

Counseling and Extrabiblical Methods

Question #9: Define, describe, and provide a biblical evaluation of each of the following: 12-step recovery programs, cognitive-behavioral therapy, the biogenic theory of mood disorders, and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) therapy

I. The 12-Step Recovery Programs include:

Substances-Related Recovery Programs:

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) – Recovery from alcohol addiction.
- Narcotics Anonymous (NA) – Recovery from drug addiction.
- Cocaine Anonymous (CA) – Focus on cocaine and other drugs.
- Crystal Meth Anonymous (CMA) – Recovery from methamphetamine addiction.
- Marijuana Anonymous (MA) – Recovery from marijuana dependency.
- Pills Anonymous (PA) – Recovery from prescription pill addiction.

Behavioral / Compulsive Habit Recovery

- Gamblers Anonymous (GA) – Recovery from gambling addiction.
- Overeaters Anonymous (OA) – Recovery from compulsive eating.
- Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) – Recovery from compulsive sexual behavior.
- Sexaholics Anonymous (SA) – Recovery from sexual addiction with a stricter definition of sobriety.
- Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA) – Recovery from addictive relationship and sexual patterns.
- Debtors Anonymous (DA) – Recovery from compulsive debt and spending.
- Workaholics Anonymous (WA) – Recovery from work addiction.
- Internet and Technology Addicts Anonymous (ITAA) – Recovery from internet/technology compulsions.

Programs for Families and Codependency

- Al Anon Family Groups – Support for families and friends of alcoholics.
- Alateen – Support for teenagers affected by someone else's drinking.
- Nar Anon Family Groups – Support for families of drug addicts.
- Co Dependents Anonymous (CoDA) – Recovery from relational codependency.
- Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA) – For adults raised in alcoholic or dysfunctional homes.

Description and key components (of all recovery groups):

- Admitting powerlessness over the problem
- Seeking help from a higher power
- Moral inventory and confession
- Making amends
- Ongoing spiritual growth and helping others

Twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

1. Admission of Powerlessness	7. Humble Request for Change
2. Hope in a Higher Power	8. List of Those Harmed
3. Decision to Trust God	9. Making Amends
4. Moral Self-Examination	10. Ongoing Self-Examination
5. Confession	11. Spiritual Growth
6. Readiness for Change	12. Helping Others

Comparison: AA Twelve Steps vs. Biblical Repentance and Sanctification

AA Twelve-Step Emphasis

Biblical Counseling Emphasis

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|--|---|
| 1. Admit powerlessness over addiction | Acknowledge personal sin and responsibility before God (Psalm 51; 1 John 1:8–9, James 1:4-15). |
| 2. Believe a Higher Power can restore sanity | Know and submit to the one true God revealed in Scripture who saves and transforms (Psalm 96:5, 1 Cor 8:4-6; Hebrews 11:6). |
| 3. Turn will and life over to God “as we understand Him” | Repent and submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ according to the gospel (Luke 9:23; Acts 2:38). |
| 4. Moral inventory of oneself | Examine the heart before God through Scripture (Psalm 139:23–24; 2 Cor. 13:5; James 1:23–25). |
| 5. Admit wrongs to God, self, and another person | Confess sins specifically to God and, where appropriate, to others (1 John 1:9; James 5:16). |
| 6. Become ready for defects to be removed | Put off sinful habits through repentance (Ephesians 4:22). |
| 7. Ask Higher Power to remove shortcomings | Pursue sanctification by the Spirit and obedience to Scripture (Galatians 5:16). |

AA Twelve-Step Emphasis

Biblical Counseling Emphasis

8. List those harmed	Identify those sins against (Matthew 5:23–24).
9. Make amends where possible	Practice restitution and reconciliation (Luke 19:8).
10. Continue personal inventory	Practice repentance and growth (Colossians 3:5–10).
11. Seek a Higher Power through prayer and meditation	Biblical prayer + meditation on Scripture (Psalm 1; Colossians 3:16, Matt 6:9-13).
12. Help other addicts and practice the principles	Discipleship and helping others change biblically (Galatians 6:1–2; Matthew 28:19–20).

