

Copyright © 2023 Joseph Edward Hussung

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF EMPATHY AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS ON THE MINISTRY
OF GOD'S WORD

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Joseph Edward Hussung

May 2023

APPROVAL SHEET

A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF EMPATHY AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS ON THE MINISTRY
OF GOD'S WORD

Joseph Edward Hussung

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Jeremy P. Pierre

Second Reader: [John M. Henderson]

Defense Date: [Month Day, Year]

To Christ

To my wife, Sarah

To Sophia, Liora, and Alistair

To my Mom and Dad

To my brothers

Thank you

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE.....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Thesis Statement.....	3
Familiarity with the Literature.....	4
<i>Imago Dei</i>	4
Construals of Empathy.....	6
Psychological Use of Empathy.....	7
The Development of Empathy in Popular Culture.....	9
Non-Academic Biblical Perspective on Empathy.....	11
Christian Psychology and Integrationist's Use of Empathy.....	12
Biblical Counseling's Use of Empathy.....	14
Void in the Literature.....	17
Outline of Chapters.....	17
Chapter One: Introduction.....	18
Chapter Two: The <i>Imago Dei</i> and Relational Purpose.....	18
Chapter Three: Empathy as Necessary Implication of the Biblical Theme of Love.....	18
Chapter Four: Apply Empathy to Biblical Counseling.....	19
2. THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY.....	20
The Development of the Doctrine of the <i>Imago Dei</i>	20
The Structural <i>Imago Dei</i>	21

Chapter	Page
The Functional <i>Imago Dei</i>	24
The Relational <i>Imago Dei</i>	26
The Eschatological <i>Imago Dei</i>	29
A Biblical Counseling Anthropology	31
What Is Man?	32
What Was Man Made to Do?	37
In What Context Was Man Made to Do This?	38
Sin’s Distortion and Christ’s Restoration of Mankind’s Function and Relationships	41
God’s Purpose for Relationships	44
Created to Reflect a Relational God.....	44
Created for a Relational Purpose.....	47
Conclusion	51
3. EMPATHY AS NECESSARY IMPLICATION OF THE BIBLICAL THEME OF LOVING SUFFERERS	52
Divine Love of Suffering People.....	52
God Is Love.....	53
God’s Love toward Sufferers in the Old Testament.....	55
The Manifestation of God’s Compassion in Jesus Christ	61
Human Love for Suffering People.....	66
Imitation of God’s Compassion and Mercy	66
Human Limitations to Imitating God in His Compassion.....	69
Empathy as Necessary Implication for Human Compassion	71
Defining Empathy.....	73
Psychological and Psychiatric Definitions	74
Comparison of Definitions	77
Distinctions between Empathy and Compassion	80

Chapter	Page
Conclusion	83
4. APPLYING EMPATHY IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING	84
How Empathy Informs Compassion in Counseling Relationships.....	85
Empathy Informs Compassion by Helping Discern External and Physical Factors	86
Empathy Informs Compassion by Helping Discern Active Heart Dynamics	87
Empathy Informs Compassion by Discerning the Counselee’s Relational Contexts.....	90
Empathy Informs Compassion by Helping Discern Passive Heart Dynamics	93
The Practice of Empathy in the Counseling Relationship	96
Pre-Counseling Conceptualization	96
Observing Non-Verbal Communication	100
Attending.....	102
Active Listening	105
Intuitive Empathy	110
Empathic Confrontation	112
The Movement from Empathy to Compassion.....	119
The Counselor’s Heart.....	119
Ways Counselors Abort Compassion.....	122
Conclusion	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY	125

PREFACE

My connection with empathy is not a straight line, but rather a pattern that I observed in my father throughout my life. As I have observed my father there are two things that have stuck out about the way that he relates emotionally to the different aspects of his ministry. First, he has an incredibly emotional connection to the Gospel. Seldom can he speak about the gospel without tears in his eyes. The joy of the truth that Christ died for his sins creates a palpable sense of grief over sin and joy over salvation from my father that permeates every facet of who he is. Second, his emotional connection with those under his care is evident to anyone who sees him behind closed doors. I have a distinct memory of my mom and dad weeping on the front porch of our house with a woman whose husband was leaving her. Arm around her, just attempting to show the love of Jesus to a woman who, in her marriage, had become unloved. His ability to understand others, emotionally connect with them, and draw them to Christ as their source for strength, is unparalleled and a source of how I have always desired to counsel o

So, as I attempt to chart a biblical understanding of empathy, I want to thank my father for his example of this type of empathic ministry. I also want to thank my wife, Sarah. Without her willingness to support me in this endeavor both parentally (watching the kids as I study, counsel, and go to seminars) and emotionally (as I stress about deadlines), I would never have accomplished this. She has been my biggest supporter throughout my life and ministry, and I could never thank her enough.

Joe Hussung

Hopkinsville, Kentucky

December 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“First of all, if you learn a little trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with a lot of folk. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”¹ Nearly every High School student has been required to read the powerful words penned by Harper Lee in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. This folksy wisdom delivered by the southern lawyer Atticus Finch encapsulates the concept of empathy. To modern people, empathy has become one of the primary ingredients for flourishing relationships, so much so that it is found in many of the core values of major corporations,² used by presidents and politicians,³ in speeches, and is the answer to plot points in popular TV shows,⁴ yet empathy is relatively new to the English language.

Edward Titchenor delivered a set of lectures in 1909 on experimental Psychology, which were the first articulation of the concept that would come to be known as empathy. In these lectures, he interacted with a German philosopher named Theodore

¹ Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, 1st Perennial classics ed, Perennial Classics (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 33.

² In November of 2020 Amazon updated much of its corporate structure to include as a core tenant that one should “lead with empathy.” Also, numerous articles have highlighted empathy in Tim Cook’s (CEO of Apple) management model. Amazon Company News, “Amazon Announces Two New Leadership Principles,” July 1, 2021, <https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/company-news/two-new-leadership-principles>.

³ President Barak Obama’s famous 2006 Commencement address to Northwestern University mentioned that the United States’ greatest issue is not the national deficit but its “Empathy Deficit.” Barak Obama, “Obama to Graduates: Cultivate Empathy,” *Northwestern University News*, June 19, 2006, <https://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2006/06/barack.html>.

⁴ The series finale of *Marvel: Agents of Shield* the heroes give an army of murderous, time-traveling robots empathy in order to stop them from destroying all of humanity, “What We’re Fighting For.” *Marvel: Agents of Shield*, directed by Kevin, Tancharoen, written by Jed Whedon, season 7, episode 13 ABC, August 12, 2020.

Lipps who describes the mental process one uses to feel their way emotionally into art, either in creating or experiencing it. Lipps, as a German, used the word “Einfühlung” or in feeling.⁵ Titchener created the term empathy to coincide with Lipps’s concept by using two Greek words: “em” meaning “in” and “pathos” meaning “feeling or passion,” thereby creating the modern word empathy. He meant this to describe the way that people “feel their way into” great works of art and literature and the situations they depict.⁶

Though empathy began as a term describing the expression and reception of art, it soon expanded into other areas with similar experiences. Psychologists started using the term empathy to describe the way that humans interacted both cognitively and emotionally with one another. As the century has progressed, empathy has become a catch-all to include almost any type of perspective-taking or fellow feeling with another human being.⁷

Empathy is not a new concept in biblical counseling. In Jay Adams’s early work *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, he takes up the topic of empathy with a largely favorable review of the concept. Certainly, he makes some modifications and critiques some ways that psychology, at the time, was utilizing empathy in its methods. With new generations of biblical counselors, usage of the term has become normalized when referring to connecting with a suffering counselee. This usage is expressed in numerous examples of biblical counseling literature throughout the last decade or two. With an ever-expanding definition of empathy and some Christian theologians’ objections to the concept, there is a need for biblical counselors to take up the task to compare the values

⁵ Susan Lanzoni, *Empathy: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 9.

⁶ Edward Bradford Titchener, *A Beginner’s Psychology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), 198.

⁷ C. Daniel Batson describes eight different phenomena that psychologists describe with the term empathy. Among these encompass any like or approximate feeling toward another person in an emotive state as well as any negative feeling toward another’s suffering. C. Daniel Batson, “What Is Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena,” in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. Jean Decety, William Ickes (Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2009), 3-15.

held within the current understanding of empathy with the values upheld by Scripture about how one is to have flourishing, loving relationships.

In the end, biblical counseling is all about relationships. It is about the relationship between the counselor and the counselee. It is about the relationship of the counselee with other people in his or her world and even with the world itself. It is fundamentally about their relationship with God. To understand what good relationships look like in the modern-day, one must examine, understand, and critique the current concept of empathy as it relates to the Bible.

Thesis Statement

The concept of empathy is relatively new and comes with a wide range of proposed meanings. However, to examine how empathy works within a biblical framework it must be seen through the lens of already established biblical concepts. These established biblical concepts, such as love, mercy, compassion, and sympathy, serve as parameters to what a biblical form of empathy can and cannot be.

Therefore, this thesis will argue that empathy is a disposition of love that willingly resonates with the experience of another image-bearer. This disposition conveys God's chief design purpose for human relationships, which is to know God and to make Him known. Understanding how empathy functions in the Christian life through relationships with others will help the church build better methods of private soul care.

This thesis will examine God's purpose in relationships, as rooted in the *imago Dei* and place empathy within that larger purpose. Second, it will locate empathy within God's command to be compassionate as the Lord is compassionate (Luke 6:36), showing that empathy is a necessary implication of that command. Third, it will apply this biblical framework within a biblical counseling methodology and to the heart of the counselor.

Familiarity with the Literature

The discussion on empathy will interact with theological, secular, and Christian counseling resources.

Imago Dei

To analyze empathy's value, this thesis will argue that it includes both structural and functional aspects of the *imago Dei* worked out in relationships with both God and neighbor. The debate on the meaning of the *imago Dei* stretches far back into the earliest times of the church fathers. This thesis will pick up the debate in the reformation as it shifts to include not only structural aspects of the *imago Dei* but also the functions for which those structures were designed.

John Calvin, in *The Institutes of the Christian religion*, emphasizes “knowledge, and in the second, true righteousness, and holiness,” as being the image of God.⁸ Before, men like Irenaeus and Thomas Aquinas had seen the image to be more in the ontology of man, such as his reason, intellect, and freedom, but Calvin (as well as other reformers) moved the discussion to how man was to function in relation to those capacities. This led Calvin to see the fall of mankind having a more significant marring of the image than previous theologians. Calvin believed that in the fall, the image of God was, “corrupted” though “not utterly effaced and destroyed.” Lastly, Calvin emphasizes Christ as the renewal of the image as the image of God. As such he, “restores us to true and substantial integrity.”⁹

In *Reformed Dogmatics*, Hermon Bavinck firmly seats himself within the reformed tradition as believing “the idea that a human being does not *bear* or *have* the image of God, but that he or she *is* the image of God.”¹⁰ Because of this whole-person

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.15.4, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 108.

⁹ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (Beveridge, 107).

