



# The Four Processes of Counseling: Facilitating Heart Change

Ashley Buechele, M.A.

---

Our deepest, most impactful work with people is to facilitate change at the deepest levels—what the Bible calls the heart—as these changes naturally flow into their affections, emotions, thoughts, and behavior. Apostle Paul models this for us in Ephesians 3:16-4:2 as he prays for the Ephesians to “know” the love of Christ: the Hebrew meaning of this word implies a deeper understanding than just intellectual. He is praying for them to know Christ and his love experientially in their hearts, and then he anticipates that this intimacy will ripple through how they live. This Toolkit provides guidance on Facilitating Heart Change. As with the other processes, Facilitating Heart Change is not a discrete phase, but is interwoven with the other phases.

## The Importance of Facilitating Heart Change

Individuals come into counseling with hurts and a story that has shaped their view of God and view of self. Their story fuels the way they feel towards other people and how they move through the world. Their story and implicit beliefs need to be revised for true heart transformation.

One of the most effective ways of facilitating heart change is through **corrective relational experiences**. These surprising moments of grace occur when a caregiver is attuned and responsive to someone's emotions and needs, in direct contrast to their previous experience, especially during their formative years. These mismatching experiences can happen on a variety of levels with varying degrees of impact. As caregivers, we aim to foster this experience with those we walk with.

Corrective experiences can also happen as the adult person processes their past by showing understanding to their younger self (through various exercises), which can help them learn to have more compassion for themselves and reduce underlying self-contempt and resentment. These corrective relational experiences with another person and themselves offer relief and opportunities for healing and change. They are pointers to the ultimate corrective relational experience with Jesus, who was perfectly attuned, moved, and responsive. For the deepest heart change, the most transformational kind of corrective relational experience is from Jesus to the person's hurting self.

Many of those we serve (and caregivers!) seek to grow and change through logical left-brain study of God's truths and theology, which are valuable, but the greatest change happens through an experiential full-brain, heart knowing as they grow in intimacy with Jesus.

## Tips for Facilitating Heart Change

In this Toolkit, we will guide you through two of many ways to facilitate heart change.

**Experiencing Jesus** connects people's head knowledge of God to a deeper heart knowledge and connection with Him.

### Experiencing Jesus through immersive Bible meditation

This tool is one way to help those we serve experience Jesus by putting themselves into a story with Jesus. We can personalize and contextualize this experience for clients one-on-one, but it can also be done in a group setting, such as in a small group or during a sermon. As caregivers, we can also help by teaching and having them try somatic practices:

- Explain that you are going to lead the person or group through an exercise that will help them move beyond knowing *about* Jesus to *experientially knowing Him*. Let them know that this will involve closing their eyes and using their imagination, informed by scripture, to put themselves into the shoes of someone in a Bible story. Check in and see if they have questions or concerns. Address these and check for readiness and openness before starting.
- In advance, prepare a story where Jesus attunes to a hurting person, which would be meaningful and resonate with the person or audience you are serving. Examples include Jesus calling tax collector Matthew to follow Him (Luke 5:27-32), Jesus speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-42), Jesus healing the blind man (Mark

8:22-26), Jesus healing the cripple at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-8), Jesus healing the woman with a bleeding disorder (Mark 5:24-34), and Jesus healing the man with leprosy (Luke 5:12-14).

- Share some historical and cultural context to convey a full picture of the hurting person's pain. E.g., tax collectors were Jewish traitors, Samaritans were partial pagans, lepers and the bleeding were unclean and outcasts, the disabled were destitute. All of them were outsiders, hurting, desperate, and alone.
- The caregiver then leads the person or audience through the following steps:
  1. Read the passage aloud.
  2. Ask the person to close their eyes and imagine they are the hurting person in this story right before the story begins. Ask questions to help them immerse themselves into the experience of the setting via their senses. *Where are you? What do you see? What is the landscape like? What do you smell?*
  3. Ask questions to help them sink into being the person, giving them time with each question. *How is your body positioned? How does your body feel? What did you do all day? What are your stresses? What are your fears? What is your pain?*
  4. Then help them more fully experience the person's relationship with Jesus. *What have you heard about Jesus? What do you know? What have you seen? What do you think Jesus is like?*
  5. Lead them through experiencing the presence of Jesus. *You hear Jesus is coming, Jesus is near. What do you*

*think? What do you feel? What do you do?*

6. Lead them through experiencing Jesus personally. *Jesus sees you. What does he communicate with his face? Does he see and understand your pain? How can you tell? What is it like to be seen by Jesus? What does Jesus feel? How do you know? What is it like to see Him moved by your pain? What does He do? What is it like for Him to respond to you? How does it feel in your body? What emotions do you feel?* Have them sit and soak in experiencing Jesus like this. You can just leave them in silence, or they can narrate what is happening, if that feels right.
7. Give them a gentle warning that there are just a few minutes left and you will be wrapping up soon. Then, invite them to take their time, but when they are ready, to open their eyes and come back into the room.
8. Process what they experienced. *What did it feel like to be with Jesus? How did it feel in your body? What emotions did you feel? What was He like? What was it like to be seen by Him? For Him to speak to you?* The goal is for them to experience Jesus and then process it with you, putting their new understanding of God and view of self into words.

## Experiencing Jesus through art

A second suggested way to facilitate an experience with Jesus is to use arts such as music or movies. One example is to have them watch *The Chosen*, specifically the episodes with less creative license. The calling of Matthew (Season 1, Episode 7) and Jesus healing the cripple man at the pool of

Bethesda (Season 2, Episode 4) are great. Encourage them to find a character whose pain resembles their own: abused, rejected, abandoned, grieving, afraid, doubting, or in physical pain. Direct the person to watch how Jesus attunes and responds to that person's pain and then imagine Jesus doing the same with them and their own pain.

---

A heart being opened, healed, and moved to change is a wondrous thing. Facilitating heart change allows deep transformation in someone's ingrained and implicit beliefs. It can help someone who expects God to be angry know Him as compassionate and caring as they encounter an experience of His grace. These new and mismatching encounters can rewire their right brain and help them reshape their view of self and God, flowing into lasting emotional and behavioral change. May you have the joy of experiencing how Jesus and heart change transform the way the people you serve (and you!) move through the world and connect with others and God.