Key Differences for Biblical Counselors

- **Definition of the Problem**
 - ◆ AA: addiction as a disease or condition producing powerlessness
 - ◆ Biblical counseling: addiction viewed as enslavement to sin or idolatry of the heart/mind.
- **Identity of God**
 - ◆ AA: “God as we understood Him” (intentionally broad)
 - ◆ Biblical counseling: the triune God revealed in Scripture
- **Identity of the Person**
 - ◆ AA: lifelong identity as “recovering alcoholic”
 - ◆ Biblical counseling: new identity in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- **Source of Change**
 - ◆ AA: recovery through steps, meetings, and community support
 - ◆ Biblical counseling: regeneration and sanctification through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.
- **Summary:**
 - ◆ The 12-step model contains partial moral insights, but is deficient because it does not explicitly ground transformation in repentance, the gospel of Christ, and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit through Scripture (John 8:32; 17:17, Heb 4:12, 2 Pet 1:3; Rom 12:1-2).

II. Define, describe, and provide a biblical evaluation of **cognitive-behavioral therapy**.

Description of cognitive behavioral therapy

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy operates by helping individuals address life difficulties through modifications to their thoughts and behavior.
- Threefold premises:
 - ◆ Psychological problems are based, in part, on faulty or unhelpful ways of thinking.
 - ◆ Psychological problems are based, in part, on learned patterns of unhelpful behavior.
 - ◆ People suffering from psychological problems can learn better ways of coping with them, thereby relieving their symptoms and becoming more effective in their lives.
 - ◆ Commonly summarized as:
Situation → Thoughts → Emotions → Behaviors

The CBT process:

- Assessment and goal setting
 - ◆ Identifying automatic thoughts (thoughts that are quick, often unnoticed interpretations).
- Recognizing cognitive distortions, such as:
 - ◆ All-or-nothing thinking
 - ◆ Catastrophizing
 - ◆ Mind-reading
 - ◆ Over-generalization
- Challenging and restructuring thoughts
 - ◆ Is this thought true?
 - ◆ What evidence supports or contradicts it?
 - ◆ Is there a more balanced way to think?
- Behavioral intervention
 - ◆ Behavioral activation (scheduling meaningful activities)
 - ◆ Exposure therapy (esp. for anxiety). A gradual confrontation of feared situations
 - ◆ Skill-building – Problem-solving, communication skills
 - ◆ Homework and Practice: thought recording, journaling

- Monitoring Progress and Adjusting

Evaluation of CBT

- CBT possesses a materialistic worldview that rejects the existence of anything that is not physical in nature.
- They exclude all of the spiritual realities about mankind, which are so central to understanding and helping people (cf. John 4:24)
- The CBT system has a completely relativistic morality, with human behavior based on the preferences of the client and the counselor.
- There is no category for right and wrong.
- CBT therapy will never address sin before a holy God, but will only be concerned with changing thoughts and behaviors to something more conducive to the counselee's comfort level.

III. Define, describe, and provide a biblical evaluation of the “biogenic theory of mood disorders.”

Define and describe the biogenic theory of mood disorders

- The biogenic theory of mood disorders proposes that emotional disturbances stem primarily from neurochemical dysfunction in the brain.
- This theory suggests that depression and other emotional and behavioral problems are caused by a disorder of our genetic material.
- The theory focuses on three neurochemicals—serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine—that the brain manufactures and distributes to facilitate neural communication.
- As mood disorders become more severe, the popular theory attributes their cause to a chemical imbalance.

Treatment under the Biogenic Theory of Mood Disorders

- Identify the disorder by using the DSM (**D**iagnostic and **S**tatistical **M**anual for Mental Disorders – current edition is the DSM-5 TR [Fifth Edition, Text Revision]).
- Primary Therapy: Psychotropic medication
 - ◆ SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors)
 - ◆ SNRIs (Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors)
 - ◆ Tricyclic Antidepressants (TCAs)
 - ◆ MAOIs (Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors)

Key Assumptions of the Biogenic Theory of Mood Disorders

- Mood disorders are primarily medical/biological illnesses
- Treatment focuses on correcting internal physiological dysfunction
- Symptom relief is proposed through chemical intervention

