

# **The Bible as Therapeutic Narrative: A Faith–Psychology Integration Approach to Pastoral Counselling**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the Bible as a therapeutic narrative and explores how Scripture can be used in pastoral counselling to support emotional healing, identity restoration, and spiritual integration. Using the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM), the study demonstrates how individuals can re-read their life stories through biblical narrative in ways that affirm dignity and reorient meaning. Four narrative case texts Job, Joseph, the Samaritan Woman, and selected Psalms of David serve as interpretive mirrors for experiences of grief, betrayal, shame, and emotional overwhelm. The study also incorporates brief pastoral case reflections to illustrate how narrative encounter facilitates healing within real counselling contexts. The findings emphasize that transformation in pastoral care does not emerge from doctrinal instruction or behavioral correction, but from the re-narration of identity within God’s redemptive story. The article offers a contextual approach grounded in African communal spirituality, where healing is relational, storytelling is formative, and spiritual belonging is central. The study contributes to pastoral theology by presenting a practical, theologically grounded counselling model that honors Scripture, emotional experience, and cultural context.

**Keywords** Narrative Therapy; Pastoral Counselling; Emotional Healing; Identity Reconstruction; Faith–Psychology Integration; Biblical Interpretation; Spiritual Care; Meaning-Making.

## **1.0 Background of the Study and Problem Statement.**

Stories have always shaped how human beings interpret life, pain, and hope. Across cultures, storytelling provides meaning and healing, functioning as a vehicle for moral wisdom and emotional restoration (Bausch, 1984; Shea, 1982; Tilley, 1985). Within African societies, particularly among the Akan of Ghana, Anansesem traditional folktales served not only to entertain but to educate, resolve conflict, and transmit values that promote psychological and communal well-being. This narrative dimension of African life reveals that healing and knowledge are mediated through story (Goldberg, 1982; Clinebell, 1984).

The Bible, likewise, is a divine narrative an unfolding story of God's relationship with humanity. Through stories of suffering and redemption, Scripture provides meaning to human pain and direction for spiritual renewal (Brueggemann, 1995; Crossan, 1988). Yet, in contemporary Christian counselling, particularly within African Pentecostal and Charismatic circles, the Bible is often used as a repository of moral instructions rather than as a therapeutic story that speaks to the human condition. Many believers quote verses for comfort but fail to engage the deeper narrative that offers transformation and healing. At the same time, African Christian counselling has relied heavily on Western psychological models that, though valuable, are often culturally detached. These frameworks tend to prioritize individualism and rational analysis while overlooking the communal, spiritual, and narrative nature of African life. The result is a counselling practice that is either overly spiritualized reducing distress to sin or demonic attack or overly secularized, neglecting the faith and theological dimensions of healing (Capps, 1990, 1993; Patton, 1990; Shafranske & Malony, 1990).

This study proposes a hermeneutical approach that treats the Bible as a therapeutic narrative a living story through which God engages and transforms human experience. By interpreting Scripture narratively rather than prescriptively, the study bridges theology, psychology, and African spirituality. It proposes the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM) as a conceptual framework for Christian counselling that integrates biblical hermeneutics, psychological theory, and African narrative consciousness. Methodologically, the project draws on insights from narrative theology and pastoral hermeneutics (Gerkin, 1984, 1991; Dulles, 1982) and aligns them with therapeutic narrative practices (White & Epston, 1990; Combs & Freedman, 1990). Through qualitative hermeneutical analysis of biblical stories such as Job, Joseph, and the Samaritan woman, the study explores how Scripture functions as divine therapy for emotional and spiritual renewal while also engaging cognitive-meaning processes highlighted by CBT literature (Beck, 1995; DiGiuseppe et al., 1990; Propst et al., 1992).

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

1. Interpret selected biblical narratives as therapeutic texts that address emotional and spiritual experience.
2. Explore how individuals can re-narrate personal experiences of suffering, betrayal, shame, and emotional struggle through engagement with Scripture.
3. Integrate theological reflection, psychological insight, and African communal consciousness using the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM).
4. Demonstrate how FPIM can guide pastoral counselling practices toward renewed identity, belonging, and meaning.
5. Identify practical implications for the use of biblical narrative in Christian counselling and pastoral care.

