Haley Troxclair, CWID 10285914

Dr. Cowan

Introduction to Pastoral Care and Counseling

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Paper: A Verbatim Critique

As I was contemplating who I would consider interviewing for my pastoral interview, I struggled to find someone that I was not overly attached to or would struggle to respond in a pastoral way. I knew that anyone I knew everything about, such as friends, or any of my youth member who I have fully developed relationships with would not work, as well as any of my newer youth members because we are not quite on that level of trust to freely open up yet. I instead decided to turn to someone that I have only known for about four months, and I still have plenty to learn about their life. This person is a friend, named Joshua, that I have been spending a fair amount of time with and getting to know, but I knew there was plenty I did not know from certain conversations and indications he had made on different occasions. Taking some of these hints, I guessed that he would be the perfect fit to conduct my pastoral interview because I could not only respond empathetically, but it was also a way to learn about some of the experiences that have truly affected his life. Therefore, the following verbatim arose in a staged way that he was prepared because I asked ahead of time, but the information he provided was completely new to my knowledge and understanding.

**Haley:** How’s it going?

I asked this question randomly after returning from dinner with Joshua, and he began the interview on his own accord, as I had previously told him that I wanted to do something that was natural and actually felt like an interview. With the following response, I rolled with it and the remainder of our conversation was centered around the topic that he brought up on a simple question I asked to see how he was doing. So, with this response, I dove in.

**Joshua:** Well, I’ve been well but I was going through some things the other day for English and I came across a gold coin from 2008 that I think I received from my father. I graduated from high school in 2007, so it was from around the time I got kicked out of my house. That was June 15th, my birthday.

**Haley:** Not a good home life?

I think this was a solid introductory question to really get to the root of what Joshua was implying from finding this coin. It was a way for me to enter into his emotional world and enter into his experience without pushing any emotion or my own understanding on him. I do, however, wonder if I analyzed his statement too much to jump into asking about his home life instead of asking something like, “You were kicked out of your house?” This would have used his words more than paraphrasing to fit my own thoughts, which I would say was premature meaning making on my part.

**Joshua:** No. He has been an abusive alcoholic longer than I have been alive.

**Haley:** I take this is your dad, right?

This is a good response to verify that I am following with his explanation and know he is speaking of his dad. I am starting to become a part of his world, as I follow his experience and listen to all that he has to say as way to establish trust.

**Joshua:** Yea. And I put the home life blame on him. Mom is fine and has done the best she can to cope. Only thing I blame her for is as long as she stayed.

**Haley:** So, their marriage wasn’t really healthy?

Asking this question may not have been the best approach to get Joshua to elaborate, as I almost assumed that it was not healthy. I probably could have asked something that centered more on his father being to blame rather than assuming that the marriage was unhealthy. The marriage could have been fine as a relationship, but it could have been other things that led to the home life being bad, so I could have done better. This may have been a case of over-functioning or inner chatter even though I presented it as a question rather than stating right out it was unhealthy.

**Joshua:** No not at all. He blamed her for everything he couldn’t have. He had a good job, but spent money on what he didn’t need. He blamed her for not being able to have what he wanted so far as he forged her signature on an equity line of credit to buy a motorcycle, which ultimately ended the marriage. I think it lasted as long because of us kids, which puts blame on us. That was difficult.

**Haley:** I’m sure that had to be hard on their marriage.

I do not like how I used, “I’m sure” here. I am jumping far into this role of assuming that it was hard on the marriage when I wish I would have turned more to focusing on the difficulty that he is leading to himself. I may have cut him off on expressing the difficulty of his life by focusing more on the marriage and not how he felt. I am a product of an over functioning brain rather than becoming one with his emotions.

**Joshua:** Marriage wasn’t a concern, but what was hard was mom working 12 hour shifts and dad getting home from work and passing out on the couch. If he was woken up, we would get yelled at or punished. I was put in the position of responsibility of 5 or 6 years old at the age of 10 or 11 and I had to make sure they didn’t ever get into trouble.