Evaluation of the Biogenic Theory of Mood Disorders

- No one can diagnose a chemical imbalance because there is no way to verify one. There are no objective means for diagnosis.
- The premise that chemical imbalance causes depression has been debunked.
- The theory proves inadequate because it oversimplifies human nature.
- Scripture presents humans as responsible beings comprised of both an outer person (including the brain) and an inner person (the heart, soul, mind, or will).
- What we experience as feelings or moods are a physiological response to the thoughts, emotions, and judgments of our inner person.
- The biogenic theory's fundamental flaw is that belief in it removes personal responsibility for choices; therefore, if identity and future are predetermined by brain chemistry, one bears no responsibility for actions.
- A biblical framework recognizes that examining fears, failures, losses, and broken relationships attached to feelings reveals that limiting oneself to a physical explanation might oversimplify the problem and cause one to miss pathways to other answers.

IV. Define, describe, and provide a biblical evaluation of “Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy.

Description of Eye Movement and Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy

- Eye Movement and Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) is a controversial counseling approach designed to help people, particularly those diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), process traumatic memories.
- Premise: Voluntary bilateral eye movement stimulates and facilitates information processing in the human brain.
- Francine Shapiro established the following hypothesis: “The procedural elements of EMDR therapy, including the bilateral dual stimuli, trigger a physiological state that facilitates information processing.”

- Shapiro: “The goal of EMDR treatment is to rapidly metabolize the dysfunctional residue from the past and transform it into something useful.”

Components to EMDR Therapy:

- 1) Image: a mental picture representing the most upsetting part of the traumatic incident.
- 2) Negative Cognition: the negative self-assessment that victims make in the present.” These negative cognitions are always in the present tense and considered to be inappropriate or dysfunctional.
- 3) Positive Cognition: after identifying a negative cognition associated with the target memory that needs to be reprocessed, the client identifies and verbalizes the desired positive cognition.
- 4) Emotions and level of disturbance: while focusing on the image and negative cognition, the client rates the associated felt emotion on a Subjective Unit Disturbance (SUD) scale with 0 (no disturbance) to 10 (highest possible disturbance).
- 5) Body Scan of Physical Sensations: self-evaluation of perceived negative physical reactions associated with a particular memory.
- 6) Eye movement: Bilateral stimulation (BLS) or side-to-side movement of the eyes back and forth when focused on the clinician’s two fingers at the rate of two back and forth movements per second.

Evaluation of EMDR

- The ultimate goal of biblical counseling is to conform regenerate believers to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).
- There is no scientific or medical consensus on how memories are stored, recalled, reconstructed and exactly what takes place in REM status of the brain.
- The voluntary rhythmic moving of one’s eyes back and forth in EMDR is nothing like the involuntary phasic twitching of eyes during REM sleep.
- EMDR claims the distinctive of accelerated memory processing as a promotional selling point, but CBT continues to be the preferred secular treatment for PTSD. (This is an observation not an endorsement of CBT).
- Shapiro demonstrates that man is his own authority: “The clinician’s job is to facilitate the client’s self-healing process.” This humanistic philosophy teaches that man has what he needs inside himself to solve his own problems.
- Shapiro reduces a dysfunctional memory to something that needs to be “metabolized.”
- The claim: “EMDR can help to empower the client to do whatever it takes to attain a positive quality of life that is enhanced by a sense of control and self-efficacy.”

- Biblically, man's problem is internal to man (Eccl. 7:20) but man's solution is external to himself (Acts 2:38; 4:12).

Biblical Model for Change

Romans 12:1–2 — Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Therefore – includes all doctrine, and all the truth taught from Romans 1-11
- I urge you – this is a plea to the believer to take action
- Means – by the mercies of God
- Responsibility – present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice
- The type of sacrifice is further defined as acceptable to God, spiritual service of worship
- Contrast between humanism and biblical sanctification: not conformed to the world (See Eph. 2:1-3, BUT transformed by the renewing of your mind
 - ◆ Mind – inner man; heart, soul, mind NOT brain!
 - ◆ Transformed – passive voice – the believer receives this transformation
 - ◆ Renewing – the means of grace, the Word of God and the Spirit of God changing us into the Son of God.
 - ◆ What is change? Our thinking! Truth in the inner man.
 - ◆ Outcome – proving what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. We glorify God!

Resources:

The Twelve Steps <https://www.aa.org/the-twelve-steps>

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