

[MJTM 23 (2021–2022)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Elizabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto, et al. *Skills for Effective Counseling: A Faith-Based Integration*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 480 pp. Pbk. ISBN 9780830828609. \$50.00.

With the exception of a handful of books (e.g., James H. Olthuis, *The Beautiful Risk* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001]), there are few pastoral or Christian counseling books that focus exclusively on counseling skills as opposed to counseling issues or a counseling model. Thus, it was with great interest that I received and read *Skills for Effective Counseling*. What initially stood out about this book was the authors' intent to provide an instructional guide that supports learning basic therapeutic skills common to most counseling approaches—whether or not they are faith-based models.

The first section (untitled) of *Skills for Effective Counseling* includes the introduction and two chapters that introduce three threads that are woven throughout the book: counseling skills (ch. 1), “The Person of the Counselor” (ch. 2), and theological reflection and integration (ch. 1). The second section “Target 1: Establishing Relationship and Exploring” includes five chapters that introduce skills that facilitate the creation of the counseling relationship. The skills introduced in this section include “perceiving” (ch. 3), “attending” (ch. 4), “reflecting content” (ch. 5), “reflecting feeling” (ch. 6), and the use of empathy (ch. 7). Section three, “Targets 2 and 3: Deepening and Growing,” introduces the reader to the use of advanced counseling skills such as “clarifying” (ch. 8), “intuitive empathy” (ch. 9), metaphors (ch. 10), confrontation (ch. 11), the safe and effective use of self (ch. 12), understanding and implementing change (ch. 13), working with relational systems (ch. 14), and working with spiritual themes (ch. 15). The fourth section “Target 4: Consolidating and

Ending” reminds the reader that the outcome of effective counseling is change and, as a result, counseling relationships come to an end (ch. 16). In terms of content, this reviewer observed that the sources used by the authors include a diverse assortment of Christian counselors, pastoral counselors, and secular writers that include many seminal and influential sources from each of these traditions.

The book concludes with a brief postscript, four appendices, a reference list, an author and subject index, and a Scripture index. The first appendix provides answers to questions that appear in ten of the sixteen chapters. The second appendix contains supplemental individual learning activities designed to enhance the reader’s knowledge and use of the skills described in the text. The third appendix provides group learning activities that may be used in either a classroom setting or a learning lab. The fourth appendix briefly discusses the authors’ understanding of the relationship between psychology and religion.

As a classroom instructor and clinical supervisor, this reviewer appreciated the case studies, sample dialogues, reflection questions, and other activities designed to support learning that are scattered throughout the book. These activities are designed to help the reader look beyond particular uses of individual skills and to consider how these skills work with and build on each other. For the discerning learner, these practice exercises, case studies, and sample dialogues demonstrate that a healing conversation occurs when there is a purposeful use of multiple skills.

In conclusion, the authors have achieved the goal of producing a skills-based text that can serve to support students to learn key counseling skills, reflect on their emergent awareness of self as a counselor, and integrate these within the construct of Christian counseling. I anticipate that *Skills for Effective Counseling* may eventually replace the use of the secular skills-based learning models currently in use within many seminary and Christian university programs.

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