

# **Proverbs: Living Just in an Unjust World**

## **Study Guide**

### **Topic 5: Psychological Insight**

**by George Stagg**

Proverbs: Living Just in an Unjust World  
Family Study Guide 9: Psychological Insight  
© George Stagg, 2011. All rights reserved.

Written by George Stagg.

Published by:  
Twin Cities Church  
Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota  
[www.tccmn.org](http://www.tccmn.org)  
612-866-5848

All rights reserved. If you believe this tool would serve your efforts to help others know God and mature in their knowledge of Him, please contact us. We welcome opportunities to serve the churches of God.

All Bible references and quotations, unless noted, are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

# Psychological Insight

## Passages

12:25; 13:12; 14:10, 13,30; 15:4,13,30; 17:22; 25:20; 27:19; 28:17

12:25. Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad.

13:12. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

14:10. The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy.

14:13. Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.

14:30. A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.

15:4. A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit.

15:13. A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by sorrow of heart the spirit is crushed.

15:30. The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.

17:22. A joyful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.

25:20. Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.

27:19. As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects the man.

28:17. If one is burdened with the blood of another, he will be a fugitive until death; let no one help him.

# The Proverbs as Tools for Counseling

The Scriptures provide many resources for skillfully helping people identify sources of mental and emotional trouble. The Proverbs are no exception. Anyone responsible for the development and care of people should develop a basic skill in these proverbs to assist them.

## Observable Negative Psychological Conditions:

- anxiety (heart weighed down, loss of drive), 12:25
- emotional pain (sick heart), 13:12
- deceptive facade, 14:13
- lack of confidence, no fortitude, 14:30
- unhealthy complexion/weak physicality, 14:30
- broken spirit, victim (energy, vitality gone), 15:4
- crushed spirit (sadness), 15:13
- the surety of a man's expressions as expressions of heart (27:19)
- guilt (28:17)

## Causes of Negative and Positive Psychological Conditions

- evil words vs. encouraging words (12:25)
- anxiety vs. peace (12:25)
- unfulfilled expectations vs. desires granted (13:12)
- jealousy vs. contentment (14:30)
- violence/disorder/anger vs. peace and harmony (14:30)
- perverse words vs. virtuous speech (15:4)
- pessimism vs. optimism (15:30, 17:22)
- sadness vs. joy (17:22)

One of the difficult tasks of counseling people is identifying the source of the trouble. Often, we can see the psychological conditions but not the root problem. To get at the problem, the counselor must understand what causes the exterior signs. For example, when you see someone that has lost motivation and confidence, what is your first thought as to a possible cause? Maybe they've failed too many times? Maybe they don't know what to do? These are all possibilities. However, the Proverbs show that jealousy and envy also cause a lack of confidence (14:30). They shut down, not because they don't know what to do, but because they can't become or accomplish what someone else is or has done. They do not like who they are and it's shutting them down.

# What Does God Have to do with Psychology?

What is psychology? Literally, the term means “the study of the soul,” which is the breath or the spirit of life in all humans. The term is a young term, only a few hundred years old, and is primarily understood as the name for the professional mental health discipline. The American Psychological Association doesn’t define what *psychology* is under its definition of *psychology*, but it indicates that psychologists “study both normal and abnormal functioning and treat patients with mental and emotional problems” ([www.apa.org/about](http://www.apa.org/about)). In the APA’s comprehensive list of 53 psychology topics, 43 topics are topics that the Bible addresses in various capacities, and provides a path towards healing those with “mental and emotional problems” identified or caused by these topics. Of the 10 topics not mentioned, most are specific medical diagnoses or professional designations for fields of study not specifically addressed in the Scriptures (e.g., autism, Alzheimer’s, military, safety and design, etc.). Of the 53 topics, which is described as a comprehensive list, several very significant biblical topics consequential to mental and emotional health are not mentioned. From a negative perspective, shame, guilt, and fear are not found on the APA list. Positively, joy, hope, confidence, and peace are not found on the list, but happiness is a broad term used under the category of “emotional health.” Interestingly, the topic of ethics is concerned only with the code of ethics required by professional psychologists, not with the connection between virtue and emotional and mental well-being. Perhaps this is why guilt and shame, which are powerfully motivating emotions, are not considered substantive psychology topics.

A search of the ESV English New Testament for the following psychological terms yields the following results:

- anger (rage, malice, wrath, bitterness, hate): 113 times
- anxiety (stress, despair, perplexed, worry, pressure): 36 times
- fear (afraid): 141 times
- guilt (fault, condemn, judgment): 246 times
- shame (dishonor, disgrace, embarrassment, humiliation): 55 times
- peace (comfort, ease): 128 times
- joy (happiness): 62
- hope (confidence, optimism): 113 times

Additionally, the Scriptures address quite specifically the resolution of the following conditions that are often treated by professionals in the discipline of psychology:

- immorality/sensuality/carousing/debauchery/fornication/lust/adultery/sexual addiction
- strife/discord/anger/rage/wrath/malice
- greed/envy/jealousy/covetousness
- factions/divisiveness
- drunkenness/substance abuse/addictions
- theft/lying/swindling/deception/manipulation
- selfishness/arrogance/pride/narcissism
- insubordination/disrespect
- fear/timidity/anxiety
- guilt/shame/depression
- procrastination/withdrawal/abandonment
- marital conflict/raising children/managing households

From subject matter alone, we must conclude that the Bible seeks to address the same types of things the professional discipline of psychology seeks to address.