## **2.0 Theoretical and Theological Framework.**

The therapeutic potential of Scripture is best understood within a hermeneutical and narrative framework that recognizes the Bible as both divine revelation and human story (Brueggemann, 1995; Crossan, 1988). This study draws upon the interpretive traditions of narrative theology, pastoral hermeneutics, and psychological theory (Goldberg, 1982; Tilley, 1985; Gerkin, 1991), integrating them through the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM) to explain how Scripture functions as a living text that heals, restores, and transforms (Clinebell, 1984; Patton, 1990; White & Epston, 1990).

### **2.1 Hermeneutical Foundations.**

Hermeneutics, the art, and science of interpretation, seeks to uncover meaning within texts through dialogue between the reader, the text, and context. Within theological studies, biblical hermeneutics transcends literal interpretation to explore the transformative encounter between divine revelation and human experience (Clinebell, 1984; Gerkin, 1991). According to scholars such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Anthony Thistleton, understanding arises when the interpreter and the text enter a fusion of horizons, allowing meaning to emerge through engagement and reflection (Goldberg, 1982; Tilley, 1985).

In the context of counselling, hermeneutics offers a way to interpret human suffering and healing as part of God’s redemptive narrative (Patton, 1990; Brueggemann, 1995). Scripture is not a static document but a living story that addresses contemporary experiences of pain, guilt, and hope. When approached hermeneutically, biblical narratives become therapeutic encounters, inviting individuals to reframe their struggles through God’s perspective and discover new meaning within divine story (Capps, 1993; White & Epston, 1990).

## **2.2 Narrative theology and therapeutic meaning.**

Narrative theology asserts that God reveals Himself primarily through story rather than through abstract propositions (Goldberg, 1982; Tilley, 1985). Thinkers such as Hauerwas, Frei, and McClendon emphasize that theology is best understood when believers locate their lives within the grand biblical narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration (Crossan, 1988; Brueggemann, 1995).

In this view, the Bible provides not merely moral guidance but a narrative framework for personal identity and transformation. Individuals find healing when they realize their personal stories are intertwined with God's redemptive story (Capps, 1993; Patton, 1990). This process parallels narrative therapy in psychology, which helps clients reconstruct life stories that move from trauma to meaning. However, the theological dimension adds that ultimate healing occurs when one's story is interpreted within the story of Christ the divine narrative of suffering, death, and resurrection (Brueggemann, 2002). By reading Scripture as story, Christian counselling shifts from advising or moralizing to story-sharing and re-storying (Parry & Doan, 1994; Stover & Stover, 1994). Counsellors help individuals recognize God's presence within their narratives and to reinterpret pain, failure, or loss as part of a redemptive process rather than as final defeat (Capps, 1990; Webb-Mitchell, 1995)

## **2.3 Psychological Parallels: Narrative and Cognitive Framework.**

The study draws conceptual parallels between narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990) and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which both emphasize meaning-making as essential to healing. Narrative therapy helps individuals externalize problems, view them objectively, and reconstruct empowering stories (Combs & Freedman, 1990). Similarly, CBT reframes distorted thought patterns to align with healthier perspectives (Beck, 1995).

Within a theological framework, these processes correspond to repentance, renewal of the mind, and faith transformation (Rom. 12:2). The counsellor's task becomes hermeneutical helping clients interpret their experiences through the truth of Scripture, reshaping personal narratives in the light of divine promise. This integration of theology and psychology reflects therapeutic spirituality, where faith and meaning jointly contribute to emotional well-being.

## **2.4 African Narrative and Communal and Worldview**

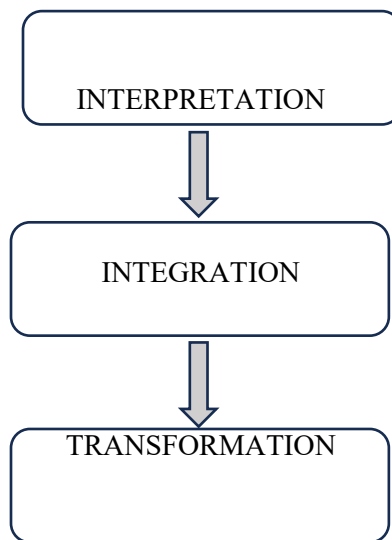
African thought systems naturally align with narrative theology because both view life as story-centered and communal. In traditional African society, healing is not merely individual but collective, involving family, faith, and community participation (Louw, 2000). Testimony, proverb, and storytelling are all mechanisms for restoring identity and belonging. As Kwame Bediako (2004) observe, African spirituality views suffering and healing through relational harmony with self, community, ancestors, and God. When Scripture is interpreted within this worldview, its therapeutic power becomes both spiritual and cultural. The biblical story thus resonates with African oral traditions, reinforcing the truth that healing occurs through shared story and collective memory. This contextual dimension ensures that the hermeneutical approach to counselling is not imported or abstract but rooted in the lived experience of African Christians whose identity and hope are shaped by narrative consciousness.

