

Session Five – Behavioral Approaches

Read Chapter 8 – pp. 99-117

***For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.
- Romans 7:15***

Behavior in the Bible

The Bible is replete with advice about behavior, including the behavior of the righteous and the need to support others. It warns about the danger of isolation, encouraging instead community and fellowship. It also has many examples of the value of solitude. (99)

❖ Honorable Conduct (99-100):

- 1 Peter 2:12
- ***Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.***

- Titus 2:7-8
- ***Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.***

- Philippians 1:27-28
- ***Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.***

❖ Isolation (100):

- Genesis 2:18
- ***Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."***

- Proverbs 18:1
- ***Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment.***

- 1 Peter 5:8
- ***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***

❖ Fellowship (100-101):

- Galatians 6:2
 - ***Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.***

- Philippians 2:4
 - ***Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.***

- Romans 15:1
 - ***We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves.***

- Hebrews 10:24-25
 - ***And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.***

❖ Quiet Time (101):

- Matthew 14:23
 - ***And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone,***

- Mark 1:35
 - ***And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.***

- Luke 5:15-16
 - ***But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. 16But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.***

To summarize, the Bible tells us that being alone is bad, except when it is done for our good. Isolating ourselves is dangerous, and receiving the gifts of God's Word within the community of saints is central to life within the Body of Christ. Being alone at times for prayer and meditation, however, is also important to the life of faith. It can help us recover when we are wearied of our burdens. (102)

Behavior and Mental Health Problems

Behaviors that are particularly bad for mental health are social isolation and lack of participation in enjoyable activities, which leads to an unhealthy lifestyle. (102)

Social Withdrawal and Isolation – Persons with mental health problems almost inevitably withdraw from others. This is because they look to future events and cannot imagine that they will enjoy themselves... Persons with anxiety can get into similar vicious cycles. Due to thinking that they will be anxious in a situation, they avoid the situation. As a result, they do not learn that the situation is not as dangerous or as scary as they imagine. (102)

Enjoyable Things – Lack of enjoyment might be due to *anhedonia*, which translates as “without pleasure”. Someone with *anhedonia* will engage in behavior that previously gave them pleasure and find that they no longer enjoy it. Thus does Luther so often cajole those with depression and anxiety, “You must go do fun things, such as ride, play music, play games, and so forth.” Note that Luther was not saying, and you should not say, “You will have fun!” Rather, Luther was saying, as you should say, “Do it because it will be good for you.” (103)

Neglecting Health-Promoting Behavior – Persons with depression and anxiety will not engage properly in healthy behaviors. They will not exercise enough, they will not take the time to prepare healthy meals, and they may unintentionally develop poor sleep habits. (104)

Modern Life, the Business of the Family, and Being Too Busy for Fun – Modern life can cause depression because it is so busy that individuals, couples, and families neglect to do things that they enjoy... it is sensible and helpful to consider the joys of life as necessary to prevent or defeat depression and anxiety. (104)

Behavior Therapy for Mental Health Problems

Cognitive therapy is the dominant form of therapy because, like the eight-hundred-pound gorilla, it is powerful. It is the most widely studied and most widely practiced form of therapy. Behavior therapy, however, is also powerful and has some advantages over cognitive therapy. (105)

Advantages of Advising about Behavior – Behavioral issues leading to mental health problems are easier to identify than cognitive errors... there is no “fast thinking” version of behavior... behavior is observable. Also, behaviors to combat mental health problems are straightforward... It is easy to evaluate whether someone has followed behavioral advice. (105)

Behavioral Activation – Modern mental health professionals routinely give two pieces of behavioral advice to persons with depression and anxiety: go out with others and do fun things... Implementing behavioral activation can be a challenge. This is because thinking (*It won't be fun*) and associated emotions (*I'm too down to do that*) are still at play when working to activate behavioral change. The strategies that mental health professionals use to increase the likelihood that someone will engage in behavioral activation focus, ironically, on thinking...

Helping persons recognize that the way they are acting is unhealthy for their mental health is essential... (so too) helping persons ignore thinking and emotions that encourage unhealthy behavior...(and) helping persons plan enjoyable activities. (106-107)

Luther's Modern Advice About Behavior

- ❖ Discuss your favorites... or your least favorites (107-111)

Applying Behavioral Principles

Luther’s helpful advice regarding behavior to combat depression and anxiety is straightforward. His advice is commonsensical, and you can and should offer the same advice; it is advice given by mental health professionals. To start, evaluate the person’s behavior, then enlighten him or her about the importance of behavior. Next, encourage and advise him or her to change his or her behavior. (111)

Socialization

The main behavioral goals to combat mental health problems are fun and socialization. They tend to go together. (114)

Note a focus on “fun” and face-to-face socialization.

Healthy and Unhealthy Behavior

Diet, exercise, stress, and sleep habits are not easy to change from unhealthy to healthy... An effective way to convince someone to care for himself is to remind him that his capacity to care for others is compromised if he is not first caring for himself. (116)