that **of dealing adequately with our emotions**. Above, I already mentioned anger. Grief is another 'difficult emotion' in our western culture. A Bible study I did, about two decades ago, about Jesus weeping with Mary in her grief over her deceased brother Lazarus, was most helpful to me, as it showed so clearly how Jesus actively and openly acknowledged Mary's emotions. Yes, the Bible – God's Words of Love and Wisdom – remains for me the ultimate Source of revelation on Christian Counseling and all that is involved.

In the sequel I will refer to the above list as **the ten human needs**.

In my understanding of life according to the Bible and from what I have seen in practice, I conclude that when those ten needs are being fulfilled in someone's life, the person will be much more likely to thrive and be fruitful.

## Epilogue

I believe that when, as pastoral workers or Christian counselors, we keep these ten needs in our mind when looking at Christian / pastoral counseling, we will come up with better solutions for the people who seek our help. A Church will do well to look to fulfill these ten needs in their community.

In a subsequent brief article I will look in more detail at the problems people may present in counseling. Finally, it is my aim to confront some 22 of the most used or recommended approaches (as presented briefly in my 2001 article: '[Pluriformous and Multi-Colored Christian Counseling](#)' – [www.12accede.org/pluriform-cc.pdf](http://www.12accede.org/pluriform-cc.pdf)) with the seven goals of God, this list of needs and the full list of common problems, to see how well each approach does on providing adequate help in all of these cases.

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## More information or suggestions

For more information, questions or suggestions you can contact me via e-mail: [andre.roosma@12accede.nl](mailto:andre.roosma@12accede.nl)




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