## **2.5 Faith-Psychology Integrity Model (FPIM).**

The Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM) developed in this study provides a framework for understanding how biblical hermeneutics and psychological theory converge in therapeutic practice. The model recognizes that human transformation occurs through a continuous dialogue between divine revelation and human experience (Gerkin, 1984).

At its core, FPIM unfolds through three interrelated movements. Interpretation involves reading Scripture and human experience as intertwined narratives of divine–human interaction, where meaning emerges through engagement with the biblical story (Patton, 1990). Integration represents the dynamic process of relating biblical truth to psychological insight, allowing theological meaning to inform emotional understanding and personal reflection (Capps, 1990). Transformation is the outcome of this encounter, as individuals reinterpret their lives within God’s redemptive story, moving from brokenness toward healing and purpose (Ganzevoort, 1993). FPIM positions the counsellor not merely as a psychological technician but as a theological interpreter one who guides counselees in discovering God’s presence within their personal stories (White & Epston, 1990). Healing, therefore, does not arise from detached analysis but from narrative participation: the lived experience of reorienting one’s story toward divine purpose and meaning (Graham, 1992).

## **2.6 Conceptual Framework.**



**(Authors Construct 2004)**

## **2.7 Conceptual Framework (Explained).**

This study is guided by the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM), which understands healing as a narrative process in which individuals re-read and re-narrate their life stories through Scripture. The model views the Bible not simply as doctrinal instruction, but as a living narrative in which God encounters human experience and invites transformation (Gerkin, 1984). FPIM integrates biblical hermeneutics, emotional meaning-making, and African communal spirituality as complementary ways of understanding the self. The framework unfolds in three interconnected movements (Louw, 2000).

Interpretation involves reading personal experience alongside biblical narrative. Here, the counsellor helps individuals name their emotions, losses, fears, and hopes, and recognize that their story resonates with stories in Scripture (Capps, 1990). This movement legitimizes emotional honesty and opens space for individuals to encounter God within their lived experience (Patton, 1990). Integration occurs as biblical meaning and emotional insight are brought into dialogue. The person begins to see their life not as an isolated or broken narrative, but as part of God’s ongoing redemptive work (Ganzevoort, 1993). Past events are not denied or erased; rather, they are reframed considering God’s character, presence, and promises. Identity shifts from shame or abandonment toward dignity and belonging (Graham, 1992). Transformation emerges when individuals re-narrate their identity in the presence of God and community. Healing is expressed not primarily as behavior change, but as restored meaning, renewed self-understanding, and reconnected relational life (White & Epston, 1990). The person moves from fragmentation toward coherence from this is what happened to me to this is who I am becoming in God’s story. FPIM therefore positions pastoral counselling not as advice-giving or problem-solving, but as a companioning journey in which the counsellor helps individuals discover how their story is held,



affirmed, and reinterpreted within the biblical narrative of God's compassion and redemption (Watkins Ali, 1999).

## **2.8 Interpretations of the Framework**

The Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM) illustrates the dynamic interaction between faith, psychology, and human experience in the counselling process. It begins with interpretation, where Scripture and human experience are read as interwoven narratives of divine–human encounter (Gerkin, 1984). Through integration, insights from biblical hermeneutics and psychological theory are brought into conversation, producing a holistic understanding of the counselee's inner world. Finally, the process culminates in transformation, where counselees reinterpret their stories within the larger redemptive story of God, leading to healing, renewed identity, and restored purpose (Ganzevoort, 1993; White & Epston, 1990). The model emphasizes that effective Christian counselling is both theological and therapeutic. Healing arises not through detached analysis but through participatory interpretation, as individuals experience (Graham, 1992). Scriptures not merely as text, but as living story. Within African contexts, FPIM further recognizes that meaning making and healing are communal processes shaped by shared narrative, memory, and embodied faith practices (Louw, 2000; Watkins Ali, 1999). The FPIM therefore offers a contextual framework that unites spiritual revelation, psychological insight, and cultural meaning-making, particularly relevant to African Christian counselling practice.

