



The Four Processes of Counseling: Counseling that Transforms

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We've spent the past few months exploring the four subprocesses of counseling in our GIFT (Gospel-centered Integrative Framework for Therapy) approach. These four subprocesses — Building Alliance, Reducing Symptoms, Grieving and Accepting, and Facilitating Heart Change — are not linear stages but ongoing, interwoven processes. Each is essential, and together they reflect a holistic approach to care that is both clinically grounded and deeply shaped by the gospel.

In GIFT, a process is more than a technique or sequence of steps; it is the relational and spiritual journey through which transformation unfolds. Each subprocess offers a unique contribution. Let's briefly revisit each of the subprocesses.

Building Alliance establishes safety in the counseling relationship. Trust and safety are not only prerequisites for healing, they are instruments of healing themselves. People heal in the context of secure relationships, and it is often our first task as caregivers to show up with compassion, presence, and curiosity—modeling the heart of Christ in how we listen and engage. As clients feel seen and welcomed, their nervous systems settle, and they become more open to reflection and healing.

Reducing Symptoms addresses a person's most pressing felt needs. Whether someone is suffering from insomnia, panic, intrusive thoughts, or emotional numbness, attending to symptoms honors their full humanity as embodied souls. God's common grace includes rest, regulation, and relief. Helping someone feel better clears the path for deeper healing to occur.

Grieving and Accepting invites people to name what they have lost—and to encounter God in the midst of sorrow. Many people avoid grief out of fear that it will overwhelm them or because they've never experienced compassion in their pain. As people honestly grieve their wounds and losses, they move toward acceptance, freedom, and deeper intimacy with Christ.

Facilitating Heart Change the most distinctively Christian element of the GIFT and opens the door to spiritual renewal. Facilitating Heart Change is grounded in the Gospel's vision of human nature that we are embodied souls created in the image of God, marked by the Fall, and deeply in need of spiritual redemption, relational reconciliation, and psychological renewal. Because of this, transformation happens not by turning inward to find solutions, but by turning toward Christ. This process invites clients to experience Jesus in the places of their greatest need and distorted beliefs. Whether a person believes they are unlovable, unworthy, powerless, or alone, the gospel offers a radically different truth. As people internalize these truths experientially, their emotions, affections, and behaviors begin to shift as well, leading to lasting change and a renewed understanding of who they truly are.

The System of Self-Redemption

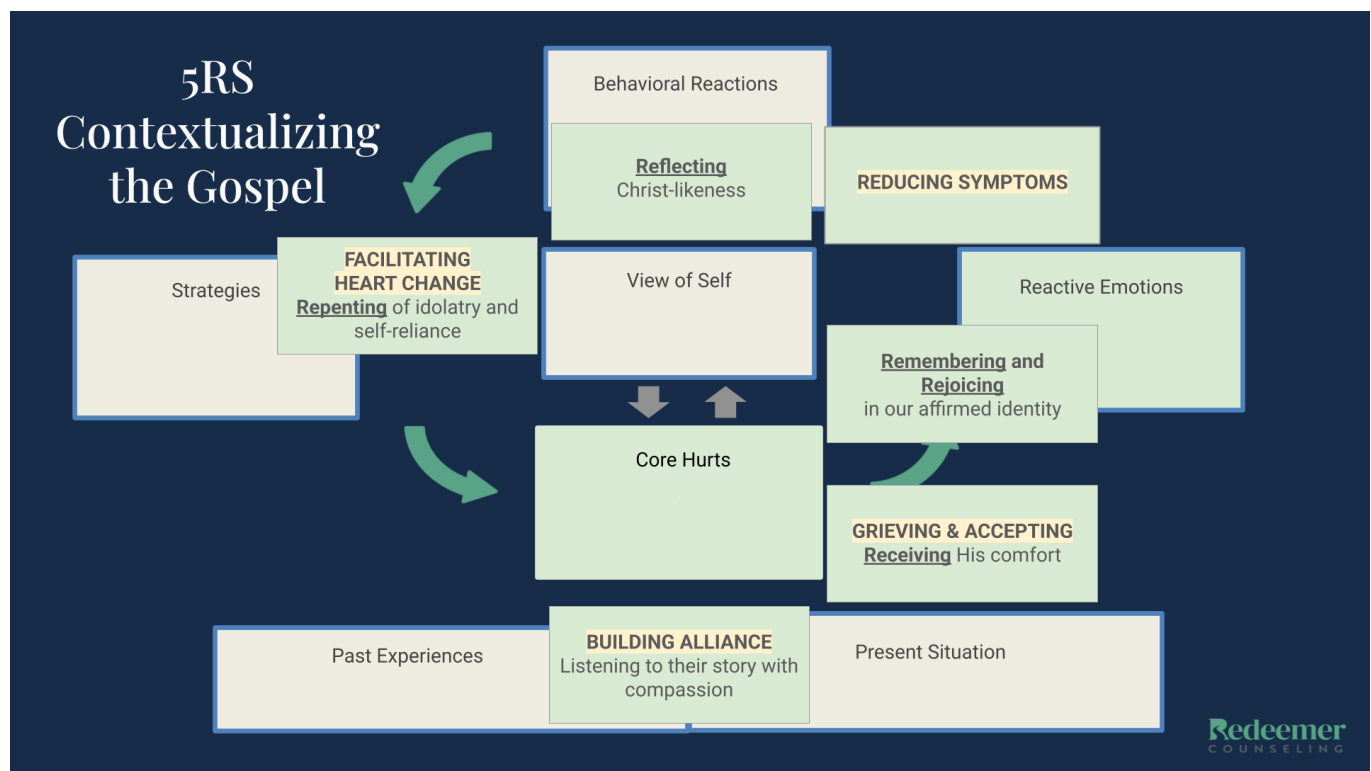
In GIFT, we understand people's struggles and patterns through their propensity for self-reliance to avoid and redeem their deep, internalized shame: the System of Self-Redemption. In our Deep Idols series, we explored the strategies utilized in the System of Self-Redemption in depth. People engage in self-redeeming strategies that are exhausting and unsustainable. Underneath these efforts lie core wounds and a shame-based view of self (e.g., "I'm unlovable," "I'm inadequate"). Over time, their strategies lead to increased anxiety, disconnection, and despair.