**Haley:** That had to be a lot of responsibility for you.

I believe this response to be much better than my previous ones, as I repeat back the role of responsibility he had to take on at his age. By repeating his statement, I believe I fell back into following his experience rather than asking another question to please my questioning brain, which was leading me to seem more passive than receptive to his emotions.

**Joshua:** It was and I think my childhood ended because of it. Not just because of watching the kids, but I had to make sure they didn’t wake him up. He was an angry drunk, and we couldn’t be sure of what he might be capable of. We were terrified of him. The siblings. Even the dogs.

**Haley:** If you don’t mind me asking, what were some of your experiences with him?

Asking this question to me was leading the conversation, but I did feel that in the way he was speaking, he was holding back some of what he was really feeling. By asking this question, I was pushing for some form of reflection, which may not have been the best response to his statement on being terrified. I am not fully satisfied with this response because I think I may have cut Joshua off from more fully expressing his feelings of fear with his siblings even though I was asking for examples.

**Joshua:** One time, his pager went off and woke him up. He ultimately woke up angry and threw it into the field. Once he realized he actually needed it, I had to go out and look for it.

**Haley:** It sounds like you may blame yourself? Am I picking up on this correctly?

I believe that this was a response to be proud of because I could feel in his voice and expression of body language that he felt responsible for these experiences. I was in a position of experiencing this emotion with him, and I wanted to ensure that what I was picking up on was accurate, so inquiring in a sense of otherness and focus on Joshua’s unsaid language was the way I feel is appropriate, especially since it was recognizing the emotion and then asking if that was correct.

**Joshua:** I wasn’t to blame, but I was the oldest. I had responsibility. Even if it wasn’t me, I was at fault because I wasn’t careful enough.

**Haley:** I see that talking about this makes you angry. Are you still angry?

Once again, I think ensuring that I am identifying his emotions were vital in maintaining his trust throughout the conversation. Being able to place what he was feeling and how his emotions were developing through remembering his experiences was how I found the ability to really place myself into his life and apply what I was seeing into further identifying how he is still feeling about his father. I could see where the question in my response could be leading though, so I wonder if there is possibility that I could have done without that question.

**Joshua:** Still angry. Not as much as I used to be. I can’t say I hate him any less, but it’s not on the surface anymore. I used to want to kill him. And worse, I saw someone that looked like after a few years and I wanted to hurt him as well.

**Haley:** I can’t imagine the anger that must take to want to harm someone that way.

I believe that this response was a way of sharing in understanding with Joshua, so I do believe that it was good because I followed his experience and replayed it back to him. This response confirms that I am intent in listening and continuing to show compassion throughout the sharing of his life and striving to understand without saying that I know where he is coming from or that I understand his situation.

**Joshua:** The anger developed as I got older. At first, I was most angry at how he treated us. Being careful around him and his outburst. Now, I’m not as angry about the outburst, but more as a person and what he did knowingly while in control.

**Haley:** I sense with some of this anger, there is some pain that is still there or was once there. Am I right here?

Here, I believe that recognizing and guessing the reactions in emotions aids in becoming more present in the world of shared understanding. By being able to follow what he is portraying in more than just his words, but also in the tone of his voice, I was able to strengthen in understanding without falling into the many traps of over functioning or meaning making.

**Joshua:** There is still some pain. Including what I went through and how he still puts people through similar things.

**Haley:** Even though you aren’t connected to him, you still see pain he’s inflicted on others. You want to tell me about this?

In this response, I connected an earlier statement of being disconnected with his father to what he stated previously in how his father still inflicts pain on others. I ask if he would like to share because I did not want to push in anyway, but this question is one that will assist in the full understanding of why there is still pain present when thinking of his dad. Therefore, I do believe this was an appropriate response in a way to build understanding, but also not to force his sharing.

**Joshua:** As we got older and bigger, he couldn’t intimidate us anymore. He leaned towards psychological abuse. “You’re not good enough.” “Your goals are good goals.” “It’s not normal to feel any type of way.” We couldn’t be sad, happy, angry, or depressed. We couldn’t show emotion. Silence…He would do cruel things. Put is in positions where he held something over us.