## **3.0 Introduction for Research Orientation.**

This study employs a qualitative hermeneutical and narrative orientation. The qualitative design allows for the exploration of meaning rather than measurement, emphasizing understanding over prediction (Graham, 1992). The hermeneutical dimension interprets Scripture as a living text that speaks into human experience, engaging the interpreter, the text, and the context in dialogue (Gerkin, 1984). Meaning arises within this interaction as the divine narrative encounters human pain and hope (Capps, 1990). The narrative orientation views both the Bible and human life as stories that reveal identity and transformation through experience (White & Epston, 1990). Counselling, in this sense, becomes an act of narrative interpretation helping individuals reinterpret their personal stories within God's redemptive story (Patton, 1990). The African worldview further enriches this process by framing healing as relational and communal rather than purely individual (Louw, 2000; Watkins Ali, 1999). Within this framework, the study positions Scripture not as a static authority but as a dynamic story that participates in the healing dialogue between theology, psychology, and lived faith (Ganzevoort, 1993).

### **3.1 Data Sources**

The study draws on three complementary sources of data: Scripture, pastoral experience, and scholarly literature (Capps, 1980). Scripture forms the primary text, providing the theological and narrative foundation for the inquiry. Selected biblical narratives such as Job, Joseph, and the Samaritan woman serve as case examples of divine engagement with human suffering, forgiveness, and restoration (Patton, 1990). These texts are read hermeneutically, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between divine revelation and human experience (Gerkin, 1984).

Pastoral and counselling experiences constitute the second source, reflecting real-life contexts in which Scripture is applied to emotional and spiritual care within African Christianity (Louw, 2000). These experiences provide practical insight into how individuals encounter God's story amid personal struggles (Graham, 1992). Finally, scholarly literature offers the third source, engaging theological, psychological, and cultural studies that support the integration of faith and therapy (Ganzevoort, 1993; White & Epston, 1990). The dialogue among these three sources biblical narrative, lived experience, and academic reflection forms the interpretive foundation of this study. This triangulated approach allows for a deeper, contextually grounded understanding of the Bible as a therapeutic narrative that speaks to both spiritual and psychological dimensions of healing.

### **3.2 Data Collection and Analysis.**

Data were gathered through textual interpretation and reflective analysis rather than empirical fieldwork. The selected biblical narratives were examined hermeneutically, paying attention to literary form, theological meaning, and their relevance to contemporary counselling contexts (Gerkin, 1984). The process involved multiple readings, contextual reflection, and thematic mapping to identify recurring patterns such as suffering, faith, forgiveness, and restoration (Capps, 1990).

Analysis followed a thematic–hermeneutical process that mirrored the hermeneutical circle, where interpretation deepens through continuous dialogue between the text and the interpreter (Patton, 1990). Insights from theology, psychology, and African cultural understanding were integrated to construct meaning from the narratives (Louw, 2000). This approach allowed for a fluid movement

between textual interpretation (Scripture), contextual reflection (experience), and conceptual synthesis (theory) (Ganzevoort, 1993). The final phase involved relating the interpretive findings to the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM). This ensured that the conclusions drawn were not abstract but applicable to counselling practice, demonstrating how biblical stories can function as therapeutic encounters that transform human experience within God’s redemptive framework (White & Epston, 1990).

### **3.3 Triangular Sources.**

To ensure interpretive credibility, the study employs source triangulation, integrating insights from Scripture, pastoral experience, and scholarly reflection (Graham, 1992). Each source contributes a distinct yet complementary perspective: Scripture provides divine revelation and theological grounding; pastoral experience reveals lived realities of healing and faith; and scholarly literature offers theoretical and analytical depth (Patton, 1990). This triangulated interaction strengthens the reliability of the study by allowing different viewpoints to illuminate one another (Louw, 2000). It prevents interpretive bias by balancing personal faith, professional experience, and academic rigor (Ganzevoort, 1993). Within the hermeneutical process, triangulation ensures that conclusions drawn about Scripture’s therapeutic power are not subjective impressions but contextually and theologically verified insights (Capps, 1990). This approach reflects the interdisciplinary nature of Christian counselling, where theology, psychology, and culture converge to form a holistic understanding of human restoration (White & Epston, 1990).

