

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

by Dr Nicolene Joubert



Christian psychology/psychiatry seeks to serve the healing ministry provided by Jesus Christ. Jesus forgives our sins, cleanses us and renews us body, soul and spirit. *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Christian psychology embraces this truth and aims at guiding Christian clients on the road of sanctification. Although all things become new Paul describes the inner struggle we might experience between our flesh and our spirit in no uncertain terms. *“For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members* (Rom 7:22-23).

The Christian community is not exempt from grappling with the reality of living in a fallen world with all its temptations, pain and hardships. Christians wrestle with issues such as depression, anxiety, terminal illnesses like cancer and HIV/Aids, alcoholism, violence, sexual abuse, poverty, divorce, loneliness, anger, work stress and general life stress. Facing a reality filled with various challenges, threats and needs doesn't leave any person untouched and people are affected on a physical (body), psychological (soul), social and spiritual (soul/spirit) level.

Soul care, from a traditional Christian perspective focuses on spiritual answers for the problems humans struggle with. Dealing with anger from this perspective differs greatly from a secular psychological approach. Instead of venting or suppressing the anger, a person with uncontrollable anger would be advised to acknowledge the anger and to exercise self-control by focusing one's mind on restored peace and acts of kindness. Traditional Christian answers like these are however not always sufficient in helping a person find a solution or to bring comfort or change a person's behaviour and it might become necessary to seek further help.

Is it necessary for a person to consult a psychologist/psychiatrist when having a problem?

Annelie Kanis, a counselling psychologist and part time lecturer at the Institute of Christian Psychology, is of the opinion that just as doctors studied in the field of medicine, psychologists are specialists in the field of communication and human sciences. It means that they have studied and obtained knowledge in that particular field. There is a great difference between sharing a problem with a friend and sharing it with a psychologist. Psychologists have specialized knowledge and will be able to help you in terms of what to expect or what is normal regarding certain issues. Just as for example a fertility specialist is an expert on the field of fertility so a psychologist has specialized knowledge with regards to problems with communication and relationships.

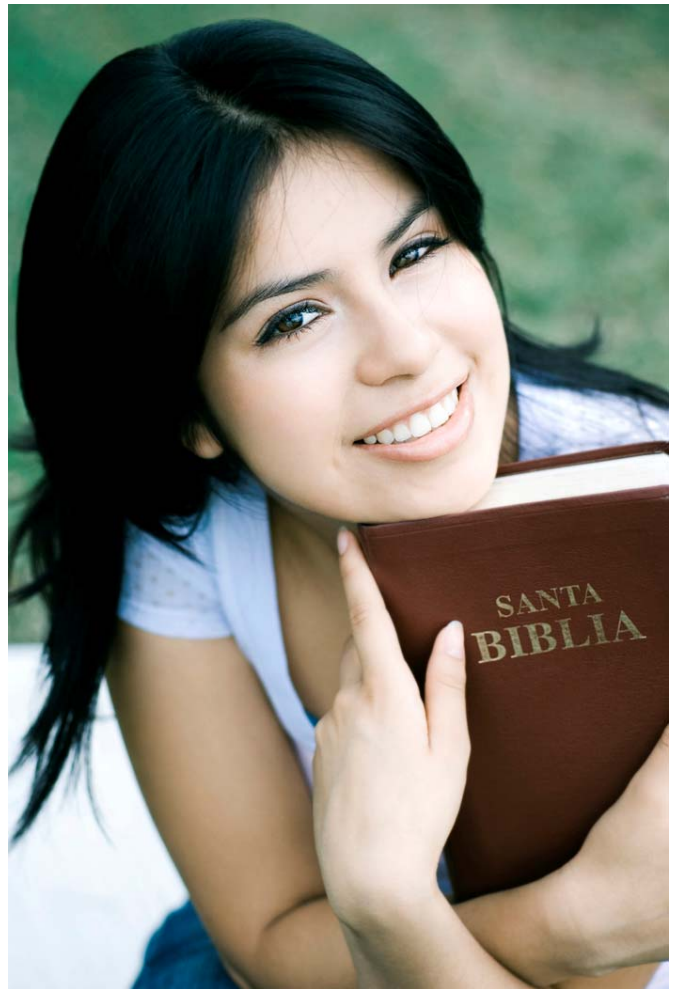
According to Zipporah Sigwili, a clinical psychologist and lecturer at the Institute of Christian Psychology, people sometimes need to seek professional help as problems stem from various aspects of human nature (body, soul, spirit as well as social issues) and psychiatry and psychology examine and treat behaviour with all of these aspects in mind.


Just as the field of psychology illustrates that behaviour does not only involve action, but includes thoughts, feelings and actions, the Bible also emphasizes the importance of our thoughts in relation to our behaviour - *Rom 12:2* “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*”

When is it necessary for a person to seek professional help?

Annelie Kanis shares the following guidelines:

- 1. Seek professional help when you experience the same problem over and over again.** In some cases the problem seems to improve but then there is generally a relapse. It is important to see somebody before it becomes a crisis. People often feel pressurized to cope with their problems and may feel that their problems are trivial, but they aren't and need attention.
- 2. It is also necessary to seek professional help when there is something wrong that influences your daily living** for example:
 - You don't enjoy the things you used to enjoy
 - It is very difficult to complete daily tasks like getting up for work
 - You don't feel like spending time with friends like you used to
 - When there are problems with eating or sleeping



Zipporah Sigwili states that all knowledge, including psychology, has been given by God for us to help ourselves and each other. Since psychology is based on well researched facts regarding the human mind and behaviour, professionals can use this knowledge effectively in their interventions. Christian psychologists should however be able to recognize theories or methods which are not in line with God's word. They are only able to do this if they apply the basic Christian biblical principle of submitting themselves and all they do under the guidance of God. 

Prof NICOLENE JOUBERT is the founder and head of the Institute of Christian Psychology. She is also a registered counselling psychologist in private practice and a well-known speaker on the effects of trauma. For more information on Christian Psychology, or for professional advice, please contact: 011 021 8930/ 011 827 7611 / 0209.