**Haley:** So, you would say that he manipulated your emotions? Is that what I’m hearing?

I do not believe I could say anymore but that this is not a very strong response. Instead of identifying or reflecting on the emotional aspect of the experience, I asked a question that lead to something even farther away from how he felt about this aspect of their relationship and more towards wanting Joshua to identify his father’s actions in a certain way. That in itself, I believe, took away from him and focused more on his father. A mistake I would definitely say falls under my tendency to want to ask more questions rather than focus on the emotional effect on Joshua.

**Joshua:** Definitely. One of the most memorable was when he would tell us kids things like, “I wish your mother loved you.” Or he would get angry if we were in a bad mood or in a good mood, so we wouldn’t express any feelings.

**Haley:** What do you think made him try to make you think your mom didn’t love you?

This was not a relevant or empathic response to the statement of being told that his mother did not love him or his siblings. Instead of asking more questions trying to find answer and discover why he thinks his dad would say these things, I should have led more to identifying his emotions in the statements or how hiding emotions in the presence of his father would be difficult.

**Joshua:** At this point. I was, I was 14 or 15 and I was allowed to choose where to live and he was trying to directly manipulate against my mom. Even though they both signed papers in the divorce that they would not do that and that it was not allowed.

**Haley:** I’m sure that made your decision difficult.

I initially want to say that this statement is leading Joshua in a direction of discussing this specific instance of choosing between his mother and father, but I also think that recognizing the difficulty of his experience in the way he speaks, frustrated, about his father’s clear disregard for the rules is a sign of following and intent listening. However, I believe I may have had an experience of premature meaning making by stating that I was sure it was difficult. Sticking more to guessing rather than saying I was sure would have been better.

**Joshua:** It did. It put me in the situation where I was either on dad’s side or on mom’s. If I were on mom’s side, you were against him. That’s when I started staying at one or the other for an extended period of time.

**Haley:** I can’t say I understand or know how you felt in this experience, but I can remember the struggle through my own parent’s divorce to not take sides. It seems here, however, that you were in a more volatile situation. Would you say that is correct? Were you in danger?

This is not a horrible response, in my opinion, but I did not ask for permission or ask if I could share any of my own experience to aid the situation. I just jumped into how I have been in this struggling situation as well, however, I do correct this addition of my own story by recognizing the importance and severity that seems to be present in his situation, and I guess but ask for confirmation as well in this response.

**Joshua:** (With hesitation) Yea…

**Haley:** Would you like to tell me more on that or why you felt that way?

This is not a good response for me to have made because I was searching for more and not being reverent to how his hesitation was speaking to the way he was feeling. I ignored the meaning he was exuding in his tentative “yea” and pushed to guide the conversation too much towards receiving more information over being concerned of his feeling of danger. I think this leads too much into a directed approach than a following or guided approach.

**Joshua:** Every day I felt in danger. Knowing he was going to drive somewhere after drinking too much with me and my siblings in the car. He would get angry at cars that pass him and he would go from 40 to 80 just to get in front of them and slam on the breaks. It put us in danger. Like our lives were at stake. Not just the feeling of danger, but we actually were. When I was 14, I went through struggles of a suicide attempt, and a few months after, he thought it was a good time to buy a gun. He had never had a gun before. He taught me how to clean, assemble, disassemble, and shoot the gun. One day, he took me to the range and put a loaded gun in my hand and just stepped away to see if I would kill myself. I guess he thought that would solve a few problems for him.

**Haley:** I feel like he may have made you feel like a burden.

Here I am imposing too much of my own opinion of the situation rather than guessing what this specific memory was making him experience emotionally. I assumed that he felt like a burden rather than stating that I recognized the emotion and asking for affirmation that it was what he was in fact feeling.

**Joshua:** I think to him we were

**Haley:** Do you really think that was his motive?

I do not like this response because I am leading the conversation and almost trying to take a side here. Instead of intently focusing on the experience of Joshua, I am practically giving his father the benefit of the doubt. I should instead be empathizing in how I cannot even fathom how it possibly feels to be a burden to his own father. I believe I am faulting here in trying to find all of the answers so that I can provide comfort and some way to make things right because these experiences he is sharing with me are making me feel uncomfortable and worried, so I want to fix it rather than experience it with him.