## **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the interpretive analysis of selected biblical narratives using the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM). The aim is to show how Scripture functions as a therapeutic narrative a living story through which God engages human suffering, restores identity, and reshapes meaning (Gerkin, 1984). Rather than approaching biblical texts merely as doctrinal instruction, this chapter reads them as transformative stories that reveal and heal emotional and spiritual experience (Capps, 1980; Patton, 1990).

The narratives chosen to represent common human struggles such as loss, rejection, shame, and the search for belonging. Each narrative is interpreted hermeneutically, recognizing the interaction between the divine story and the human story, and is then brought into dialogue with psychological reflection and African communal spirituality. (Ganzevoort, 1993). Through this approach, individuals are shown how to locate their own life experiences within God’s redemptive narrative and experience healing as re-storying of the self. (White & Epston, 1990). The chapter highlights the central themes of each narrative, explores their emotional and theological dimensions, and demonstrates how these stories can be applied in pastoral counselling and therapeutic practice. In doing so, it shows how FPIM can guide counsellors to help individuals reinterpret their lives through the healing power of Scripture (Graham, 1992).

### **4.1 When Faith meets Sufferings: A Hermeneutical Reading of Job.**

The narrative of Job offers one of Scripture’s deepest explorations of the tension between faith and suffering. Job is described as blameless and upright (Job 1:1), yet he experiences profound loss and affliction. His story challenges the assumption that righteousness guarantees protection from

pain, inviting a more nuanced understanding of suffering as part of the human experience rather than a sign of spiritual failure (Capps, 1980). Job responds not with silent resignation, but with lament an emotionally honest engagement with God during anguish. His prayers of protest reveal that faith does not eliminate pain but grants the courage to bring pain before God, a dynamic widely acknowledged in biblical theology of lament (Westermann, 1981; Brueggemann, 1995)

This emotional transparency has significant implications for counselling. In many African Christian contexts, grief and despair are often masked by calls to be strong or have more faith. Job's narrative legitimizes emotional expression as an act of faith, not weakness (Miller, 1990). Counselling can therefore help individuals name their sorrow, confusion, or anger without guilt. By providing space for lament, the counsellor supports the externalization of emotional pain and prevents silent suffering (Graham, 1992).

Within the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM), Job's journey reflects a movement from interpretation of suffering to integration of emotional and theological struggle, and ultimately to transformation through divine encounter (Ganzevoort, 1993). Job's healing does not begin when his circumstances change, but when he experiences God's presence during his suffering (Job 38–42). Counselling likewise shifts from attempting to solve suffering to helping individuals reorient meaning and rediscover identity in God's story (Patton, 1990). Job teaches that healing arises not through explanation, judgment, or forced positivity, but through presence, honesty, and encounter. Counsellors are therefore called to accompany rather than explain to sit with the sufferer, honor their story, and help them recognize God's nearness even when answers remain hidden (Louw, 2000).

#### **4.2 Case Application: Grief and Meaning in Pastoral Counselling.**

A 42-year-old Christian woman, referred to here as M, sought counselling six months after the loss of her teenage daughter in a sudden accident. Before the loss, she had been an active member of her church, involved in women's ministry and known for her strong faith. After the tragedy, she found herself unable to pray, avoiding church gatherings, and experiencing intrusive thoughts of I should have protected her. Her grief was compounded by well-intentioned but painful comments from others who suggested that God gives His hardest battles to His strongest warriors or implied that the tragedy had a hidden moral cause. M expressed deep confusion, emotional numbness, and a sense that God had withdrawn from her life (Miller, 1990).

The counselling process focused first on creating space for lament allowing M to voice her grief without correction. The narrative of Job was introduced not as an explanation for suffering, but as a biblical witness to the struggle of remaining in relationship with God amid loss. Guided reflection on Job's laments helped M see that questioning and sorrow are not signs of weak faith, but of faith that refuses to disengage (Westermann, 1981; Brueggemann, 1995). Over several sessions, she slowly shifted from asking like why God did this to me? to how can I remain with God while I grieve? Her grief did not disappear, but her relationship with God was reoriented from silence and guilt to honest, ongoing dialogue (Capps, 1980). This movement reflects the FPIM model: interpretation of suffering, integration of emotion and faith, and transformation through relational encounter (Patton, 1990).

