

QUESTION: I have a friend who suffers from anxiety. He wants help but wants to make sure that it does not contradict his faith. Are there effective treatments for emotional problems that are biblically sound?

ANSWER: That is a great question. Many people suffer from mental illness. Mental illness strikes people in all ethnic, social, and age groups. These diseases include depression, anxiety, psychosis, and childhood behavioral problems. Furthermore, people also experience distress in their marriages and families, as well as, their personal life. Unfortunately, Christians are not immune from these problems.

Fortunately, a scientifically based treatment is available. It is called Cognitive Therapy (CT). Research has demonstrated that CT is the most effective treatment for the vast majority of psychological disorders. A recent study has shown CT to be the most effective form of treatment for depression, anxiety, marital problems, and chronic pain. It is also an effective part of the treatment for schizophrenia, ADHD, Bipolar Disorder, and drug abuse.

Research has shown that the reason we have certain emotional and behavioral reactions to events is due to what we tell ourselves. Often what we tell ourselves is distorted and inaccurate. The goal of CT is to help people become more aware of their thoughts and beliefs and then evaluate and modify them so that they are more accurate and helpful. Cognitive Therapy is about giving people the tools they need to cope with life.

The biblical basis for Cognitive Therapy is found throughout Scripture. In Romans 12:2 when the Apostle Paul states, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.” For Paul changing the ways one thinks is essential to one’s growth in Christ. The process of growing in Christ includes transformation of how one perceives life.

Another biblical concept rooted in Cognitive Therapy is the word “Repentance.” In the Bible, repentance means to “change your mind.” When people are able to change their minds (how they think and what they believe), they are better able to become all God intended them to be. The goal of Christian-Oriented Cognitive Therapy is to help people grow in Christ by learning to discipline their minds.

One of the things your friend will find in Christian oriented Cognitive Therapy is that it is focused on the present. It is focused on problem solving. It tends to be brief in nature. Most people get significant relief from their symptoms in 9-12 sessions. Finally, it works.