Most well-regarded therapy models seek not only to reduce symptoms but to produce meaningful internal transformation. Modalities such as CBT and DBT target thoughts and behaviors; psychodynamic therapy explores unconscious patterns; IFS and AEDP foster emotional and relational healing. These approaches often yield powerful shifts in how a person feels and functions. However, they do so without the full acknowledgment of the spiritual nature of humanity— as beings made in the image of God, in need of connection with Him as the ultimate source of our identity. Put simply, we cannot find ourselves within ourselves alone; we must find our identity in our Creator and Redeemer.

The GIFT not only reflects the common grace of God offered in secular treatment models, but it names our core problem not only as trauma, relational injury, or emotional dysregulation, but as disconnection

from God and self, driven by shame and self-reliance. As caregivers, we want to help people remember the Gospel and reconnect with God, bringing lasting change. In GIFT, we weave the good news into our counseling using the 5 Rs:

1. **Receiving** Christ's comfort, grace, truth, and care
2. **Remembering** Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and the redemption offered through Him
3. **Rejoicing** in an affirmed, secure identity, and unearned belonging rooted in Christ
4. **Repenting** of false narratives, idols, and self-reliance (System of Self-Redemption)
5. **Reflecting** on the goodness of God and how the Holy Spirit is inviting them to live from gospel truth. understanding of God and view of self into words.



The System of Self-Redemption shows us where the Gospel needs to reach the person for transformation. The four processes of counseling are relational and spiritual approaches that help people experience the love and grace of God in relationship with a caregiver. The 5 Rs are active movements that lead to corrective relational experiences with Christ. While they are not a checklist, we have provided some examples of questions to help you weave the 5 Rs into the four processes of counseling.

5 Rs Sample Questions

Subprocess	5Rs	Sample Questions
Building Alliance	Receiving grace from an embodied presence of another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's it like to be seen, heard and accepted here just as you are? • What do you notice in your body as you experience this sense of safety here? • Can you imagine experiencing the same compassion & sense of safety with God?
Reducing Symptoms	Receiving his mercy in caring for the body through medication, diet and the wisdom of how God wired us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it like to experience relief in your body? • Can we celebrate this moment of relief together? • Let's slow down and sit with the relief and peace you're feeling. How is God relevant to your experience now and in your distress?
Grieving & Accepting	Receiving comfort for our personal experiences of pain and suffering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you imagine what it would feel like to experience God's comfort in this sorrow? • What is it like to receive Christ's compassion in this place of grief- not just know it intellectually, but let's notice how it feels in your body?
	Remembering his faithfulness in our personal story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can we explore where Christ may have been with you in that painful moment? • What's it like to bring your sorrow into the presence of Jesus, who was called "a man of sorrows"? • Have you internalized a version of God that felt cold or absent? Can we compare that with how Jesus responds to the suffering in Scripture?

Subprocess	5Rs	Sample Questions
Facilitating Heart Change	Receiving his comfort and identity as his beloved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you imagine what God/Jesus is saying to the wounded part of you (i.e., the child who feels abandoned)? • What do you want to hear from Him to help you feel his comfort or feel assured that he loves you? • Is there anything you want to say to God/Jesus in response to his comfort and compassion?
	Remembering the magnitude of his compassion personally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you imagine what Jesus may have been thinking/feeling towards you as you were suffering? • Would you tell him what you need to help you remember his love for you personally? • What is it like for you to be reminded that you are his beloved?
	Rejoicing in the affirmation of received identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does being affirmed of his love and who you are in him motivate or shape you to live your life going forward? Are you willing to share that with God? • What is it like to feel his comfort, to hear him say _____?
	Repenting of beliefs, strategies, and propensity for self reliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What false beliefs about God or yourself are you sensing an invitation to lay down? Would you be willing to tell that to God? • What would it mean to turn from self-sufficiency and entrust your worth fully to Jesus? Would you share that with God? • How does God respond to your confession?
	Reflecting and Representing Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would it look like to live today as someone already loved, already chosen by God? • Let's notice what it feels like in your body to imagine walking forward in your identity as God's beloved child • What's one thing you can begin to put into practice to reflect these truths?"

The beauty of the GIFT is that it offers a vision for healing that is holistic, relational, and redemptive. Facilitating Heart Change is not about behavior modification; it's about surrendering self-redemption and receiving Christ, depending on and trusting in his finished work on the cross to redeem us. As caregivers, we don't manufacture this change, but we can help create the space for it to occur. We bear witness, extend grace, and point to Jesus. And in doing so, we get to watch the Holy Spirit do what only God can do: heal the brokenhearted and make them new.

May we walk humbly in this sacred work, and may the Gospel shape both the hearts we care for and our own.