If we were to briefly observe the biblical description of man and woman prior to the introduction of sin into humanity, the following conclusions can be made.

- they were naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25)
- they were at peace with God and man (no guilt, fear, shame, or anxiety)
- enjoyed the personal presence of God

After they sinned, humans knew shame (Gen 3:7), fear (3:10), guilt, judgment and condemnation (3:9-24), pain and suffering (3:16, 17-19) marital conflict (3:16), environmental conflict (3:17-19), anger, envy, deception, violence (4:1-8), sexual and child abuse (4:23-24), substance abuse (9:24), and childhood rivalry (4:1-9, 9:20-27).

The Bible clearly addresses symptoms and causes of mental and emotional anguish. As God's ultimate purpose is to dwell in His people once again to manifest his glory, peace, and beauty to all things (Ephesians 2:11-3:13), we can see that the purposes of God are to once again unite God and His people together in order to experience a life eternally

free from the consequences of sin and rebellion against God.

However, there is great confusion today about the role of the Bible, the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ, and the Church in dealing with the emotional and mental suffering present in God's people today. This has not always been the case.

## **The Current State of Christian Soul Care**

With some exceptions, Christianity has always reflected a strong belief in the power of the Scriptures to heal emotional and mental anguish. The periods of Christian history that reflected the strongest belief in the power of the Scriptures to deliver people from psychological anguish were also those periods characterized by very deep and comprehensive biblical knowledge. Church fathers such as Augustine (354-430), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Martin Luther (1483-1546), and John Calvin (1509-1564) believed strongly in the unique power of the Word of God as it gave its readers knowledge of God, who alone had the power to overcome sin and heal its consequences. The reading and listening to the Bible was strongly urged as an important practice for all Christian people. Accordingly, these men and their contemporaries, some of whom experienced great emotional and mental suffering, emphasized the diligent study and practical use of the Bible. Later, the Puritans, represented by pastors like Richard Baxter (1615-1691), grew to be known for their great skill in the practical applications of the Bible for the treatment of the soul. The Puritans laid foundations for men like Jonathan Edwards, John Newton (*Amazing Grace*), and Charles Spurgeon into the 1800s. The Puritan tradition waned due to unhealthy internal problems, but also because of the emergence of modernism.

The emergence of the Enlightenment, which began as the fruit of a Christian worldview that believed in the God-ordained orderliness of creation, resulted in the broad decline in the use of the Word of God in soul care in Western civilization. Science supplanted revelation as authority in Western culture, and as a result, undermined the trustworthiness of the Bible. Much suffered in the wake of the emergence of science and the professionalization of disciplines that began in the late 1800s/early 1900s. Evangelical theological education, which was once central and integrated with all disciplines of knowledge, fragmented

and increasingly became disconnected from the shepherding of local churches and the maturity of Christian people. Evangelicals withdrew from serious intellectual engagement across the disciplines, just as the disciplines of psychology, sociology, and other “soft-science” disciplines emerged. Evangelicals busied themselves with “sacred” subjects like evangelism, missions, apologetics, and church, but grew increasingly separated from the culture and from addressing the problems facing a new modern/secular people.

Eventually, after a few decades of complete withdrawal, Christians grew increasingly aware of the need to engage the world intellectually. However, in the virtual absence of sound Biblical understanding that had been neglected for well over a century, Western Christianity finds itself in disarray on how to be faithful to Jesus Christ and the Scriptures and yet diligently and sufficiently engage the culture and the professional discipline of psychology. At this point, Christians seeking to develop a Christian model of soul care find themselves in one of two camps: the integration model and the biblical counseling movement. The integration model is basically a model built consistent with the agenda and assumptions of the professional psychology discipline, but filtered by a Christian worldview and Christian theological affirmations. Founders of the integration model were professional counselors trained in professional psychological programs who sought to Christianize the discipline. The biblical counseling movement arose out of a reaction to the integrationist model, believing that it too fully embraced secular psychology and compromised the role of the Scriptures, the Spirit, and the Church. According to Eric Johnson, one of the leading Christians seeking to establish a biblically faithful and scientifically rigorous model of soul care, these two models demonstrate the following strengths and weaknesses:

### *Integration Model*

Strengths: seeks to benefit from the scientific knowledge of the professional discipline of psychology