¹⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John

approach to the *imago Dei*, Bavinck extends the image of God to include both internal and external aspects of humans, even including the body. Bavinck also makes an important distinction between human capacities such as emotions, desire, and the will and how those capacities are utilized for God's glory in perfect knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.¹¹

Karl Barth, in *Church Dogmatics*, rejects the common conception of the image of God being found in structural components of mankind's faculties but rather emphasizes that the image of God is mankind living in relationship. He states that the image of God, from the simple reading of Scripture, "Is not a quality of man."¹² Instead, Barth sees the image of God as man being created to be in relationship with God and others. Barth's assertion moves the focus of the image of God from a structural concern to unilaterally a functional concern. Not answering the question "what is man" but rather "what was man meant to do?"¹³ This is in an even more distinct functional outlook than Calvin and Bavinck had. While Calvin and Bavinck saw it functionally in righteousness and holiness generally, Barth saw this in more general terms as being made for God-honoring relationships.

Anthony Hoekema in his work, *Created in God's Image*, outlines the development of the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, from Irenaeus to G. C. Berkouwer, and notes how each theologian adds to the discussion on what is and is not the image of God. In this discussion, Hoekema notes that a shift has taken place in Christian theology.

Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 554.

¹¹ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:555-57.

¹² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, pt. 1, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 184.

¹³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt. 1, 184. Barth does state, "It [the image of God] does not consist in anything that man is *or does*." (Emphasis mine) And so it can be argued that Barth does not believe that the image of God is found in the functional aspects of mankind, but the rest of the argumentation seems to indicate that Barth sees man's relationship with God in functional terms.

Earlier theologians said that the image of God in man was to be found primarily in his structural capacities (his possession of reason, morality, and the like). More recent theologians, however, have affirmed that the functioning of man (his worshiping, serving, loving, ruling, etc.) constitutes the essence of the image of God.¹⁴

Hoekema goes on to argue that both structural and functional aspects should be held together when thinking about the image of God. Empathy, as it relates to the *imago Dei*, will involve both structural (emotions, intellect, and the will) and functional (righteous and holy relationships) aspects and therefore will need to hold all the different views of the *imago Dei* together. To understand how empathy ought to function in the Christian life, one will have to see the structural components within the *imago Dei* and relate how they are utilized as one empathizes, as well as how that empathy is right and good for righteous and holy relationships.

Construals of Empathy

The popularity of empathy today as a concept has led to a massive collection of literature on the topic from various perspectives. In the sciences, this literature begins with aesthetics and bleeds into scientific research into the empathy of primates.¹⁵ In the arts, it has been a major theme in great works of literature such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and children's books such as *Those Shoes*. There has been scientific research on empathy being done in both animals and humans, and there have been enumerable blog articles, videos, and podcasts discussing the merits and dangers of empathy. Within this larger usage of the term, there are certain sectors of culture that speak more of empathy than others. Empathy, as a concept, was birthed within the field of psychology, and in its earliest days was applied primarily in a therapeutic setting. To understand the further

¹⁴ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 69.

¹⁵ Frans De Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Crown, 2010).

development of this concept this section will trace the development of the concept of empathy as the meaning expands in both the psychological field as well as within the biblical counseling movement and popular Christian contexts.

Psychological Use of Empathy

C. Daniel Batson's chapter in *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, entitled "What is Empathy: Eight Related but Distinct Phenomena," is one of the most central, and broadly quoted works on what empathy is from a psychological perspective. There is a multitude of definitions of empathy springing from several different streams of research and thought. In this chapter, Batson identifies eight distinct phenomena that are commonly referred to as empathy within the psychological field and attempts to build the broad spectrum that is empathy.¹⁶ This chapter shows the breadth of how empathy has come to encompass so many different aspects of interpersonal relationships throughout the last one hundred years. Batson shows these eight phenomena to "reduce confusion by recognizing complexity," in defining empathy.¹⁷ Batson's definitions of what the term empathy is will serve as a general guide for the discussion on secular psychology's use of empathy and comparing that definition with that of this thesis.

Early in the twentieth century, the popular psychological concept of *Einfühlung* needed to be translated into English. At the center of this task was Edward Titchener, along with James Ward, who offered "empathy" as a suitable translation.¹⁸ Titchener's two main works, *On Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Process* and *A Beginner's Psychology*, are the first works to use the term, "empathy." In these two works, Titchener explains empathy as the "tendency to feel

¹⁶ Batson, "What Is Empathy," 4-8.

¹⁷ Batson, "What Is Empathy," 8.

¹⁸ Lanzoni, *Empathy: A History*, 9.

oneself into a situation,”¹⁹ which is a slight modification of Theodore Lipp’s concept of “Einfühlung.” He primarily uses the concept to explain how one uses their imagination and memory to project themselves into what they are reading or seeing and feel what the characters or objects are feeling. However, it is easy to see how this concept bleeds into interpersonal relationships; as a counselor imagines the situation, capacities, and values of a counselee they can do something similar to empathize with a counselee.

Continuing the research in social work from practitioners such as Otto Rank and Jessie Taft, and “relational therapy,” Carl Rogers became one of the most prominent practitioners of empathy in a therapeutic setting. In his seminal work, *A Way of Being*, Rogers lays out his understanding of empathy. Roger views empathy as a process of taking on the perspective of another person and believes it to be “the most potent factor in bringing about change and learning.”²⁰ Rogers, the creator of the Client-Centered therapy model of counseling, combines empathy and the notion of unconditional positive regard. This is a unique form of empathy that has taken hold in more popular formulations of empathy in the culture at large, where empathy is understood to withhold judgment.²¹

Lastly, there are several works that develop skills associated with empathy. Skills such as attending, types of interviewing skills, reflection, and confrontation skills have been connected to the overall counseling process. Allen E. Ivey, Mary Bradford Ivey, and Carlos P. Zalaquett, develop many of these skills in their work *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*.²² These skills help counselors to build rapport with counsees, grow in understanding, and help counsees grow in self-understanding as

¹⁹ Titchener, *A Beginner’s Psychology*, 198.

²⁰ Carl Rogers, *A Way of Being* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980), 139.

²¹ Jerold D. Bozarth, “Rogerian Empathy in an Organismic Theory: A Way of Being” In *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*, ed. Jean Decety and William Ickes (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 103.

²² Allen E. Ivey, Mary Bradford Ivey, and Carlos P. Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling: Facilitating Client Development in a Multicultural Society* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2018).

counselors seek to empathize.

The Development of Empathy in Popular Culture

Although the term empathy was coined in 1908, it was a relatively unknown concept outside of academic and psychological circles until after the Second World War.²³ The introduction of empathy into the popular culture was through the relatively new medium of Cinema. Empathy began to be a way that described the audience's emotional connection with characters on the screen. This also began to be extended to literature as well as the movie-making process. This started to be identified academically by Arthur Koestler in 1949 in his work *Insight and Outlook*. In this book, Koestler details the method of both writers creating characters and the purpose of creating characters that can be identified in some sort of emotional way.²⁴

Another significant contribution to the popular discussion on empathy has come by way of Gordon Allport and Kenneth B. Clark. Clark wrote the introduction to the famous *Brown v. Board of Education* supreme court briefing in 1954 with the solicited help of Allport. Allport had just written an influential work called *The Nature of Prejudice* in the same year that used the concept of empathy to help alleviate racial tensions.²⁵ Allport, who was writing in the wake of the atrocities of World War II, defined empathy as the “gift of understanding people.”²⁶ Clark would continue to use this type of conception of empathy and merge it with a more emotive sense as he worked within the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Even President Obama's speech citing an “empathy deficit” being the problem with the large racial and social divide in America in the

²³ Lanzoni, *Empathy: A History*, 195.

²⁴ Arthur Koestler, *Insight and Outlook* (New York: Macmillon, 1949).

²⁵ Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954).

²⁶ Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 435.

twenty-first century is an extension of Clark's argument during the civil rights era.²⁷

Edwin Friedman in his book on leadership, *The Failure of Nerve*, has a chapter devoted to empathy.²⁸ Friedman argues that empathy empowers the most cancerous personalities in a system or group of people to have all the power. The one who complains the most will be catered to the most if the leader is "empathic," and this will be to the detriment of the rest of the individuals in the group. Friedman believes that leaders should not prioritize empathy over accountability. This is the starkest difference between Friedman's critique of empathy and popular conceptions of empathy. Friedman argues that empathy does not lead to an individual becoming more mature whereas those who positively assess empathy (such as Carl Rogers) have argued that empathy is one of the key factors in someone becoming more mature.

Brené Brown's popular video, which has over sixteen million views on YouTube, provides one popular view of empathy.²⁹ Brown makes a stark contrast between sympathy and empathy. Sympathy, to Brown, is an emotionally disconnected response to someone's suffering. They are standing over the hole that is the other's suffering saying they are sorry, or at best they may attempt to minimize the other's pain by a statement that starts with the words, "at least." Empathy, on the other hand, is the sharing of pain with someone. Someone with empathy takes the perspective of another person, staying out of judgment, recognizing, and communicating the other's feelings.³⁰

²⁷ Obama, "Obama to Graduates: Cultivate Empathy."

²⁸ Edwin Friedman, *The Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury, 2007).

²⁹ Brené Brown, "Brené Brown on Empathy." December 10, 2013, YouTube video, 2:53, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw> .

³⁰ Brown, "Brené Brown on Empathy."

Non-Academic Biblical Perspective on Empathy

With new concepts and new words come difficulties in researching these concepts. As of right now, there has been very little academic work in the terms of journals and articles from a biblical perspective on the concept of empathy. Much of what has been written has been responding to secular and popular construals of empathy and has yet to be written down in academic journal articles, books, and monographs, but rather has been put forth in blog articles, podcasts, and popular level videos.

In response to Brené Brown's video and the broader culture's infatuation with empathy, several Christians have spoken out about what they feel is, the danger of empathy. Joe Rigney, the president at Bethlehem Seminary, has written several blog articles and appeared on podcasts and videos to talk about the "Sin of Empathy." Rigney sees empathy as a problem for Christians. Although he does believe that "we can find much to praise in the concept of empathy,"³¹ he sees sympathy as a far superior term. Primary behind his desire to see sympathy as a superior term is that Rigney sees sympathy as having an emotional distance, while "empathy makes their suffering our own in a more universal and totalizing way."³² This, in Rigney's estimation, is part of the danger of empathy in the life of a Christian. Further expounding on this theme, Joe Rigney and Douglas Wilson appear in a video entitled *The Sin of Empathy*. They use the two popular-level works cited above, *The Failure of Nerve* and *Against Empathy* as critiques of using empathy for any type of moral decisions or in leading the church as a pastor. Their main concern is that one should not connect with a person coming for counseling too emotionally or it may affect one's judgment as to the truthfulness of the claim. In both his blog post and in the video, there is a consensus among Wilson and

³¹ Joe Rigney, "Do You Feel My Pain? Empathy, Sympathy, and Dangerous Virtues," *Desiring God Blog*, May 2, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-feel-my-pain>.

³² Rigney, "Do You Feel My Pain?"

Rigney that sympathy is the preferred term rather than empathy.

Christian Psychology and Integrationist's Use of Empathy

Christian Psychology and Integrationist's concept and use of empathy sits in between the biblical counseling use and secular psychology. Many of the more thoughtful leaders in their movements make exegetical arguments to ground their use of empathy in the Scriptures and therefore an interaction with these Christian counselors will draw similarities and differences between this thesis' scriptural argument.