#### **4.2 Joseph: Betrayal, Identity, and the Restoration of Narrative Meaning.**

The story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50) traces a journey from betrayal and abandonment to healing and restored identity. Joseph is rejected by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and

imprisoned. His suffering does not arise from personal failure but from the fractures of family relationships and the misuse of power. Thus, Joseph's narrative speaks to individuals whose deepest wounds are relational wounds that come from those who were expected to protect, love, and affirm (Graham, 1992). These forms of suffering remain among the most difficult to process in pastoral counselling (Patton, 1990).

Although Joseph rises to a position of influence in Egypt, the emotional memory of his trauma is not erased. When he later encounters his brothers, he weeps openly (Gen. 42:24; 43:30; 45:2). His tears reveal that healing is not forgetting, and that emotional truth remains part of growth (Capps, 1990). Yet Joseph does not remain defined by pain. He reframes his narrative through a theological lens, declaring, God sent me before you to preserve life (Gen. 45:5). This statement does not diminish the reality of harm; rather, it reveals a shift in identity. Joseph comes to see his life not as a story of betrayal, but as a story held within God's redemptive purpose (Ganzevoort, 1993).

Within the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM), Joseph's healing can be described as a movement in which he first confronts his story, then reinterprets his suffering in the presence of God, and ultimately embodies a renewed identity that allows him to forgive. Forgiveness here does not function as denial or minimization, but as the reclaiming of agency Joseph refuses to remain shaped by the intentions of others (White & Epston, 1990). In counselling practice, Joseph's narrative encourages individuals to recognize that trauma need not define the self. The counsellor helps the counselee tell their story honestly, process emotional memory, and gradually discover new meaning grounded in God's ongoing work in their life (Gerkin, 1984). Transformation occurs when a person realizes that their identity is not rooted in what was done to them, but in who they are becoming in the presence of God (Louw, 2000).



#### **4.3 Case Study: Betrayal, Identity and Narrative Reconstructions.**

A 29-year-old man, referred to here as K, sought counselling following longstanding emotional conflict within his family. Growing up, he was consistently compared to his siblings and described as the “less promising one.” His parents favored his older brother academically and socially, while K was frequently excluded from decision-making and family conversations. As an adult, he experienced persistent self-doubt, difficulty trusting others, and a fear of forming close relationships. He described himself privately as the one who was never chosen, a phrase that reflected both emotional memory and self-identity (Graham, 1992).

During the counselling process, the narrative of Joseph became an interpretive lens through which K could re-examine his experiences. Joseph’s betrayal by his brothers and subsequent journey toward resilience provided a story that paralleled K’s emotional wounds (Capps, 1990). Rather than treating the betrayal as a defining identity marker, counselling invited K to view his story within a larger narrative of survival, adaptability, and dignity (Ganzevoort, 1993). Through reflective dialogue and guided narrative reframing, K gradually shifted from seeing himself as a victim of family exclusion to recognizing his capacity to form meaningful relationships and define his own future. The transition mirrored the FPIM movement of reinterpretation to integration to identity transformation (Patton, 1990; Louw, 2000). Forgiveness was understood not as excusing the past, but as releasing the power of that past to define his present self (Gerkin, 1984).

#### **4.3 Samaritan Woman- Narrative Identity and the Recovery of Belonging.**

The account of the Samaritan woman in John 4 illustrates how identity can be reshaped through interpretive encounter. The timing of her visit to the well midday rather than during the communal

morning gathering signals social withdrawal and internalized shame. Her story has become defined by past relationships and public perception, shaping her self-understanding through the lens of exclusion. The narrative therefore highlights the psychological weight of being known primarily by one's failure and the resulting erosion of belonging.

Jesus' interaction with her begins not with correction, but with recognition. His request for water establishes her agency and humanity before addressing her history. When Jesus names her past, He does so without condemnation, allowing her to hold her story without defensiveness or collapse. This moment marks a shift from being spoken about to speaking for herself, as the narrative space moves from external judgment to self-articulation. Her identity is reframed not by erasing her past, but by situating it within a relationship of regard and dignity.