Weaknesses: practitioners are first psychologists, then Christians (agendas and models are set by discipline of psychology); integration literature reflects a simplistic reading of the Bible and minimal understanding of Christian doctrine; training programs do not teach students how to integrate the complex discipline of psychology with a deep and comprehensive understanding of Scripture; fails to see the church community as the

ultimate locus of emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being

### *Biblical Counseling Movement*

Strengths: places the Bible as the primary text and authority in soul care; sees the biblical agenda for addressing mental and emotional problems

Weaknesses: disregards contributions that may come from the scientific observation of human experience; continues to perpetuate the persistent evangelical/fundamentalist problem of disregarding the world and its possible contributions; fails to provide a truly Christian perspective on the discipline of professional psychology; fails to see the church community as the ultimate locus of emotional, spiritual, and mental well-being

For a more complete history of Christian soul care and a review of contemporary models, see Eric Johnson's *Foundations for Soul Care*, from which much of the above content came.

## **Toward a Theology of Soul Care**

I suggest the following guidelines as the beginnings of a Christian soul-care model that is thoroughly biblical and scientifically informed. These things must at least be present, and there are additional considerations that I am sure need to be added.

1. Christian soul care must begin with a biblical understanding of humanity (Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 3:9-19; Ephesians 2:1-3)
  - humanity was made in the image of God, capable of a loving and peaceful union with Him and with itself
  - without God, humanity is entirely incapable of any good and is enslaved to and victimized by sin
2. The ultimate goal of Christian soul care must be maturity in Christ, which means a complete participation in the eternal purposes of God as an active participant in a local church, in which God is most fully dwelling, leading to the full manifestation of the wisdom and glory of God throughout the heavens and the earth. (Colossians 1:24-29; Ephesians 2:11-3:13).
3. The process of maturity must engage the biblical processes prescribed as normative for Christian development:
  - confession and repentance as a response to the gospel of Jesus

Christ as the change agent not only for salvation, but also sanctification and ultimately glorification (Colossians 1:21-23)

- commitment to the Scriptures as the teachings of Jesus Christ, which bring renewal to the mind and provide the means through which we understand and know God (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Romans 12:1-2, Colossians 3:10)
  - a diligent battle to resist sins that provide Satan an opportunity to establish a foothold, which prevents the renewing activity of the Holy Spirit (sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8), anger and bitterness (Ephesians 4:25-32), pride (James 4:6), greed (Matthew 6:24), etc.
  - participation in a local church, under the spiritual authority of elders, who are God's chosen instruments to tend to the care of the souls of Christians and who alone possess the biblical authority to do so (Ephesians 2:11-3:13, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-5)
  - engagement in mission and in the service of others (Titus 2:11-3:8, Acts 20:35)
4. Practitioners of Christian soul care (elders and church leaders) must be deeply and comprehensively trained in the all of the Scriptures, and in particular their formative use for counseling and shepherding people towards psychological health and Christian maturity. This goes well beyond the affirmation of historical Christian doctrines. Christian soul care providers must demonstrate a sage-like capacity to use the narratives and teachings of Scripture to skillfully and subtly provide substantive help to those in their care.
  5. All Christians, especially those responsible for the care of children or other dependents, should become skilled in the more common and practical uses of the Scripture for Christian soul care. (Ephesians 6:1-9).
  6. Practitioners of Christian soul care should seek to use any professional psychological knowledge or method for the maturity of those in their care as long as it does not violate the primacy and processes of the Scriptures, Spirit, or Church. This will enhance the work of the soul care provider, and will more readily demonstrate to the world the vastness of the wisdom of the people of God who not only engage the world but demonstrate the fruit of the indwelling God through His family. Ideally, local church leadership teams would greatly benefit with a person on their team who has been highly trained in both theological education and professional psychology.

7. Practitioners of Christian soul care should become competent in the civil law regarding families to most effectively counsel people towards plans and actions that provide the necessary protection when dealing with wicked people.
8. Practitioners of Christian soul care should become competent in the legal processes and requirements civil authorities place on counselors in order to abide by not only the biblical standards of spiritual leadership, but the civil governments' standards as well.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. How does our culture challenge the ability of the Scriptures, the Spirit, and the Church in providing substantive mental and emotional care?
2. What benefit do you think the professional discipline of psychology can provide to Christians working toward emotional and mental health? Are their unique contributions that the resources provided by God cannot fulfill?
3. How do you think one would begin to read the Scriptures for truly substantive knowledge that would renew and heal a person's mind and emotions?
4. Why do you think it is so hard for many to believe that elders and church leaders possess the unique authority and qualifications to adequately shepherd peoples' mental and emotional well-being?
5. What do you think would be a good success rate for counseling efforts in local churches? In the secular world?
6. What role does the community have in the formation of mental and emotional well-being?



Minneapolis/St. Paul  
[www.tccmn.org](http://www.tccmn.org)