Eric Johnson's work, *God and Soul Care*, has a thorough grounding of empathy in Scripture. Johnson grounds people's use of empathy in God's empathy with his creatures and people. He uses multiple examples from the Old Testament as well as the general pattern of Christ's ministry on earth as one of compassion and empathy.³³ Later in this work, Johnson defines empathy as the "Sharing of thoughts and feelings."³⁴ He encourages the practice of the art of listening, explaining that it "affirms the created goodness of the other by taking his or her emotions seriously and communicates that those emotions are meaningful."³⁵ Johnson's contribution is instrumental in seeing both the exegetical justification and methodological use within Christian Psychology and the broader Christian counseling movement.

In his article, "Carl Rogers and the Christian Virtues," Robert C. Roberts gives a critique of Rogers's client-centered theory of counseling, outlining the major components of the theory and then showing some similarities with Christian teaching as well as a critique. As Roberts traces Rogers's concept of empathy and unconditional positive regard, he sees a similarity to the kind of love "as it comes to expression most

³³ Eric Johnson, *God and Soul Care: The Therapeutic Resources of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 245-47.

³⁴ Johnson, *God and Soul Care*, 449.

³⁵ Johnson, *God and Soul Care*, 447.

fully in the atonement.”³⁶ This kind of love, according to Roberts, is not conditioned upon the object’s goodness but is an extension of God’s love. Roberts draws this parallel between redemptive love in Christ and empathy with unconditional positive regard.³⁷

In Cameron Lee’s article, “Parenting as Discipleship: A Contextual Motif for Christian Parental Education,” he lays out a plan for teaching parents to disciple their children with excellence. At the end of this article, Lee highlights empathy as an important skill to be developed as a parent. He states that empathy for parents is to “put themselves in their children’s emotional shoes, imaginatively experiencing the world as the child does.”³⁸ Although Lee’s initial definition is grounded by the Psychoanalyst Christian Olden³⁹, his exegetical reasoning is the incarnation. He states that empathy, “reveals a structure analogous to the theological concept of *kenosis*.”⁴⁰ This, along with Roberts’s analysis of Rogers’s approach to counseling, helps one understand a Christian counseling perspective of empathy and their exegetical instincts in grounding this concept in their therapeutic methodology.

Finally, two works by integrationist scholars seek to help establish a Christian Counseling methodology and set of skills. John C. Thomas and Lisa Sosin’s work *Therapeutic Expedition*⁴¹ and Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto, Heather Davediuk Gingrich, and Fred C. Gingrich’s *Skills for Effective Counseling*⁴² seek to be textbooks to help

³⁶ Robert C. Roberts, “Carl Rogers and the Christian Virtues,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 13, no. 4 (1985): 268.

³⁷ Roberts, “Carl Rogers and the Christian Virtues,” 268-69.

³⁸ Cameron Lee, “Parenting as Discipleship: A Contextual Motif for Christian Parent Education,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 19, no. 3 (1991): 275.

³⁹ Lee, “Parenting as Discipleship,” 275.

⁴⁰ Lee, “Parenting as Discipleship,” 275.

⁴¹ John C. Thomas and Lisa Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition: Equipping the Christian Counselor for the Journey* (Nashville: B & H, 2011).

⁴² Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto, Heather Davediuk Gingrich, and Fred C. Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling: A Faith-Based Integration*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016).

counselor build the requisite skills to be helpful counselors. Included in each of these volumes are sections on empathy charting helpful ways to ask questions, reflect content, as well as empathically reflect and confront. They seek to apply empathy in the practical counseling context.

Biblical Counseling's Use of Empathy

The first practitioner of biblical counseling was Jay Adams. Adams wrote at a time when the Rogerian conception of therapy was by far the most popular. Much of Adams's early work interacted with Rogers's ideas about what made people change. So, it is no surprise that Jay Adams's book *the Christian Counselor's Manual* is the first biblical counseling resource to have a significant amount of space devoted toward empathy as a concept. As was previously stated, Rogers had a very specific concept of empathy that bundled it with unconditional support or acceptance. Adams, in his chapter on support, sympathy, and empathy Jay Adam prefers the term empathy. Most of the chapter is devoted to explaining why support is an unbiblical concept. Adams takes issue with the idea that support is the "non-active *presence* of the counselor,"⁴³ and prefers empathy which "comes *only* from entering into the problem so that it becomes one's own."⁴⁴ The most important thing about Adams's writing on this topic is his distinction between passivity in love and an active helping love. The latter is the understanding of love espoused by Adams. Although much of the conversation surrounding empathy has changed over the last fifty years, Adam's observations are still just as insightful on the Bible's definition of love and compassion as opposed to a more secular approach to empathy.

As the Biblical Counseling Movement developed, one of the most profound

⁴³ Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 155.

⁴⁴ Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, 159n11.

changes was a movement from a problem/sin-centered approach to biblical counseling to more of a person-oriented approach that also majored on the suffering of people as well as their sin.⁴⁵ It is in this space that empathy has been expressed as a relational and trust-building aspect of the counselor-counselee relationship. Indeed, Heath Lambert in his Doctoral dissertation, recognizes that in the early days of the counseling movement there was an emphasis on authority and there was a problem-centered focus.⁴⁶ This discussion by Lambert demonstrates that the conversation surrounding empathy moves from the first generation of Adams to the second generation with men like Paul Tripp, Wayne Mack, and David Powlison. The move in the understanding of empathy moves from feeling one's way into the problem of the counselee to attempting to move into the world and the suffering of the counselee.

This move from the first to the second generation is shown clearly in Paul Tripp's book, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*. In what has become a standard textbook for the Biblical Counseling Movement, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* encourages counselors to "Enter the Person's World."⁴⁷ Tripp, in this way, echoes Adam's encouragement to enter the counselee's problem and help them. Tripp, however, makes it more person-centered than Adams (who is decidedly more problem-centered) and encourages some acknowledgment that the counselor hears, understands, and is with them in their struggle.⁴⁸ These observations and encouragements add to the biblical counseling's construal of empathy as well as being helpful practical application of empathy will aid this thesis in its implications for the ministry of the word and the

⁴⁵ Heath Lambert, "The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 103-5.

⁴⁶ Lambert, "The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement," 98.

⁴⁷ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 126.

⁴⁸ Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 130-31.

broader church.

Bob Kellemen has written most extensively on the concept of empathy than any other in the biblical counseling movement. In his book *Gospel-Centered Counseling*, which is a Biblical Counseling primer, he lays the foundation for a more extensive work on empathy. Though he does not use the term empathy in this book he uses several concepts that fall into that category. He encourages counselors toward a model of “incarnational suffering”⁴⁹ where he says they should have mutual feelings with their counsees as well as take on the pain of their counsees. In his book *Gospel Conversations*, he shows a clear development of thought on empathy from a biblical counseling perspective. Kellemen adds a section on “Rich Soul Empathizing”⁵⁰ for the counselor and even a description of levels of empathy. Kellemen’s work in these two counseling method books is the most direct contribution from the biblical counseling movement on empathy both definitionally and practically.

Kellemen, in his companion books *Gospel-Centered Family Counseling* and *Gospel-Centered Marriage Counseling* moves from encouraging counselors toward “Rich Soul Empathizing” to teaching spouses and parents to do this for their children⁵¹ or spouse⁵². This is a clear move from empathy as a character trait possessed by the counselor to something that is taught to counsees as an integral part of loving others. These two works will both show a current construal of empathy in the biblical counseling movement as well as one of the few biblical counseling examples of the application of empathy by teaching counsees to empathize.

⁴⁹ Bob Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 176.

⁵⁰ Bob Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations: How to Care Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 141.

⁵¹ Bob Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Family Counseling: An Equipping Guide for Pastors and Counselors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020).

⁵² Bob Kellemen, *Gospel-Centered Marriage Counseling: An Equipping Guide for Pastors and Counselors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020), 113-28.

Void in the Literature

The Biblical Counseling Movement was birthed at a time when the authority and the sufficiency of the Bible needed to be defended at all costs. Psychotherapy had pushed into the pastoral sphere in several areas.⁵³ A debt of gratitude is owed to the pioneers of the Biblical Counseling Movement in both guarding that ground as well as laying out a foundation for a way to help people live flourishing lives through the application of God's word. The Biblical Counseling Movement's defense of truth and emphasis on sin as the main problem in counseling issues created a void in the care of souls in the way one shows compassion, patience, and mercy in the counseling room. Although several biblical counselors have used the word empathy, written about empathy, and encouraged empathy in the counseling room, no one has written a biblical understanding of empathic values from a biblical counseling perspective.

In the Biblical Counseling Movement, there is a prevailing notion that what is utilized by the counselor in his or her counseling should also be taught. This is largely based on 2 Corinthians 1:3-7 where Paul writes, "He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God." The other void in biblical counseling is a methodological void with the concept of empathy. If the biblically related values to empathy are important to be utilized by the counselor to help counselees they should likewise be taught. No one, to date, has written a method of using and teaching empathy in counseling situations.

Outline of Chapters

This outline of the chapters will advance the argument of this thesis by providing an account of the development of the concept of empathy from the word's

⁵³ David Powlison, "Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies)," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 6.

inception to today, argue that empathy has biblically related values, organize these values into a cohesive understanding of empathy, and then apply that system to the ministry of the word in biblical counseling.

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one will present a synopsis of some of the main voices in the debate surrounding the *imago Dei* to set a wide-angle theological lens for the framework for empathy. It will then present a diachronic account of the development of the concept of empathy from the perspectives of psychology, pop culture, Christian Psychology, and biblical counseling, and demonstrate the important conversation that is and has been going on within the Christian community as well as the larger world about what empathy is and how it should be employed to help people change. It will also demonstrate a void in the Biblical Counseling Movement's writing on this topic and the line of reasoning for this thesis.

Chapter Two: The Imago Dei and Relational Purpose

Chapter two will build a theology of relationships that is centered around man as the "Image of God." First, it will examine the different perspectives of the *imago Dei* throughout church history and show how these different perspectives have influenced biblical counseling anthropology. Second, it will show God's purpose for relationships and how this purpose fits within the larger framework of the *imago Dei*. Primarily, this will argue that relationships were meant to incorporate the totality of people in loving relationships with God, other people, and their world.

Chapter Three: Empathy as Necessary Implication of the Biblical Theme of Love

In the third chapter, this thesis will examine how empathy fits within the larger anthropological framework of relationships and their chief design purpose. It will first

examine God's love and compassion and trace those biblical categories through the scriptures. Then it will show that people are commanded to imitate, in some way God's compassion towards others tracing the differences between God's compassion and mankind's compassion. Next it will locate empathy as a necessary implication of the command to imitate God's compassion. Last it will examine secular definitions of empathy and differentiate it from compassion.