Within the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM), this narrative demonstrates how personal identity is clarified at the intersection of story, self-perception, and relational encounter. The interpretive movement involves acknowledging one's narrative honestly. Integration occurs as the story is re-read considering divine presence rather than public judgment. Transformation is seen in her return to the community she once avoided, now saying, Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did (John 4:29). The narrative that once isolated her becomes the basis of renewed belonging. For, counselling practice, the text provides a framework for working with individuals who carry shame or fractured identity. The task is not to erase the past but to re-narrate the self in relation to a larger story of being seen, known, and valued. Belonging is restored, not through forgetting, but through reinterpretation that reclaims dignity.

#### **4.4 Case Study: Shame, Identity and Recovery of Belonging**

A 24-year-old woman, referred to as S, sought counselling after withdrawing from her church and social circles due to community gossip about her past relationships. Although she had ended the relationships and desired to rebuild her life, she felt continuously defined by her history. She avoided gatherings, walked quickly through her neighborhood to avoid conversations, and described herself as tired of being seen as a rumor. Her sense of identity was shaped not only by her experiences but by how others interpreted those experiences, leading to emotional isolation and diminished self-worth (Graham, 1992).

In counselling, the narrative of the Samaritan woman (John 4) was introduced as a mirror for her experience of public identity and private pain. The focus was not on moral evaluation, but on how Jesus addressed the woman's story without humiliation or dismissal (Capps, 1990). Through reflection on the narrative, S began to see that dignity is not revoked by human judgment and that identity can be reclaimed through encounter and recognition rather than concealment. Gradually, she re-engaged in selected social spaces, first with trusted friends and eventually in larger community settings (White & Epston, 1990). Her movement from withdrawal to cautious reintegration reflects the FPIM emphasis on reinterpreting the self within a narrative of acceptance and restored belonging rather than shame.

#### **4.4 Psalms- David Emotional Honesty and Re-orientation of Self.**

The Psalms, many of which are attributed to David, offer profound insight into the emotional and spiritual dynamics of the human experience before God. David's prayers and songs provide a first-

person account of faith lived within the tensions of fear, guilt, hope, desire, and trust. His voice does not present faith as certainty without struggle, but as a continual negotiation between internal emotion and the reality of divine presence (Capps, 1990). The Psalms therefore function as a theological and psychological witness to how identity is shaped through emotional expression within relationship with God (Graham, 1992).

David's laments (e.g., Psalms 13; 22; 42) articulate experiences of abandonment, anxiety, and vulnerability. Yet these laments are not expressions of unbelief; they are acts of relational engagement. By addressing God directly, David refuses to withdraw into isolation. His emotional transparency becomes a pathway to re-narrating the self (Brueggemann, 1995). The turn from lament to trust in many psalms is not a sudden emotional reversal, but a reframing a movement in which David remembers God's past faithfulness and reorients his identity around that memory. Even in psalms that do not end in praise (e.g., Psalm 88), the very act of speaking to God affirms that relational connection persists within suffering (Louw, 2000).

This dynamic aligns with the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM). The interpretive movement involves acknowledging emotion as part of one's lived reality. The integrative movement arises as emotional expression and theological conviction are held together without collapse into despair or denial (Ganzevoort, 1993). The transformational movement emerges when identity is re-stabilized not on emotional fluctuation but on continued relationship with God (Gerkin, 1984). David's narrative demonstrates that emotional honesty is not a threat to faith, but a means by which faith deepens (Miller, 1990).

In counselling practice, David's psalms provide language for individuals who struggle to articulate inner experience. They model how grief, fear, guilt, or longing can be spoken in God's presence

without shame. The counsellor may guide the counselee to read or compose psalm-like prayers as a process of meaning-making, grounded in the assurance that the self remains held within a larger divine narrative. In this way, the Psalms support not the avoidance of emotional pain, but the reorientation of the self through prayerful engagement with God.

