

Workshop 1

TRAUMA

Christ's comfort in deep suffering

The impact of 'therapy speak'
in our culture, and wise ways
to resist it

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Does it make any difference?

"Me thinks you doth protest too much"

Or

"I fear, my dear fellow, that the intensity of your denial merely reflects the strength of your own repressed desires."

Why did therapy speak become popular?

- Cultural Need
- Flexible Adaptation
- Individual Meaning Making

What "needs" is therapy speak

- Explains or makes sense of an experience
- Normalising and affirming
Naturally I want to describe myself without reference to God
Makes people feel known and understood (myres Briggs)
- A desire for diagnosis and treatment
- Common language to help communicate experience
- Understanding a persons world. A common language (with no reference to God)
- Name what you feel
- Brings clarity
- It gives us a shared vocabulary (though sometimes it expands unhelpfully)
It provides people with identity- some find labels helpful (sometimes we like to categorise others)
It validates our experiences
It can lead us into a new community of shared experience (esp on social media)
- It provides a shorthand
Heard and understood
It helps us be known
- More nuanced understanding
- It can direct towards help
- A need to understand yourself and your feelings
To acknowledge suffering
To help provide an explanation for things we don't understand in ourselves or others
- Helps communicated severity
- Doesn't describe fully but in part
Gives compassion
- Making sense if life whilst using current vocabulary
- relief to know this is a struggle others have
- Makes me understand each better
- a way to get out of responsibility
- Need for identity
Ways of describing eg narcissistic
Understanding ourselves
Way of fixing ourselves
Especially in the absence of God
- Not wanting responsibility

- Belonging
- Giving someone an identity, a label which explains them.
Can also take the pressure or responsibility off of someone because of the label.
- Known and affirmed outside of relationships
- Providing a language for important discourse, pursuing understanding of deep problems, offering sense of control
- Gives expectations of how other people should respond to you. Demand to be treated/served a different way
- Gives the church a framework for how you might be able to move towards people
- Giving simple language to complex experiences
- Helps others to understand something of experience
Gives more acceptability from others
Create adaptability from others
- Gives meaning from experience
- Enables ability to relate
- Enables belonging in community
Can provide access to resources. Normalising. Provides ability to be seen as not unusual.
- Quick shorthand to explain complex ideas - saves having to go into massive detail with a quick reference point.
- Provides community/identity - shared labels
- Explains behaviours - maybe relieves feelings of guilt/shame
- common language- to speak and be understood
validating experiences
Is therapy speak addressing a need at all, or is it creating a need?
gives expression
gives an individual a sense of control and self-validation
- Shared language to enable people to understand our experiences.
Justification for behaviours.
To qualify for support.
- It allows us to know what's going on and deal with it
- We can learn from one with same label

- An explanation for who I am and my struggles
- A need for meaning
- Way of expressing self
- You control the narrative
- The need to be known and understood. But giving validity to the experience.
- Giving people identity
- Gives a voice to the sufferer, "I'm not abnormal, I'm not the only one"
- In people's desire to be known and understood gives them a way to self-define how they want be understood
- Enables support to be accessed
- Provides a reason not to take responsibility for your behaviour, outside of yourself.
- Helps other people to understand something of the struggle quote quickly
- Gives a language for something that we struggle with
- Giving a language for describing struggles without having the language of Scripture accessible to them.
It gives a sense of not being alone, experiencing a common struggle. It gives hope that when there is a diagnosis there may be a way through. It removes responsibility for own behaviour - this is who I am and I can't help it.
- The language helps us recognise ourselves and helps us belong to a community of others using similar language
- Universal struggle so not alone
- Gives an explanation
Gives hope that there can be a solution
Blame shifting - "it's not my fault- I have anger issues"
Validating and normalising
Suggests medical solution so nothing spiritual in it
- A need to express emotions
A need for connection
A need for meaning
A need for validation
Removing responsibility

How does therapy speak shape our view of ourselves, our culture, and our needs?

A me-centred view of the world

Erases sin and suffering.

Wrapped up in self and introspection

A language omitting God

It creates our identity.

Need for understanding self

I am not what God says in Gen 1 - 2 (image) or Eph 1

Can start to define you rather than a current experience

Displaces our identity in Christ.
Arbiters of our own identity.
Sin becomes pathology.
You have to accept my behaviour because of my label.

Some therapy will say that sin exists outside of me-total depravity

It admits humanity has a problem that needs solving

Tendency towards determinism rather than embracing progressive sanctification

The language tries to draw a neat line around something that the bible would acknowledge is more complex

Searching for understanding

I need to be accepted not 'I need to change'.
Label can be deterministic.