Chapter Four: Apply Empathy to Biblical Counseling

In the fourth chapter, this thesis will apply the biblical framework for empathy for the counseling task. First, it will examine the ways in which empathy informs compassion by showing the type of information that is needed for compassion to take its full affect. Second, it will examine the best ways to practically draw out the information, build trust with the counselee through these practices, and use that information to help counselees move forward. Lastly, it will examine the impact of the information on the heart of the counselor and typical ways that counselors may stop empathy and compassion from happening.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Any endeavor examining a function of mankind cannot start with a microscope, but rather with a wide-angle lens. Before studying empathy and the design purpose for relationships, one needs to put those concepts into the larger context of what it means to be human. Empathy, in this way, should be set in a larger theological and anthropological framework. Empathy is about relationships and relationships are central to what it means to be human. God has created humanity and the world in such a way that everything people do, feel, or think is part of their relating to their world. It is for this reason that the wide-angle lens that must be used is the concept of the *imago Dei*, the image of God. The goal of this chapter will be to consider historical insights about the image of God as a framework for considering empathy in human relationships. Then it will show how relationships fit into that system of human nature and purpose. It will do this by first tracing the differing ways the doctrine of the image of God has developed in Christian theology and how these developments have influenced the anthropology of biblical counseling. Then, this chapter will show for what purpose God created human beings to live in relationship with one another. Namely, God's chief design purpose for relationships is to know God and to make God known.

The Development of the Doctrine of the *Imago Dei*

Over the centuries there has been a multitude of interpretations of the *imago Dei*. These disagreements arise primarily from exegetical issues of how to interpret the terms found in Genesis 1:26 translated as "image" and "likeness." Although this is a worthwhile exegetical debate the wider debate is an anthropological one and hinges on

more than just Genesis 1:26-28 and other passages that utilize “image” language. This debate has developed over time and has taken on several different forms, but in essence, each iteration of the debate answers a different integral question about mankind’s nature, function, context, and goal.¹

The Structural *Imago Dei*

The first aspect in the debate over the *imago Dei* referred to in mankind was one of ontology, or the structure of man. This emphasis seeks to answer the question, “What is man?” and does so by locating the image of God in his capacities. When answering this question theologians focused on specific attributes that connected mankind to God ontologically and separated man from animals and angels.

Irenaeus, the second-century bishop of Lyons, lays much of the foundation for the debate when he addresses heresies arising in his time. There are several things to note about Irenaeus’s concept of the *imago Dei*. First, Irenaeus grounded the image of God in the internal capacities of reason and will. He writes, “But man, being endowed with reason, and in this respect like to God, having been made free in his will, and with power over himself, is himself the cause to himself, that sometimes he becomes wheat, and sometimes chaff.”² For Irenaeus, man’s nature is grounded in reason or rationality and their ability to make free choices. These two capacities were retained even after the fall and were important in Irenaeus’s thought because they are the ground for moral responsibility before God.

Second, Irenaeus viewed a sharp distinction between the image of God and the

¹ Although the exegetical issues at stake in the debate over what the *imago Dei* is are significant to each aspect’s interpretation, this Thesis’s focus is not primarily on what the *imago Dei* is. It is fundamentally showing that each iteration of the debate surrounding the *imago Dei* says something helpful and true about the human experience. So this section will not take a position on what the *imago dei* is exegetically as much as it will explain each view and then connect those views to a biblical counseling anthropology.

² Irenaeus, *St. Irenaeus of Lyons against Heresies* 4.4.3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Jackson, MS: Ex Fontibus, 2010), 370.

likeness of God in Genesis 1:26. Although he grounded the image of God in the two structural capacities of reason and will, he also saw the likeness of God something that needs the Spirit of God to “perfect.” He says about the likeness of God, “But if the Spirit be wanting to the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image [of God] in his formation (*in plasmate*), but not receiving the similitude through the Spirit; and thus is this being imperfect.”³ In this passage, he explains that without the Spirit there is no “similitude,” or likeness to God but rather just retains the form or “plasmate” of God. Irenaeus saw that after the fall of mankind men and women were able to retain the image of God but unable to be like God in any real qualitative way because the added gift of the Spirit was lost. This distinction is likely not a helpful exegetical distinction between the terms “image” and “likeness,”⁴ nor is it a precise theological statement about what happened at the fall. Nevertheless, it is a helpful theological distinction between mankind’s ontology and the quality of man’s functioning. Irenaeus was showing that although what mankind is does not change at its base level, the function of how those capacities are used in the lives of men drastically changes. This distinction was picked up by later theologians such as Calvin and Luther during the Reformation.

As possibly the most significant medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas also adds to the discussion. Aquinas is most known for finding “the image of God primarily in man’s intellect or reason,”⁵ which is like that of Irenaeus. However, Aquinas casts a slightly different light on the concept than his predecessor. Aquinas did not see a substantive difference between the terms “image” and “likeness,”⁶ but instead an image

³ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.6.1 (Roberts and Donaldson, 520).

⁴ Anthony Hoekema, *Create in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 35.

⁵ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 36.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.93.9, vol. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 477.

that shows itself in three ways. He writes,

Wherefore we see that the image of God is in man in three ways. First, inasmuch as man possesses a natural aptitude for understanding and loving God; and this aptitude consists in the very nature of the mind, which is common to all men. Secondly, inasmuch as man actually or habitually knows and loves God, though imperfectly; and this image consists in the conformity of grace. Thirdly, inasmuch as man knows and loves God perfectly; and this image consists in the likeness of glory.⁷

Aquinas's formula for the image shows all mankind retains, in his "natural aptitude" the ability to love and know God. This aspect of the image of God is universal and not lost after the fall of mankind. The second and third ways, like Irenaeus, were gradations of utilizing that natural aptitude to know and love God to one degree or another. The Reformers would take considerable issue with this latter point of man's natural ability to know and love God even after the fall. Their contention on this point leads to a focus on the functional aspects of the image of God.

Lastly, Herman Bavinck, writing in the late nineteenth century, adds to the discussion on structure. Bavinck builds off the previous structural components laid down by Irenaeus and Aquinas while also adding to it in a more holistic way. Bavinck writes that in the same way that God (all of God and not one part of God) is the archetype of man so also "nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God."⁸ This statement is in stark contradiction to some earlier church fathers who seemed to minimize the bodily aspects of the image.⁹ As well as including the body in his formulation of what the image is structurally, Bavinck also becomes more precise about what the internal capacities of mankind's soul are. Whereas Irenaeus and Aquinas saw the intellect and will

⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.93.4 (Fathers, 471).

⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 554-55.

⁹ Anthony Hoekema attributes this to Aquinas being influenced by the great Greek Philosophers, Plato in particular, as the reason that early church fathers deemphasized the body or even argued that the body was the source of the lower passions and therefore a negative attribute of mankind. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 39-41.

as the main parts of man's natural capacities, Bavinck says,

Belonging to the image of God in the second place, are the human faculties...the heart, according to Scripture, is the organ of man's life. It is, first, the center of physical life but then also, in a metaphorical sense, the seat and fountain of man's entire psychic life, of emotions and passions, of desire and will even of thinking and knowing.¹⁰

Alongside the body, Bavinck sees three capacities as comprising the heart: thinking, feeling, and willing. Bavinck's understanding of the structural aspect of the image of God included both internal capacities as well as man's physical body.

So, what is man? Man is comprised of a soul (or heart) and a body. The soul is comprised of capacities to think, feel, and will. But why did God create man this way? What were they made to do with these capacities? This question brings about the second emphasis in this theological debate.

The Functional *Imago Dei*

Whereas the first years of church history focused primarily on the structure of man, the reformation added to that formula an additional question, "What was man-made to do?" The Reformers, and in particular John Calvin, reacted strongly to Catholic teaching on the fall and, by extension, Rome's teaching that man had the capacity to be able to have faith in God even in his unregenerate form. This reaction pushed the Reformers to rethink the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.¹¹

Calvin begins his thoughts on the matter of God's image with a general agreement with the preceding church fathers on the placement of the image of God. Calvin, in agreement with Irenaeus and Aquinas, believed that the image of God is primarily to be found in the internal part of man. He writes, "though the divine glory is displayed in man's outward appearance, it cannot be doubted that the proper seat of the

¹⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:556-57.

¹¹ Hoekema, *Create in God's Image*, 42.

image is in the soul.”¹² Calvin does admit that the body does show some of God’s glory, but he is careful to distinguish that although he would not strongly oppose someone who “may choose to include under the image of God,”¹³ he does not agree with that assessment. The difference between Calvin and his predecessors is his starting point. Irenaeus and Aquinas started with creation and searched for the difference between the animals and human beings (or conversely the similarities between man and God) as the key to the image. In their search they found reason and will to be those distinguishing features. However, Calvin looked to the renewal of the image in Christ and reasoned backwards. He wrote about Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:19, which are two passages that speak to the renewal of the image after Christ,

We must now see what particulars Paul comprehends under this renovation. In the first place, he mentions knowledge, and in the second, true righteousness and holiness. Hence, we infer that at the beginning the image of God was manifested by light of intellect, rectitude of heart, and the soundness of every part. For though I admit that the forms of expression are elliptical, this principle cannot be overthrown, i.e., that the leading feature in the renovation of the divine image must also have held the highest place in its creation.¹⁴

Calvin located the image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

Otherwise, he states that the image of God was in the perfection of the soul’s capacities instead of any capacities within the soul. For Calvin, the image of God was found in the functioning of the soul as opposed to what the soul was ontologically.

This distinction reveals the primary issue with both the reformational and earlier church formulas for the image of God. There is a tension in both formulas when it comes to how the fall affects the image of God in man. On the one hand, early church fathers such as Irenaeus and Aquinas stressed that the image of God was retained after the fall because Genesis 9:6 grounds the punishment for murder in the fact that they are made

¹² Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.15.3, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 106.

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.3 (Beveridge, 106).

¹⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (Beveridge, 107-8).

in God's image. The logic flows that if God's image is reason and will and it is still present because of Genesis 9:6 then there are no effects of the fall on man's reason and will. However, this seems too high a view of man and does not account for the deleterious effects of the fall on mankind's functioning; functioning that needed to be remade into Christ's image. On the other hand, man's inability to save themselves by works or by their reason and will was one of the hallmarks of the reformation. The view that the fall of man brought about man's total depravity led Calvin to say that the image of God was "vitiating and almost destroyed"¹⁵ in the fall. This seems too low a view of man because Genesis 9:6 seems clear that humans, after the fall, were worthy of the same respect as being made in God's image as Adam and Eve did before the fall. Moving into the area of modern theology, this is the problem that is picked up and dealt with by Karl Barth and others.

So, in Calvin's estimation, the soul was made with capacities, but the image of God belongs to the perfection of those capacities. This perfection was lost or at least greatly damaged in the fall and leaves mankind with only some limited trace of the image of God while still retaining his humanity. Man was made to glorify God by functioning within the restoration of his capacities in salvation.

The Relational *Imago Dei*

In the last one hundred years, there have been many theologians that have moved in a different direction when describing the image of God. Largely rejecting previous ideas about what the image related to, they looked back to Genesis 1 to see more relational terminology in the initial creation of man and the statement of man being made in God's image and likeness.

The most well-known theologian to draw significant attention to this is Karl

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.15.4 (Beveridge, 108).