**Joshua:** He wasn’t stupid. He never owned guns before. I can’t picture another motive. It is not just something that goes through your head. I should own a gun and put it in the hands of my suicidal son.

**Haley:** That’s a fair point, Josh. I’m sorry he made you feel disposable, but it also seems that was already in your head.

This is not a response that I am satisfied with, as I took on the role of assuming how he felt. I did not ask how he was feeling, but I basically just told him that he felt disposable. I do not think this is a valid response, as I even went as far as telling him that the thought of being disposable was already in his head. This was a fail to isolate and drown my inner chatter by letting my chatter run wild and ultimately fall into the trap of over functioning.

**Joshua:** I don’t know if I would say disposable, but at 13-14, I wanted to do things to disappear.

**Haley:** I’m sorry I used disposable. Would you say that he thought you were disposable but you were getting away from him?

I believe this response is important to correct my previous one, as he says himself that the word to use was not disposable. I think this response is my attempt to right the mistake and work towards gaining Joshua’s trust again, but I ruined it with the question I included. Therefore, I believe that without the question, the response is good and can right the use of language and assumption that I made, but the question uses that language again and ultimately still tries to lead Joshua in this specific direction. This is a mistake and is not proper practice for this conversation because I am not allowing him to lead the conversation in anyway. I have taken over.   
**Joshua:** I was a burden. It didn’t matter one way or another. He just wanted me gone. Disposable isn’t a strong enough word.

**Haley:** Would you say he would have done anything to get rid of you?

This question is a product of premature meaning making and jumping to the conclusion that Joshua’s father would have intentionally done something to get rid of him. This response would have been better if I had identified the feelings or emotions that he portrayed when making the statement of his father wanting him gone. In that statement, there was some distance, and if I remember, pain that I did not address, but should have. I instead focused too much on following a story line over understanding emotions.

**Joshua:** No. I don’t think he would have done anything to endanger himself just to get rid of me.

**Haley:** So, you’re saying he was very selfish in that regard?

I believe that this response is one that could be considered leading, as I identify in my own opinion that his father is selfish. Additionally, this is definitely a paraphrase of what he actually said, so this is not a very strong or good response, as it falls more into the realm of over functioning and not empathic listening.

**Joshua:** He was selfish in many regards. You could track anything he’s done and find how it benefited him. He was going to add my brother to his health insurance, which wouldn’t cost him any extra, but it wouldn’t benefit him. So, he held that over my brother and controlled him with it. He threatened to take it away all of the time. One day my brother went against dad, so he waited for football to start to take away the insurance, which meant he could no longer be on the team. He did the same with my sister and her car or us staying with him and keeping us on his phone plan.

**Haley:** It seems that nothing was for the betterment of you guys.

Once again, I am placing my own assumptions and opinions of Joshua’s experience of the situation instead of focusing on the emotional impact that it all had on his life. I think that a better response to this memory of his father would be to gauge his emotions in this experience and see where he is instead of continuing to direct him in the relationship with his father. This is a fault in much of this interview because I’m in overall distress over the experiences he had that I just want to know about them, and I struggle to connect with him on an emotional level or enter into his world as fully as I should.

**Joshua:** No, it was in betterment of us, but it also did something for him.

**Haley:** I recognize you noticed these behaviors early in your teenage years. How were you able to move past those experiences and fears instilled in you?

I am decently satisfied with this response because I took the time to recognize that I was following and seeing the entirety of his story. I was able to apply what he was telling me and connect the different memories, so it was becoming more clear and coherent in that regard. I do believe, however, that the question is leading him to discuss how these experiences affect him now rather than identifying that I feel he has been made stronger through this experience, so there is some disconnect between the two statements. Even though I combined all that he had told me throughout the interview, I was not recognizing his emotions in that moment, but looking to how he had coped.

**Joshua:** I didn’t do it very well. I still had hate at the surface until a couple years ago. I think what helped is the last I saw him, he kicked me out the day I turned 18. I really think distance and time helped forget some and not care about other parts.