It can be wonderfully relational

I can become entitled rather than sacrificial

Our culture says our value is in what we can produce and therapy labels suggest what we can/can't offer. But the Bible says our value is intrinsic.

Jeremiah 17 v 5 "This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord"

Categories to enable understanding

We don't experience the positive participation in Christ's suffering and comfort

Self referential effect

I am what I feel

We become the centre.

I can be defined by the struggle and I cannot change

If it offers a view of ourselves that we belong to a particular tribe it distorts truth that we are all uniquely made. There's an expectation that everyone in that tribe will respond a certain way or has certain needs

The assumption is that having identified our diagnosis we should be able to receive therapy/medication to eradicate our distress

God becomes someone who serves us to make us feel better

Love becomes how I can be served and met - focus on me.

Can start to live according to the label rather than who you are in Christ

Psalm 139 - search me God and know me. Invite a revealing from God of His knowledge

Our trust of God

Distancing from responsibility and accountability.

Absolves of responsibility. The weakness of the body/brain can reveal the heart more readily but cannot become an excuse to avoid sin.

It denies creation, fall, redemption, sanctification and eschatology

Restricted knowing by a label and not as holistic in knowing

We are always victims and not perpetrators.

My culture determines who I am

Sometimes we go looking for struggles that are not there

Blame the way we were made, essentially blaming God.

Know something is wrong, an intrinsic knowledge that things aren't how they are meant to be, but it gives an alternative explanation- not the fall.

Shapes our view of personal responsibility (original sin)

It foregrounds 'psychological needs' over an understanding of ourselves as sinners and sufferers

Takes us away from biblical understanding of ` sinners, sufferers and saints'

Distorts the idea that we are made. Independent from our creator: psalm 139, Genesis "made in God's image".
Autonomy

Somehow you are broken and others are not

Can be very self focused

Promises salvation through a diagnosis and promise of access to an expert 'saviour'

There's no room for God so there's no room for sin.
Agency is denied.

Distorts our identity in Christ (Eph 1)

Can excuse sin

Removes our sin from the picture: only about what happens to us. This allows us to acknowledge the reality of external suffering, but it fails to acknowledge how sin exacerbates suffering.

Does it decrease our resilience? Victim identity rather than active role

Needs versus blessings

No repentance.

Puts the person on the throne of their life rather than God

Perfectionism: focus on how life is wrong, what we lack, and a desperate need to fix it. But life will always be broken till Jesus returns.

Our world view (we are embodied souls in a broken world with broken hearts)

Can take an emotion were made to feel in response to this fallen world and make it into a bad thing itself

Therapy speak is self-promoting. It asks others to treat me according to my own diagnosis. No responsibility. "Love mercy, act justly, walk humbly with our God." Psalm 121, Christ emptied himself (Philippians 2), John 3 "if you say you have no sin you deceive yourself"

Gives reason for suffering, but minimises to the suffering coming at us (no view of personal sin and God's grace)

How does therapy speak shape our view of ourselves, our culture, and our needs?

It gives us a way to ask for help (+ve), but also professionalises that help (-ve). It may minimise personal responsibility/sin as a contributory cause. Divine light is excluded and the psalms

(for example) lie unread... Can become fairly self absorbing and focussed. But Christ draws us to make much of him. "I become less so he may be more" John

3:30

There is a narrow view of normal and that outside of that we don't fit. I am at the centre. I'm making my own meaning of my life and I set my own standard.

I am passive - abdication of responsibility. Can be determinative. But our primary identity is as children of God

Taking on the identity of a label/descriptor attributed by ourselves or others.... can provide access to services in society.

Ps 42/43... realign our identity in christ

Looking for solutions in humans and situations, not God. Many things can help, but only God saves.

Genesis 3:15 promises a heavenly redeemer but therapy speak promises an earthly redemption from a counsellor

Our worship is less rich- Jesus is not at the centre

Excuses everything else - removes blame/guilt/responsibility

Becomes manipulative/controlling - not allowed to challenge someone else's diagnostic view of themselves

Removes a tolerance of guilt - nothing is allowed to make 'me' feel guilty.

Root is 'We are all good at heart' - counter to Romans

3 v 23

Minimises real pain. Sadness in response to death isn't necessarily depression. To not be sad would be wrong.

Simplistic, putting people into categories rather than seeing the whole person

Puts me at the centre It's needs based not mercy based, God becomes our servant Needs become ultimate Culture says 'I am who I am' (only God can say that Exodus 3:14) Self actualisation is goal of therapy but Jesus call us to

take up our cross Luke 9:23 Matthew 16:24
Self esteem: Identity is shaped on our view of ourselves whereas the Bible would say our identity is defined by God - made in His image, adopted as his children

Lack of any responsibility and - labels are determinative and sense if sin forever but God redeems, grows, heals us Eph 1:1-11, John 17 (Jesus' heart for us)

- it fragments society into groups BUT God unites into one body in Christ (1 Cor 12) Rev

- culture more emotionally focussed which makes it fragile (Rev)
Closes the important gap between 'pop psychologised normal life' and real mental crises eg PTSD, OCD etc

How do we gently encourage Andy towards primarily seeing himself in the biblical story?