Barth, the famous neo-orthodox theologian of the early to mid-twentieth century. Barth begins by rejecting previous formulas of both the early church fathers and the Reformers. Speaking about the image, he says, “It is not a quality of man. Hence there is no point in asking in which of man’s peculiar attributes and attitudes it consists. It does not consist in anything that man is or does.”¹⁶ At the heart of Barth’s vision for the image is that man serves as a reflection of God’s internal relational nature. While previous formulas for the image saw man as an *analogia entis* (an ontologically or functionally similar being to God), Barth’s formula focuses on seeing man as an *analogia relationis* (relationally like God).¹⁷ David Cairns explains Barth’s position this way, “When God said ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,’ he meant that there should be in man a harmonious confrontation like that which exists in the Godhead.”¹⁸ So, Barth focused on God’s relational nature transferring to man in the way that he relates both to other men and women and also to God himself. This is what Barth saw as the image of God.

Emil Brunner was a contemporary of Barth and likewise saw the relational aspect of the image of God as primary. There were significant differences between Brunner’s conception of the relational image and Barth’s. While Barth saw man’s relational nature as a reflection of God’s inter-trinitarian relationship Brunner saw man as relational because he was created in a special relationship with God as his creature.¹⁹ This special relationship is one of both responsibility and possibility. As a creature man stands responsible to respond to God and this aspect is fixed. Brunner says, “Man is and remains, responsible, whatever his attitude to his Creator may be. He may deny his

¹⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, pt. 1, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 184.

¹⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt. 1, 195.

¹⁸ David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 173.

¹⁹ Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), 56.

responsibility, and he may misuse his freedom, but he cannot get rid of his responsibility.”²⁰ Brunner called this the functional image of God. Every human has this, and it cannot be damaged or altered. It “is part of the unchangeable structure of man’s being.”²¹

Even though the functional image of God is part of every human by way of his creatureliness, Brunner identifies another aspect of the image that is lost to all those who are not in Christ. Brunner calls this the “material” image of God and writes,

“Here, therefore, the fact that man has been ‘made in the image of God’ is spoken of as having been lost, and indeed as wholly, and not partially lost. Man no longer possesses this *Imago Dei*; but it is restored through Him, through whom God glorifies and gives Himself: through Jesus Christ.”²² So, for Brunner man is made in relation to God and as a creature, he is responsible to give an answer to God. He can respond because of the gifts God has given him such as reason, freedom, and conscience.²³ The material image is the answer that God desires from his creatures to bring him glory. It is a “response of reverent, grateful love”²⁴ that gives God the glory he deserves as his creator.

Although they had profound disagreements, both Brunner and Barth rejected earlier formulations of the image which were grounded in man’s capacity, such as reason, will, or affection, or the perfection of those capacities. Instead, they contended that the image of God was located in man as a relational being who lives in relationship with both God and others.

²⁰ Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2:56-57.

²¹ Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2:57.

²² Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2:58.

²³ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 54.

²⁴ Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2:58.

The Eschatological *Imago Dei*

In recent discussions on the image of God, there has been another emphasis on what some have called, “The eschatological goal of the image.”²⁵ This eschatological view, represented by Stanley Grenz, builds off both the reformed functional view that the image of God is to be found in the perfection of capacities found in Jesus Christ, as well as the newer relational view of the image of God. Stanley Grenz points out that in several theologians’ earlier works there is a “third possibility...lurking in the shadows...This potential third option sees the *imago Dei* as humankind’s divinely given goal or destiny, which lies in the eschatological future and toward which humans are directed.”²⁶ Although it may seem that this aspect is very similar to the functional image, there is a distinction. Those who see the image of God as an eschatological goal or destiny point to several New Testament emphases to show that God created mankind to become the full image of God in the new humanity inaugurated by Jesus. Grenze and others build their exegetical arguments based on three New Testament passages: Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15:49, and 2 Corinthians 3:18.

First, in Romans 8:29 Paul states that God’s people have been foreknown and predestined so that they might be “conformed to the image of his son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”²⁷ Grenz highlights first that God’s purpose for the conforming of his people into Christ’s image was the purpose from the beginning. He says, “this assurance [to be conformed into the image of God] rests on God’s set affection (foreknowledge) and God’s set decision (foreordination) from the beginning. According to this verse, God’s decision was that believers will indeed be

²⁵ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 224.

²⁶ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 177.

²⁷ Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations come from the *Christian Standard Bible* (CSB).

brought into conformity to the Son.”²⁸ Grenz then shows that it is Christ as the representative of the new humanity that is the substance of the goal of mankind. He writes, “Christ now radiates the fullness of humanness that constitutes God’s design for humankind from the beginning. Yet God’s purpose has never been that Christ will merely radiate this human fullness, but that as the Son he will be preeminent among a new humanity who together are stamped with the divine image.”²⁹ So, the eschatological view sees the image of God in the future constituting the new humanity whose representative in Christ, the true image of God.

Second, in 1 Corinthians 15:49 not only was the new humanity, represented by Christ, the plan for the image of God from the beginning but this is to be accomplished through the resurrection and will include a physical reality, which entails a new body. Grenz sees the statement in 1 Corinthians 15:49 that states, “And just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven,” as the culmination of the preceding verses about the resurrection.³⁰ The new humanity spoken of in Romans 8:29 will be perfectly brought into completion in the resurrection.

Lastly, those who hold to the eschatological image connect their view with the functional view by showing that this eschatological hope is something that they can currently participate and share in as a process throughout their lives. 2 Corinthians 3:18 states that as believers can see Christ’s image clearly, they are, “being transformed into the same image from glory to glory.” Grenz explains, “The eschatological destiny of bearing the divine image is present in here and now as the Spirit is at work transforming those who are in Christ into the image that Christ bears. In this process, humans are

²⁸ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 227.

²⁹ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 231.

³⁰ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 234-40.

becoming the new humanity in accordance with God's intent from the beginning."³¹

So, in the eschatological view, the image of God is the goal of humanity. When God made Adam and Eve his intention was not to leave them in the state. They were in the garden, but it was always for them to become the fullness of the image of God represented by Christ, the true image of God. As believers participate in Christ, they have assurance that they currently are being remade into his image as well as that image being perfected in the resurrection.

A Biblical Counseling Anthropology

Anthropology has been a major emphasis in the biblical counseling movement from the earliest days. Jay Adams rightly pointed out that modern psychology and psychiatry had profound insufficiencies and many of them arose out of a faulty anthropology. Indeed, faulty anthropology does lead to a faulty assessment of normality, which leads to a faulty goal and a faulty mechanism for change. Indeed, the importance of establishing the problems with secular anthropology was essential to the movement. However, Adams originally saw that this area needed to not only be defined in antithesis to secular psychology but also present a positive, biblical vision for anthropology. He acknowledged in *A Theology of Cristian Counseling* that, "whole books on nearly every one of the issues that I shall deal with here (sometimes only in passing) need to be written. Moreover, volumes on matters that I would not even dare to raise in a work of this sort must be added to them."³² Subsequent generations within the biblical counseling movement have seen a growing development in their understanding of man. The purpose of this section is not to chart a chronology of that development but to compile an outline of a biblical counseling anthropology. This outline will attempt to organize the

³¹ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 251.

³² Jay Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 94.

theological statements about anthropology made by the previously mentioned theologians in a way that makes sense within the biblical counseling movement and support that organization by biblical counselors' writings. This anthropology will cover man's ontology, purpose, and context as this paper seeks to show how empathy works within this anthropological framework.

What Is Man?

Whether it is Cognitive Behavioral Theory, Rogerian Humanism, or Post-Modern Psychological theories, the first question that they must answer is, "what is man?" All theories build off from an anthropological starting point. Biblical counseling is no different. Although there have been many ways to explain the image of God throughout the years, there is significantly less diversity in the way that mankind has been described ontologically. Mankind consists as a whole being with two unified parts. The heart is the interior aspect of the person. It is the seat of desires, affections, and thoughts. The body is the exterior aspect of the person and the means by which the heart acts physically. When theologians debated the structural aspects of the *imago Dei* they were answering a question of ontology and so their thought helps form the answer to this question.

The heart: the interior aspect of the man. When theologians have written about the interior aspect of man, they have used different words to describe this part of man. They have used words like soul, spirit, mind, and heart. Although each of these terms carries specific nuances, the heart is the term primarily used in the New Testament as a totalizing word to describe the inner aspect of mankind.³³ Many biblical counselors

³³ Friedrich Baumgärtel and Johannes Behm, "Καρδία, Καρδιογνώστης, Σκληροκαρδία," ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 3:612.

have adopted the heart as the default term for the interior aspect of the person, and along with it all the capacities afforded to him. As has been demonstrated, theologians have identified several groupings of capacities of the human soul, however, in the New Testament, there are three capacities attached to the term heart—cognition, affection, and volition.³⁴

First, the heart thinks. It assents, reasons, and interprets information and circumstances in which it finds itself. Consider the following passage. The Apostle John quotes Isaiah in John 12:40 saying, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts.” In this passage, there is a correlation that is made between the intake of information and the reasoning that the heart is doing in reference to Jesus’s miracles. The heart is hardened and therefore does not understand the meaning behind the miracles of Jesus in a way that would allow them to believe in Jesus. George Beasley-Murray writes, “Not only did the people not believe, they *could* not believe because of what Isaiah said (in Isa 6:10): God had blinded their eyes and made their heart (=mind) obtuse in case they should see, and understand, and turn, and the Christ should heal them.”³⁵ Or even more pointedly, Calvin writes in the same passage, “*The heart* is sometimes in Scripture put for the seat of the affections; but here, as in many other passages, it denotes what is called the intellectual part of the soul.”³⁶ So, the heart (the internal aspect of man) thinks, reasons, and

³⁴ Several theologians and biblical counselors have settled on these three capacities when referring to the heart. Herman Bavinck in his *Reformed Dogmatics* recognizes these three capacities when defining the psychic life of human beings. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:556-57. Michael Emler in his article entitled “Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart” recognizes these capacities. Michael Emler, “Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, 2 (Winter 2002): 47-52. Most recently, Jeremy Pierre in *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life* also recognizes these same three capacities belonging to the heart. Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016).

³⁵ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary vol. 36 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987) 216.

³⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 18, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 43.

interprets.

Second, the heart feels. In the New Testament, the term heart is also used to describe the place where all manner of positive and negative emotions emanate. John 16:22 Jesus says, “So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy from you.” In this passage, Jesus describes the heart as rejoicing at the return of Christ. Paul speaks similarly of his own heart. In Romans 9:1-2, Paul says, “I speak the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience testifies to me through the Holy Spirit – that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.” In expressing Paul’s affection for the Jews and his distress at their unconverted state he uses the language of the heart. In these passages and more the Bible describes the heart in terms of affection and desire.

Third, not only does the heart think and feel it also has intentions, commitments, and determines. Not only does the heart feel and think it also chooses. Several passages display this truth. The most obvious example of this is 1 Corinthians 7:37. Paul writes, “But he who stands firm in his heart (who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will) and has decided in his heart to keep her as his fiancée, will do well.” Paul Gardner comments on the passage and this aspect of the heart, “The ‘heart’ (Καρδία) here refers to the man’s whole will and does not just refer to his emotions as it might in English.”³⁷ This passage shows twice that people’s capacity for determination, will, and decisions are biblically located in the heart.³⁸

Lastly, these capacities are not three individually functioning capacities. They

³⁷ Paul D. Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018) 356.