**Haley:** I only ask this because you seem like you have grown far past these experiences. Am I reading that correctly?

I like this response, and I think that it does a good job to identify that Joshua has grown and can speak of these experiences in a way that seems he has overcome or at least does not see his memories as a hindrance. It is also a better response than others because I am sure to ask for affirmation that what I am picking up on is in fact correct.

**Joshua:** It also helps that he is not relevant anymore and he is essentially on his death bed, where just holding a phone for two minutes exhausts him. And because of how he is dying, diabetic neuropathy, he doesn’t remember much of anything that he has done.

**Haley:** How does him not remembering resonate with you? Would it matter?

I wish that I would have focused more on how Joshua was feeling in this statement of his dying father instead of the fact that his father does not remember what he has done. Even though I am asking how it affects him, I am not using the oneness with Joshua or the otherness that I should be using to identify his emotions or explore what exactly he is feeling. Instead, I am continuing to ask questions and search for all of the answers, which keeps our conversation at the surface.

**Joshua:** I’m angry he didn’t remember. In the beginning, he couldn’t because he drank too much. Now it is because he is slowly dying. It is harder to hate him because he can’t choose to forget anymore. It is not a choice.

**Haley:** I feel there is some sadness in that statement?

This is a good response in relation to Joshua’s statement because I recognized an emotion that he was exuding and asked him if what I was guessing was correct. I did not assume like I have in some other responses, but simply stated what I was identifying through the telling of his story, so I do believe this response was stronger than many of my others.

**Joshua:** I would always hope he would come to terms to what he did to the family. I believe that hope is all lost. About 6 or 7 years ago, I was going through the worst depression and I tried to kill myself. I wrote a letter that included everything that was wrong in my life, and he was easily 1/3-1/2 of it, so it was my real experience. His response, however, was that he did not remember anything in that way and I was lying about it.

**Haley:** I can’t even think how that added to what you were already going through in your head.

I believe this is a strong response because it finds empathy within the situation that I could not even understand his experience, so it reflected my strength in listening and following his experience that was shared with me.

**Joshua:** I’m not really sure. I believe it was an exercise of therapy, but at that time I was on so much medicine that it all was a blur.

**Haley:** So, looking back now does this response affect how you feel towards him today and finding this memory of him?

This is not a strong response, as I jumped into a question that led Joshua away from the feelings related to what we were talking about and moved to a completely different time frame. I directed the conversation instead of letting Joshua bring the conversation to where he was comfortable. Pushing the conversation in any direction because of too many questions does not prove to be effective or the basis of a positive interview.

**Joshua:** It’s sad. It feels like it is all almost over and there is just chance of even being sorry for what he did. The last time I spoke to him was in text and asked me to forgive him because he thought the hate was all over a single conversation and he had no understanding of what he even did.

**Haley:** That sounded like it frustrated you.

I am satisfied with this response because I used the connection with Joshua and my presence within his world to identify and recognize a reaction to this specific instance with his father. Guessing at this reaction was done because I could feel through his tone of voice, way of speaking, and body language that there was an emotional response to this memory.

**Joshua**: It did and you can tell from my response back to him that day that it did. Plus, I haven’t corresponded with him since then.

**Haley:** Do you think acting in anger was helpful for you to get him to realize what he had done?

I took the opportunity to assume that he responded in anger in this response instead of asking a question that led him to explain in his own words what his response to his father was. This was not a well thought out or effective response because it was ultimately a yes or no question that limits where the conversation can go. I took the lead with an assumption, and I continue to close Joshua off from taking the conversation where he wants it to go.

**Joshua:** No, I don’t think there is anything in the world to convince him of what he had done.

**Haley:** So, I think what you feel may help you continue to live above this is him not speaking to you. Is there anything other than that?

I think this was a good response in collecting the information that I had heard from Joshua and affirming in a way that his strength was clearly shown throughout his story. Combining the feelings of where he is now and his experience not being in contact with him was a way of showing that I was following him in the entirety of the conversation. This showed listening, but then also guided the interview to the direction of finding a stopping point, which in a regular pastoral meeting situation would be ideal to breaking up different sessions and wrapping up a conversation.