#### **4.5 Case Application: Emotional Suppression and Reorientation of the self**

A 35-year-old man, referred to as T, came to counselling after experiencing increasing tension in his relationships at home and work. He described himself as someone who “does not show emotion, a value reinforced by his upbringing and community, where expressions of sadness or vulnerability were interpreted as weakness. Internally, however, he experienced recurring frustration, anxiety, and moments of emotional overwhelm. During conflicts, he often felt anger rise suddenly and intensely, followed by guilt and withdrawal. He reported feeling empty and unsettled, yet unable to articulate what he was feeling (Graham, 1992).

In counselling, selected Psalms of David were introduced as models of faithful emotional expression. Instead of being told to calm down or be strong, T was invited to read and reflect on Psalms where David openly expressed fear, sorrow, frustration, and longing (Westermann, 1981; Brueggemann, 1995). This allowed T to see emotional honesty not as a failure of faith, but as a legitimate mode of relationship with God (Capps, 1990). Through guided journaling modeled after David’s psalm structure naming the emotion, naming the situation, affirming God’s presence T began to articulate his inner experience for the first time (White & Epston, 1990). Over time, he reported feeling more internally grounded, less reactive in conflict, and better able to relate to others with clarity and presence. His movement reflects the FPIM emphasis on naming,

integrating, and reorienting emotional experience within divine relationship, leading to restored self-understanding rather than suppression (Ganzevoort, 1993; Louw, 2000; Patton, 1990).

## **5.0 Conclusion.**

This study has demonstrated that Scripture can be understood and applied as a therapeutic narrative, in which divine encounter reorients human identity, meaning, and experience (Gerkin, 1984). Through the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM), the research showed how

biblical interpretation, psychological insight, and African communal spirituality may be brought into constructive dialogue for use in counselling and spiritual care (Graham, 1992; Louw, 2000).

The narrative of Job illustrated that suffering may be engaged through lament and relational honesty before God, rather than denial or spiritualized avoidance (Westermann, 1981; Brueggemann, 1995). Joseph's story revealed the possibility of narrative reconstruction, where past trauma does not determine identity but is reinterpreted within a larger redemptive horizon (Capps, 1990; Ganzevoort, 1993). The account of the Samaritan woman emphasized the restoration of identity and belonging through acknowledgment rather than concealment of personal history. The Psalms, particularly those associated with David, demonstrated how emotional expression itself becomes a site of spiritual reorientation and renewed self-understanding (Miller, 1990; White & Epston, 1990).

Together, these narratives affirm that transformation emerges not through explanation or behavioral adjustment, but through encounter where personal stories are re-read in the presence of God. The FPIM therefore offers a contextually grounded approach to Christian counselling that integrates theology, psychology, and the lived experience of faith. It recognizes that healing involves not the erasure of one's story, but its reinterpretation within the broader story of God's ongoing redemptive work.

### **5.1 Practical Implication for Ministry and Counselling.**

The interpretive findings of this study suggest several practical implications for Christian counselling and pastoral care. First, the use of biblical narrative in counselling encourages

counselees to understand their experiences within a broader story of faith rather than in isolation (Gerkin, 1984). Counsellors are therefore invited to guide individuals not only in recalling biblical texts but in entering the narrative world of Scripture, where identity and meaning are re-shaped through encounter with God (Graham, 1992).

Second, the emphasis on emotional honesty, seen particularly in Job and the Psalms, supports counselling approaches that welcome lament, grief, and confusion as legitimate expressions of faith (Westermann, 1981; Brueggemann, 1995). Pastoral caregivers should create spaces where individuals may speak their pain without fear of judgment or spiritual correction (Patton, 1990). Such environments allow suffering to be acknowledged rather than suppressed, enabling deeper restoration of self-understanding (Capps, 1990). Third, the narratives of Joseph and the Samaritan woman illustrate that transformation often involves reinterpreting personal history rather than erasing it (Ganzevoort, 1993). Counsellors can therefore help individuals re-narrate their past experiences in ways that affirm dignity, agency, and belonging, grounded in God's ongoing redemptive work (Louw, 2000). This re-narration process counters narratives of shame, failure, and abandonment.

Finally, the Faith–Psychology Integration Model (FPIM) provides a framework for training pastors, chaplains, and lay ministers in counselling practices that integrate theology, emotional insight, and cultural context (Gerkin, 1984; Patton, 1990). The model encourages collaborative reflection, spiritual presence, and attentive listening, positioning the counsellor not as problem-solver but as companion and interpretive guide (Graham, 1992).



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