³⁸ It should be noted that Jeremy Pierre makes a similar line of reasoning, pointing out the thinking, feeling, and volitional connections with the term heart in Scripture in both his doctoral dissertation and *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*. Jeremy Pierre, “Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart: The Centrality of Faith in Christ to the Restoration of Human Functioning” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 35-41; Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 18-22.

are not stand-alone “systems” but rather they are “interrelated and overlapping.”³⁹ Herman Bavinck writes about how mankind is like God as image-bearers and says, “The spirituality, invisibility, unity, simplicity, and immortality of the human soul are all features of the image of God”⁴⁰ In this quote, Bavinck is expressing something important about human beings. Humans are not made up of parts that can be separated and dissected. This has profound ramifications on the dual nature of body and soul but also applies to the internal capacities of people. The cognitive, affective, and volitional capacities of the heart are just that, capacities. They are three ways in which the one heart functions in relation to God, others, and the world.

The body. There is not just an internal aspect to human beings but also an external aspect. When God made mankind, he made them with bodies. These bodies serve many purposes. Bodies reveal gender, express emotions, and are intimately involved with both sinful and righteous behavior. Although the Bible does not present a complete taxonomy of the body and all its biological complexity, it does present the body in certain significant ways that affect the way it should be viewed in light of its more complete understanding of the heart.

First, the body and soul do not represent two entirely distinct parts but rather a unity between two distinct aspects of a person. This is what Hoekema referred to as the “Psychosomatic Unity.”⁴¹ This unity means that man’s internal and external aspects interact and affect one another. Some of these interactions are observable. Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson, in their book *Will Medicine Stop the Pain*, write,

It’s obvious that our bodies can respond to the thoughts, feelings, and choices from our inner person with noticeable physical changes. For instance, our blood pressure

³⁹ Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 17.

⁴⁰ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:556.

⁴¹ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 217-18.

rises and our cheeks flush when we become angry. This works the other way too. Our physical bodies can also influence our thoughts, feelings, and choices. For instance, an untreated rapid heartbeat can cause us to feel anxious, even if there is nothing to be worried about.⁴²

So, there is a unity between body and soul and the person is a single “Psychosomatic Unity,” in which body and soul constantly interact and affect one another.

Second, the body is the filter of all information from the world. Everything that the heart responds to outside of itself, must be observed through the senses of the body. This is a simple and observable fact. People’s hearts, without bodies, cannot see, feel (in a physical sense), or hear anything. They rely on the body’s senses to receive information and respond to it. In the biblical counseling movement, this is primarily observed through its understanding of perceptual disorders. If the body has an issue processing or perceiving the outside world then the soul is unable to interact normally with reality.⁴³

Third, the body is the means by which the soul expresses itself. Michael Emler explains it this way. “What the heart initiates in these three spheres [cognition, affection, volition] comes to fruition through the mediation of the body. The body carries out the heart’s desires. . . . We cannot move from the heart to the world around us without utilizing the body.”⁴⁴ Whatever capacities the heart contains, its only means of interacting with the world around it is the body. Because of this fact, the body is not moral in and of itself. As Bavinck states, “It is not ethical, but physical.”⁴⁵ It carries out moral deeds and

⁴² Elyse Fitzpatrick and Laura Hendrickson, *Will Medicine Stop the Pain: Finding God’s Healing for Depression, Anxiety, and Other Troubling Emotions* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 25-26.

⁴³ Ed Welch in *Blame it on the Brain?* Uses the hypothetical situation of a father who has dementia having abusive speech towards his family. Because it is known that his perception of reality is distorted because of his body’s inability to understand what is happening, the family should understand what is going on his perception to know how to help him. This does not negate a moral dynamic to the abusive speech, but it does drastically change the way someone would approach the issue and it indeed may change the moral dynamic to some extent. Ed Welch, *Blame it on the Brain? Distinguishing Chemical Imbalances, Brain Disorders, and Disobedience* (Phillipsburg, PA: P&R, 1998), 55-56.

⁴⁴ Emler, “Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart,” 48.

⁴⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:559.

its members can be given over to righteousness or unrighteousness, but the body is not the cause of moral failure and therefore cannot be blamed. Ed Welch describes this by saying, “The unique contribution of the body to the whole person is that it is the *mediator* of moral action rather than the *initiator*.”⁴⁶

What Was Man Made to Do?

The purpose of mankind is the place in which all the aspects of the image of God are brought into one cohesive form. Man was made to imitate God. Many of the early church fathers focused their efforts on looking at the similarities between man’s structure and God’s structure. He imitates because he has been made in such a way that his structure is reflective of God. When one looks at mankind and considers him, he can learn and understand some very true things about God. In a similar way that man thinks, feels, and acts toward the world around them God also thinks, feels, and acts toward people. Pierre writes, “The dynamic heart as instrument of thought, desire, and choice is analogous to God’s internal experience, and therefore a reliable means of knowing him...People were created with corresponding functions that allow them to relate to God, and more than that, to imitate him”⁴⁷ It is both in the possession of his structure that man imitates God and actively in the utilization of those structures in his life. When man functions properly by using his structure to imitate God he is living out the end for which he was created.

God does not simply act within himself but rather also acts toward others. If one properly imitates God, then they will be imitating God in their actions toward others as well as their internal responses to the world. This is the connection that Paul draws out in Ephesians 5:1 when Paul writes, “Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved

⁴⁶ Welch, *Blame it on the Brain?*, 40.

⁴⁷ Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 111.

children.” When Paul says this, he is not just explaining that they should utilize their soul’s powers and capacities to align with God but rather to use them to think, feel, and act toward others. This “therefore” at the beginning of the passage looks backward to the previous verses. Clinton Arnold explains, “Therefore” (οὖν) closely links this admonition to the immediately preceding statement that ‘God . . . forgave you in Christ,’ but also to the whole of 4:32, which speaks of God’s kindness and tenderheartedness. Because God forgives, his children should also be forgiving, and thereby imitate their Father.”⁴⁸ Imitating God means reflecting his character toward others in personal relationships. God loves, forgives, and has compassion for people and therefore his people should do likewise. Jesus connects the two ideas in his statement of the two greatest commandments. Matthew 22:37-39 says, “He said to him, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.’” Men love God by imitating him and in imitating God they love people. This is the purpose for which man was created and the *telos* of the image of God.

In What Context Was Man Made to Do This?

The purpose for all of man’s gifts that he has been given by God has an underlying assumption to them. Imitation and reflection assume a certain type of environment. As Calvin reflected in his commentary on Genesis 2:18, he explains that the statement that “it is not good for the man to be alone.” Does not just speak to marriage but rather “that God begins, indeed, at the first step of human society, yet designs to include others, each in its proper place. The commencement, therefore, involves a general

⁴⁸ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 309.

principle, that man was formed to be a social animal”⁴⁹ Indeed, God created man to be a social, or relational, being from the beginning. This relationality works itself in different ways in people’s lives.

First, mankind was made to stand in relationship with God himself. This, in essence, is what the entire debate on the *imago Dei* has been about. “In what way does God bear out his relationship with God?” is the operative question and every other theory or aspect of the image works off that main question. Whether he is aware of it or not, man’s relationship with God is the primary environment in which he lives. Hoekema stated succinctly, “Man is a creature who owes his existence to God, is completely dependent on God, and is primarily responsible to God. This is his or her first and most important relationship. All of man’s other relationships are to be seen as dominated and regulated by this one.”⁵⁰ In the biblical counseling movement, this has been a strong emphasis as well. After quoting a similar passage from Hoekema, Robert Jones, Kristen Kellen, and Rob Green explain, “As image-bearers of God all people were also created to be in relationship. This is primarily a vertical reality, in which we were created in relationship with God. . . . The God-human relationship was created from humanity’s first day, and therefore should be of utmost importance to both the counselor and counselee.”⁵¹ Just the fact that mankind is created, implies that he lives in some relationship with his creator. It is only within this primary relationship that mankind functions within his other spheres of relationships.

Second, man is created to be in relationship with other human beings. This can be demonstrated in several different ways scripturally. Barth drew a connection from the

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 128.

⁵⁰ Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 75.

⁵¹ Robert D. Jones, Kristen L. Kellen, Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: B&H Academic, 2021), 61.

term the phrase “let us” in Genesis 1:26 to the making of man and woman as a “confrontation.” Barth believed that mankind’s relationship with each other was to form a sort of trinitarian analogy. In a similar way to how the trinity lives in a community of “us,” mankind is to live in a community as well.⁵² Biblical counselors have drawn a similar line of trinitarian reasoning. Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp, “God created us to be relational beings because he is a social God. God lives in community within the Trinity as Father, Son, and Spirit, and he made humanity in his image.”⁵³ This horizontal relational purpose is ultimately seen in Christ’s statement of the second greatest commandment being, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31).

Third, man is created to stand in relationship to his or her world. Man was created to be the steward of the world in which he or she lives and this relationship to the world is part of the context in which man was created to live. Although many of the theologians mentioned above in the debate over the *imago Dei* have expressed their disagreement with this aspect being included in the formula of the image, none deny the importance of what it means to be human.⁵⁴ Hoekema explains, “Having dominion over the earth, therefore, is essential to man’s existence. He is not to be thought of apart from this dominion, any more than he should be thought of apart from his relationship to God or to his fellow human beings.”⁵⁵ Man’s relationship with nature should also be seen as downstream from his other relationships. This is not to say that it is unimportant, but merely contingent on his other relationships. Because God created mankind and commanded him to be his “viceregent”⁵⁶ then the subjugation of the world is first a

⁵² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt. 1, 195-196.

⁵³ Timothy S. Lane, Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2008), 11.

⁵⁴ Hoekema, *Created in His Image*, 79.

⁵⁵ Hoekema, *Created in His Image*, 79.

⁵⁶ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 59.

relational act toward God. Also, because God has purposed this as a communal act of mankind together, ruling the earth is also a relational act toward God and other human beings.⁵⁷

Sin's Distortion and Christ's Restoration of Mankind's Function and Relationships

To this point, this thesis has dealt primarily with what mankind should be in its perfect form. It has looked either to Adam before the fall or Christ as the pattern for what mankind was purposed to be. However, because empathy must be considered with sinful people in mind, there should be some consideration given to how sin has distorted what humanity is structurally, functionally, and the context in which they have been created. Likewise, when Jesus came, died on the cross, and was resurrected it was to restore that functioning and usher in the new humanity by becoming the “firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom 8:29).

First, mankind's internal structure has been corrupted by the fall. People's hearts are corrupted by the fall so from the way they process their world to how they feel about what happens within their world is affected by the stain of sin. Pierre puts it this way, “The Bible casts a vision far wider and deeper of sin's activity in people. Sin taints the content of people's thought life, the objects of their desire, the direction of their choices—the heart functions.”⁵⁸ Because their heart is affected by sin, so are the responses that emanate from the heart. As has already been stated, the heart and all its powers are what constitute the responses of an individual to his or her world. So, if the soul is fallen and sinful then so will the soul's responses be fallen and sinful. Jesus says as much when he states that man's, “mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart” (Luke

⁵⁷ Both Hoekema and Bavinck make similar observations. Hoekema, *Created in His Image*, 80-81, Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:576-80.