**Joshua:** I think just not getting involved and keeping it separate is the best and keeping everything closed.

**Haley:** It seems Josh, that you have a strong handle on these feelings, but sometimes you are unwantedly reminded of him or something shows up that brings you back to him.

I like this response and the ability that I showed to recognize Joshua’s strength is relevant to the otherness that I found within our conversation. I reached the level of empathic listening and responses so that I could collectively identify the feelings of Joshua, but also respond to what is bringing him back to these experiences. I think I may have formed a premature meaning of stating that they are unwanted memories, but this meaning came from the idea that this entire conversation stemmed from a memory that was brought up unexpectedly in the first place.

**Joshua:** Sometimes, yes, but it is not very often. It used to be every day or every week where I would find some way to be mad at him. Now I can go years without even thinking about him. Until something happens involving him.

**Haley:** So, finding this gold coin was that reminder this time?

This is a good response in just confirming that these emotions of anger arise in situations like the coin, and this specific conversation was based on the discovery of the coin.

**Joshua:** Yea...

**Haley:** Well, I’m sorry you had to be caught off guard in your discovery, but I’m glad you decided to talk about it. Would that also be an option in the future if were to arise again?

This is a good response to a simple answer from Joshua in recognizing that he may be ready to draw the conversation to a close. By inviting him to talk in the future, I am showing my desire to listen and become a part of this experience with him, as a practice of othering.

**Joshua:** Yea and I think it will be because I picture him dying in the next year or two.

**Haley:** I feel there was some relief in that statement?

I believe this is a good response because I recognized an emotion from Joshua, guessed it, and responded in the frame of a question that ensured that I was identifying his feelings correctly. This is good because it proves there are strong listening present and that I am striving in following this change in emotion and movement between experiences.

**Joshua:** It’s about time he dies. That’s not anger. It’s just relief that I no longer have to see him hurt anyone else. Or me.

**Haley:** I understand what you are saying, and while wishing someone to die is a major statement, I do think it is driven by the hope that you do not have to remember the pain any longer. Is that about it?

This is a horrible response in the sense that I stated that I understood what he was saying, even though I have no relation to feeling like I want his father to die or have ever wanted my own father to die. I think this statement is one said in default as a part of evading the weight of the statement that Joshua made. Furthermore, I stated what I thought he meant by this statement instead of leaving it open to explain himself. I assumed that it was driven by hope, but it could be driven by anything else. Finally, my final question is unclear of whether I am speaking of the end of the conversation or if it was a question for clarification if what I assumed was correct. I believe that is not a strong response for all of these reasons, and what I chose to say cut the possibility of the conversation going any further because I essentially asked if that was all he had. Ultimately, I think this response could have been better by not saying I understood what he was saying, assuming the reasoning why he feels a certain way about his father, or by asking such a closed question that presents the inability to really go any farther in the conversation.

**Joshua:** Yea, I think so.

Looking back on this pastoral interview, there are many things that I would do differently, and as I went through each response, my critique reflected some of those changes that I would want to make in the way I conducted this conversation. The biggest issue I believe I faced throughout the interview was my inability to stop asking questions. I have the tendency to want to know all of the answers or all of the experiences, so that I can fix it or make my own understanding. I faltered with this tendency because I created many instances of myself leading the conversation rather than allowing Joshua’s experiences and explanations to bring the conversation to fruition. Additionally, I would work harder to become more attuned to the emotions and feelings that Joshua was displaying in the conversation. Many times, I believe that I ignored or did not pick up what he was expressing, but I instead wanted to know more of the story. Through these issues, I would come to believe that this interview was not successful in terms of creating an empathic space of listening and responding because my focus was too much on learning of all of the experiences and not on how those experiences made an impact on Joshua and his life. If I could do this interview over again or take any type of advice for future pastoral interviews, it would be to become more attuned to the underlying emotions of the conversations and stray away from the desire to know everything so that the interviewee could lead the conversation in their own comfort rather than allowing myself to drive it based on my own questioning.