He is open and willing to talk

Helpful in describing experience

Helpful - 'Survivor' more hopeful than victim.

These things are important but not determinative

Helpful - 'triggers' gives us a starting point for questions. Helps with data gathering.

Affirm his suffering. He has been sinned against.

Some self-awareness

Explore his experience

He has found himself some 'pseudofacts' which eclipse Truth.

Therapy speak is shaping Andy- he identifies as a sufferer. He is also a saint-adopted by God

Therapy speak shaping some of his own meaning making which is deepening the issues

We can affirm that a desire for healthy relationships are a good thing and it's right he doesn't want to be isolated

Find out what he means by some of the phrases he had used such as "toxic relationships" to unpack more of what has affected him

If Andy knows the Bible, ask him who in the Bible he relates to and explore those stories in detail. This avoids the abstracts of therapy speak and grounds him in biblical truth.

Shaping- identity as trauma survivor, understanding his experiences through trauma labels such as triggering a toxic relationships, no sign of identity in relation to Christ (saint, sufferer, sinner)

Good that he sees himself as a survivor

Good he's explored struggles

Good that he's seeking help

Therapy is shaping his assessment of himself without any reference to God

His trauma story sounds determinative, past, present and future

It's all about him sorting himself out

Helpful: Andy had overcome evil

Accept his starting point, hear before reframing

Unpacking his language

He doesn't want to be isolated and anxious

He is expressing his struggle. We'd want to ask for vignettes to understand more.

He has made some progress through his own efforts to understand, not mere passivity.

Reframe toxic relationships as sinful

Language of 'constantly triggered' may be shaping interactions too much

He desires protection and that has some validity

Reframe boundaries as wisdom, what does the Lord say about wisdom in relationships.

He feels he understands himself better yet symptoms worse . So maybe the labels aren't so helpful

Therapy speak gives him a role to play. Gives him something.

Reframe his therapy speak in biblical language.

We'd want to affirm his suffering and sin done against him. Try to frame things in biblical language. Reinterpret his experience in biblical categories.

Evidence of brokenness and the fall

...triggers vs temptation

He needs to be a thriver not just a survivor

Ask how faith speaks to these terms

How is he relating to God

Therapy speak is encouraging him to be isolated and making him worse. Reinforcing his isolation and anxiety

Polarised thinking - toxic relationships

We were made for healthy relationship with God and others

He wants to make progress

The world is fallen - life does hurt - suffering is real

Affirm his suffering

Andy fears something. What has led to this?

Affirm his desire for life

Ask andy to share how he came to christ and see how he tells a Christian story: are there points of reference, overlaps? Lots of listening first

Understanding self better, articulating the struggles and problems, might be giving him some sense of short term safety, the fact he's seeking help, The term 'toxic relationships' can be the awareness of evil. Explore what has been the reality of his experience.

Can ask him how his strategies are working for him.

How do we get him to see downsides of his framing

He understands himself primarily as a survivor

He is stuck in a closed framework, and it's not helping him. His whole vision is now coloured by a distorting lens on his experience.

Lots of questions to understand

Need to deconstruct the terms eg toxic relationship

Language of 'toxic relationship' might be unhelpful too - could it unhelpfully throw up boundaries

Andy feels more isolated despite his vigilance. Therapy speak doesn't leave room for God.

Explore how God sees Andy more than. How he sees himself

Could be disempowering him

Therapy doesn't limit his god given goals

Being embedded souls!

How do we gently encourage Andy towards primarily seeing himself in the biblical story?

Good that he understands himself better and is brave to explore struggles
Noticed the heat coming at him
Can assess all that has happened
Bravery to face struggles real enough to recognise that it is still resulting in anxiety and isolation

he is being acted Upon, Its outside himself.?it's not his fault. no responsibility for himself. he describes himself as trauma survivor. no growth mindset.

if he is Christian, we ask, how has God helped you?
Have you ever thought of it this way?

Help them identify with a biblical character

Help him defined himself in biblical language - he is alive in Christ, a son of God not merely a 'survivor'

Ask him what's helpful, why and how.

He's happy to seek help, wants to know more
Could go from David's relationship with Absalom to

psalm of lament
Sin & the fall

What are we trying to do?

It's not about demolishing a worldview but reshaping it around the transformative story of the gospel. We need to give people better, more comprehensive language that has both better explanatory power and points them in a better direction.