⁵⁸ Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart*, 58.

6:34). However, when men and women trust in Christ, they are given “new hearts” (Ezek 36:26) where God’s law is written (Jer 31:33; Heb 10:16). This change restores the ability for people to bear good fruit in their lives. But this is only the beginning. As was seen in Grenz’s emphasis on the goal of this restoration, Christians are in a process of being made more and more like Christ’s image. Functioning has been restored and will continue to grow until it is ultimately perfected when Christians “will be like him” (1 John 3:2), as they see him face to face.

Second, people’s bodies have been affected by the fall. In the biblical counseling movement, there has been some disagreement on the extent of the fallenness of the body, but there is a unified understanding that decay is a part of the fall and man’s body is in a state of decay.⁵⁹ God cursed mankind to death when he stated, “you will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you return to the ground, since you were taken from it. For you are dust, and you will return to dust.” (Gen 3:19). 2 Corinthians 4:10 echoes a similar note saying that “we always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body. This death that the body “carries” includes sickness and disease that can have profound effects on counseling issues. Although the New Testament does not explain everything that is to be expected about the restoration of the physical body it will be restored as well. Jesus presents himself to his disciples as an embodied person after the resurrection and Paul gives the Corinthian church hope on several occasions based on that image. Lambert writes about this reality, “the splendor of glorification is more precious than even that. Glorification happens when Christ returns and reunites the souls of those who have died with their bodies and,

⁵⁹ There is considerable disagreement between first- and second-generation biblical counselors over the interpretation of “flesh” in Romans and how that term connects with the body. Jay Adams understood Paul’s use of the term flesh to be the “body habituated to sin.” He saw the body as fallen in that it was not only decaying but that it was patterned to sin. Jay Adams, *Theology of Christian Counseling*, 160-164. Ed Welch sees this as possibly positioning moral culpability to the body, which he does not see the Scripture supporting. Ed Welch, “How Theology Shapes Ministry: Jay Adam’s View of the Flesh and an Alternative,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 3 (Spring 2002), 16-25.

together with all believers, gives them their new resurrection bodies, which are no longer subject to weakness or decay.”⁶⁰

Third, because people’s hearts have been corrupted, the way those hearts function in relationships is corrupted as well. This is what it means to live in a fallen world. Sinful people sinning against God and man. Relationships break because of the fall. When Adam and Eve take and eat from the forbidden tree all their relationships changed. Adam and Eve felt shame and so they hid from each other (Gen 3:7). They heard God walking in the garden and they hid from him (Gen 3:8). When God confronts Adam with his sin, he attacks God and Eve by saying, “the *woman you gave to be with me*—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate.” (Gen 3:12) [emphasis mine]. Then God cursed the ground and man’s relationship with the world becomes toilsome and hard. Sin corrupts man’s relationships. All man’s relationships are corrupted by the fall, but like the bodies and the internal structures of man, Christ’s redemption brings back right relationships for mankind. In Christ’s death on the cross, he restores immediately man’s relationship with his or her maker, “making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col 1:20). The same gospel that brings about the right relationship with God is also the foundation for people to extend the same forgiveness to others. Robert D. Jones says, “God’s forgiveness of us fuels us and frees us to forgive our offenders. It pushes us to pardon others the way God has pardoned us.”⁶¹

Although the fall had devastating effects on the entirety of what mankind is and does, the redemption found in Christ does more. It not only restores the functioning that was lost in creation but also begins a process that will end in the new humanity being remade into the image of Jesus Christ himself.

⁶⁰ Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 295-96.

⁶¹ Robert D. Jones, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 131.

God's Purpose for Relationships

Relationships are not as much a necessity for a good life as much as they are a fundamental aspect of being a person. People are born as image-bearers and therefore immediately have a special connection to their maker and are born into a multitude of human relationships. As Kelly Kapic explains, “We enter society by moving through the birth canal right into a large web of mutual relations—moms and dads, doctors and nurses, teachers and farmers, sisters and brothers.”⁶² God made and commanded people to function relationally because God is relational and has made mankind imitate Him within these relationships so that people might know God and make God known.

Created to Reflect a Relational God

Man was made to live in relationships. God says as much when he declares that “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). However, God made man to live within relationships not just for Adam’s good but because God is a God who lives in relationships.⁶³ If man was made to imitate God, then one needs only to look to God for the pattern of how to conduct relationships. There are several ways that the Scriptures bear witness to God’s relational nature and actions.

First, God acts relationally in and of Himself. God has been functioning in relationship in eternity. Although there are extensive debates over how the persons of the Godhead relate to one another, there are several passages in the Gospel of John that are

⁶² Kelly M. Kapic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022), 99-100.

⁶³ By the term “Relate,” “Relationality,” and “Relationship,” this Thesis means to use knowledge and love to be the operative components of relationships. One must know and love (to some degree or another) the object to have a relationship. Augustine makes this argument (though from humans to God) in *On the Trinity* when arguing that God must be known and loved. This section will broadly argue that God is relational in that he knows and loves and seeks to make known and be loved by another in some sense. This can be mapped to God’s relationship within himself as witnessed in John’s gospel as well as in God’s relationship with his creation. Augustin of Hippo, “On the Trinity,” in *A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff ser.1, vol. 3, *Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 118-24.

informative about how God relates within the Godhead.⁶⁴ One passage that sums up John's teaching on the relationship between the Father and the Son is John 17:20-26. In this prayer, Jesus is expressing his desires for his followers after he dies. He asks for unity between believers to be likened to the unity between the Father and the Son (17:20). Lane and Tripp write about this passage, "In essence he is saying, 'Father, the only example of the community we have designed for our people is the community we have experienced together' . . . God himself is a model of loving, cooperative, unified community."⁶⁵ In this community of the trinity, one finds the foundational components for any God-honoring relationship—knowledge and love.⁶⁶ These reciprocal parts of love and knowledge are found within the Godhead in John 17:20-26 and correspond with the way that God acts toward his creation.

Second, God shows his relationality through creating man. In mankind's creation, God creates another with a purpose that is ultimate relational and primarily relational toward himself. God makes an individual to which he can make himself known and who can love him. As has already been stated, this was not required because God was already known and loved within himself. God graciously created mankind as another, so

⁶⁴ The theological distinction between *Opera ad intra* and *Opera ad extra* are helpful distinctions when thinking about how the trinity functions "within itself" before creation and how God functions in relation to His mission of redemption. There is not room enough to tease out all these nuances but regardless of whether God is functioning *ad intra* or *ad extra* in John 17 he is still relating in one sense or the other, which means it must be within his nature to do so.

⁶⁵ Lane and Tripp, *Relationships*, 24.

⁶⁶ When "community" is referenced toward the triune God it is important to make the distinction that the similarities experienced in human community are only analogous to that of the trinity. In no way is this meant to undermine the oneness of God by way of seeing three distinct centers of consciousness in the Godhead. Bavinck states "The Trinity reveals God to us as the fullness of being, the true life, eternal beauty. In God, too, there is unity in diversity, diversity in unity. Indeed, this order and this harmony is present in him absolutely. In the case of creatures we see only a faint analogy of it. Either the unity or the diversity does not come into its own. Creatures exist in time and space, exist side by side, and do not interpenetrate each other [like the persons of the Trinity]. . . . But in God both are present: absolute unity as well as absolute diversity. It is one selfsame being sustained by three hypostases. This results in the most perfect kind of community, a community of the same beings; at the same time it results in the most perfect diversity, a diversity of divine persons." Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, 331-32.

that God might bless man through man's knowing and loving God.⁶⁷

Not only did God create another being to stand in relationship with him, but he also actively self-disclosed himself to him. This self-disclosure is relational in that he is making himself known so that he can be loved. He does this in three ways. First, God discloses himself through General Revelation. Romans 1:20 states that in creation, "his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made." In creation, God clearly discloses himself in a way that is understood by all mankind. This self-disclosure is enough for people to be held accountable to God for the knowledge he has "shown them" (Rom 1:19). Second, God also discloses himself by speaking authoritatively in Special Revelation. The Bible is a communicative book.⁶⁸ Just by the existence of the Bible, one can determine that God wishes to communicate and through that communication, have a relationship with people. Not only does God speak but he communicates clearly and intelligibly. He enculturates his message in the language of the people to accurately communicate with the readers. God's communication through the Bible is a deliberate act to engage people in relationship. It serves both as a detailed account of a God who loves as well as how God has acted in love towards those people. Throughout Scripture, God is relentless in his pursuit of his people. He establishes covenants with them, pursues them when they have gone astray, and saves them from danger. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is the ultimate form of self-disclosure. In Hebrews 1:1-2 the writer says, "Long ago God spoke to the ancestors by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son."

⁶⁷ Karl Barth explains that God's creation of mankind is both "non-obligatory" and also a true "I-thou" relationship. What he means by this second statement is that God made man to relate to him as a true other who can respond in relationship and fellowship. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt. 1. 183-85.

⁶⁸ Kevin Vanhoozer presents Scripture as divine drama where God communicates through speech-acts to enter into relationship with his creation. Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 181-240.

When Jesus Christ, the incarnate son of God came, he was God's self-disclosure to mankind. John makes this clear when he writes that anyone who knows Jesus, "will also know" the Father (John 14:7). All of this points to a God who desires to make himself known by pursuing a relationship with people.

Third, God reveals that he values interpersonal human relationships by commanding that people pursue righteous relationships as well as commanding them how to conduct those relationships. When Jesus wishes to sum up the entirety of God's commands for people, many times he simply recites Leviticus 19:18, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). John Frame explains that God's commands are an expression of his moral purity. He writes, "By his very nature, God not only is ethically pure but inevitably reveals his moral purity to human beings, calling them to live in accord with it."⁶⁹ God expresses his values and characteristics in his law and therefore his multitudinous commands on how to love and righteously relate to people is an expression from a God who is relational himself. If the law of God is meant first to reflect God's righteousness and character, then righteous relationships are at the core of who God is and who he wants mankind to be.

Created for a Relational Purpose

Above, this thesis argued that the purpose of mankind was to imitate God and reflect him to others. This reflective aspect of man's purpose is what is central to God's chief design for relationships. Jonathan Holmes recognizes this as he defines what God-centered relationships (which he calls biblical friendships) should be. He writes,

Biblical friendship exists when two or more people, bound together by a common faith in Jesus Christ, pursue him and his kingdom with intentionality and vulnerability. Rather than serving as an end in itself, biblical friendship serves primarily to bring glory to Christ, who brought us into friendship with the Father. It is indispensable to the work of the gospel in the earth, and an essential element of

⁶⁹ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 132.

what God created us for.⁷⁰

Notice that in this definition he locates the purpose of Godly friendships as both “bringing glory to Christ,” and being “indispensable to the work of the gospel in the earth.” Later, when Holmes explicates further what is entailed in God-centered friendships, he explains, “I have come to learn that friendship flourishes best when we seek to *be* and *embody* the type of friend we see in God himself.”⁷¹ For Holmes, bringing glory to Christ within a relationship looks like being and embodying the kind of characteristics that one sees in God. In other words, they are to imitate God and reflect God in relationships. Because mankind’s purpose is to imitate and reflect, and God has placed mankind inside of relationships, God’s chief design purpose for relationships is to know God and to make God known. This is done through mutual imitation and reflection. But there are several things to be considered to establish that this is possible and to see how different types of relationships allow people to know God and to make God known.

First, can people know God through human relationships? As has already been noted, mankind has been made in a similar structure to God as he thinks, feels, and wills analogously to God. Several Scriptures indicate that human relationships can bring about knowledge of God. One of those passages is Colossians 2:1-2. In this passage, Paul writes, “For I want you to know how greatly I am struggling for you, for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me in person. I want their hearts to be encouraged and joined together in love, so that they may have all the riches of complete understanding and have the knowledge of God’s mystery—Christ.” In this passage, Paul expresses his desire that these churches would have their hearts joined together in love. This joining of hearts functions in two ways. First, knowledge is gained through the sharing of God’s word with one another within the context of these relationships. As

⁷⁰ Jonathan Holmes, *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship* (Minneapolis, MN: Cruciform Press, 2014), 27.

⁷¹ Holmes, *The Company We Keep*, 46.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man...And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation.”⁷² It is clear from the rest of Colossians that Paul would never have seen relationships between Christians to be devoid of word-saturated engagement. He commands this specifically in Col. 3:16 he writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another....” This encouragement shows the centrality of the Word of God to relationships in working out the list of virtues in Colossians 3:12 and 14 (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, love) to be both in word and deed.

Second, there is an experiential aspect to the knowledge of Christ in relationships. Christians should feel and experience the love and grace of God through relationships. N. T. Wright describes this saying,

while the process of knitting together the church into a united body clearly includes the growth of love, it also includes the growth, on the part of the whole community, of that proper understanding of the gospel which leads to the rich blessings of a settled conviction and assurance. Living in a loving and forgiving community will assist growth in understanding, and vice versa, as truth is confirmed in practice and practice enables truth to be seen in action and so to be fully grasped (cf. 1:9-11).⁷³

These loving relationships result in a practical “Knowledge of God’s mystery—Christ.” Again, Paul brings this same theme of imitation and reflection in the practical instruction later in Colossians. In Colossians 3:13 Paul encourages the Colossians to treat each other as they have been treated by God by stating that they should forgive one another “as the Lord has forgiven you.” This forgiveness is imitation and reflection. As people receive and give forgiveness to one another it brings about practical knowledge of what God has

⁷² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper Collins, 1954), 23.

⁷³ N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, v. 12 (Nottingham, England: Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press; IVP Academic, 2008), 98.

done for believers in Christ. As has been demonstrated, engaging in Christian relationships that honor God is a revelatory act, bringing about a greater love, appreciation for, and knowledge of God as believers encourage one another in the faith and share God's word. These types of relationships are meant to know God and to make God known.

The first consideration sees the way that relationships within the church serve as the ideal for how relationships should function. But God has also purposed relationships outside the church to function similarly. Although Paul's commands are primarily meant to serve relationships within the church, Jesus's commands to love neighbor are general commands that are meant to serve believer and unbeliever alike. Jesus's mission to "seek and save" (Luke 19:10) was a mission executed through relationships. Jesus engaged with unbelievers and did this to help them to know God. John makes this fact explicit when he records Jesus's words, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will also know my Father. From now on you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:6-7). Knowing Jesus means that you know the Father. Jesus came, interacted with individuals, and through those relationships made God known to them. Also, when this same mission is given to the church at the time of Jesus's departure, he commands them to "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). This disciple-making process requires people to forge relationships for the express purpose of making God known through the preaching of the gospel and the living lives that make sense of that gospel.

Lastly, the logic of God's chief design purpose for relationships flows seamlessly from Jesus's understanding of the primary concerns for humanity. Jesus understood the two primary concerns to be loving God with all mankind and loving neighbor. Relationships function as the context in which God is loved preeminently as well as loving neighbors as themselves. If it is true that "fundamentally, we are made to know the

triune God,”⁷⁴ then it follows that individuals would prioritize this knowledge and love of God for themselves because they have been commanded to by the Lord Jesus. It would also follow that if they should love their neighbor as themselves that they would also desire to make God known to others so that they might prioritize this as well.

When God created man, he created him to pattern his own relational nature and actions. The chief purpose for those relationships is an extension of mankind’s purpose, which is to imitate and reflect God. God purposed this imitation and reflection to serve relationships by the individuals knowing God and making God known. No matter what type of relationship, they are to serve this purpose.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to cast the conversation of empathy through the wide-angle lens of theological anthropology. To understand what empathy is and how it functions within the purpose of mankind it is important to see that man is created in God’s image. Mankind was created with a structure—an embodied soul, able to think, feel, and choose—in order to fulfill his purpose in the context God has placed him. Inside this wider angle, it is also true that empathy functions within person-to-person relationships and is a part of fulfilling God’s chief design for relationships which is to know God and make God known. In the next chapter, this thesis will explore what empathy is and is not, how it is a needed function within personal relationships, and how it fulfills an imitative and reflective purpose to know God and make God known within these relationships.

⁷⁴ John McClean, “Humanity: The Need of Theological Anthropology for Everyday Ministry,” in *Theology for Ministry: How Doctrine Affects Pastoral Life and Practice*, eds. William R. Edwards, John C. A. Ferguson, and Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2022), 98.

CHAPTER 3

EMPATHY AS NECESSARY IMPLICATION OF THE BIBLICAL THEME OF LOVING SUFFERERS

Empathy is situated within interpersonal relationships and these relationships have been ordained by God as a means to know God and to make God known through imitation and reflection of God's character. For empathy to fall within the scope of interpersonal relationships it must fulfill, in some way, this imitative and revelatory function within those relationships. Therefore, this chapter will examine the theme of love (both divine and human) in Scripture as it relates to those who are suffering and conclude that empathy is a necessary implication of loving sufferers because it aids in the imitation of God's display of love for sufferers. As a largely secular construct, empathy must be examined as it is generally defined in psychological research and allow for the already established biblical terms to constrain this definition. Therefore, this chapter will define empathy as a disposition of love whereby one willingly resonates with the suffering of another image-bearer, showing how this definition both accords with the biblical character of God's love of sufferers as well as being within the bounds of the common use of the term.

Divine Love of Suffering People

Central to God's character is his love. God's love is a deep cavern of inexhaustible riches. As Frederick Lehman wrote, "Could we with ink the ocean fill or were the skies of parchment made, were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade, to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, nor could the

scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.”¹ This love, as it is understood in the Bible, is primarily directed toward sufferers. These sufferers may be suffering as a result of their sin, the sin of others, or the effects of the fall on the world, but all of them suffer. In order to look at the way God loves suffering people, one must explore first the love of God broadly, then examine God’s love toward sufferers in the Old Testament and finally look at Jesus’s embodiment of that love in his person and work.

God Is Love

In 1 John 4:8, John writes, “God is love.” John’s statement about God’s character does not come in a vacuum. Robert Yarbrough explains that this same claim made here by John “is strongly implied in both John’s Gospel and throughout the OT wherever God’s steadfast covenant love is mentioned.”² It was central to John’s concept of God’s character and being. Not only is God love but he is so identified with love in this passage that anyone who does not love “Does not know God” (1 John 4:8). Several features of God’s love must be examined to form a foundation for the type of love that God shows towards sufferers.

First, God’s love must be analogous to human love but not identical. There is an important tension here. On the one hand, there are limitations to people’s ability to understand God’s love. Even though the Scriptures are replete with statements of God’s loving action, all this language is anthropomorphic and cannot exhaust all that God’s love truly is. R. C. Sproul stated, “However accurately we may speak about the love of God, our speech is limited by our human perspective. Whatever God’s love is, it is not exhausted by our concept of it. It transcends our best efforts to describe it.”³ This

¹ Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul* (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2003), 277.

² Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 236.

³ R. C. Sproul, *God’s Love: How the Infinite God Cares for His Children*, 2nd ed, Classic

ultimately means that the human perspective cannot fully examine the manifestation of God's love toward people. Humans are even more limited because without God's creative and redemptive loving actions, people would never truly know God's love. On the other hand, mankind was made in God's image and therefore has been made like God. This "likeness" in which people were made makes God's love to be at the least analogous to one another and comprehensible.⁴

Second, God's love must be self-sufficient. Previously, this thesis has demonstrated that God's relationality is self-sufficient and consists of both knowledge and love. However, it is not that God has knowledge and love, but that God is knowledge and love. God's love and knowledge are not character traits that are a part of God but are God himself. John Webster wrote, "God is in himself replete, unoriginated love, the reciprocal fellowship and delight of the three and the utter repose and satisfaction of their love."⁵ This also means that God's love always flows through himself, even when it is directed at creatures. Thomas Joseph White explains, "The fact that God's love is subsistent, and that he is characterized by an eternal love of his own goodness, means that whatever God loves, he loves because of his own goodness, and in view of his own goodness."⁶ White is explaining that God is the highest object of love as well as the source of all love. If then, God is the highest object of love, all manifestations of God's love must be manifestations of himself and his goodness.

Theology Series (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 29.

⁴ Although God's love is analogous to human love there are several ways that make God's love different from human love. Thomas Joseph White lays out three main ways in which God's love should be differentiated from human love. First, God does not love "others" as separate goods but only through their participation in his being. Second, God does not improve himself by loving his creatures. Third, God's love, unlike creatures is completely gratuitous and self-giving. It is not because creatures are lovely that he loves them, but it is that they become lovely in his love of them. Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God*, Thomistic Ressourcement Series, vol. 19 (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 337-39.

⁵ John Webster, *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*, vol. 1, *God and the Works of God* (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 92.

⁶ Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity*, 337.

Therefore, the third and primary way in which the Bible presents God's love is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. After the declaration that "God is love," John continues and writes, "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only son into the world so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). It is only fitting that the ultimate manifestation of God's love for his people would be the Word made flesh. The same God that is love walks as love among his people.

Not only was the incarnation of Jesus Christ a manifestation of God himself it was a loving act that made manifest the affection that God has for his people. This shows also that God's love must be both an action towards people as well as affection for people.⁷ As Charles Hodge explains, "Love of necessity involves feeling, and if there be no feeling in God, there can be no love."⁸ Alongside affection and feeling, action should be equally underscored. However, it would be difficult to miss God's action, because God's actions are both the content and the origin of any knowledge of God's affection at all from a creaturely perspective. Scripture, itself, is an affectionate action toward people and equally the Scriptures reveal God's past, present, and future affectionate actions toward his people. So, it is only by God's action that we know he has affection as well as what the content of that affection is.

God's Love toward Sufferers in the Old Testament

How does God manifest his love toward suffering people? The Bible is full of descriptions of God's love for sufferers. One reason for this is because the Bible is a book

⁷ Kevin Vanhoozer argues that divine emotions should be seen as "Covenantal Concern-based Theodramatic Construals" modifying Robert C. Roberts's work on emotions. These emotions (love included if not central are 1) not bodily since God is spirit 2) involve his construals of situational objects 3) has covenantal concerns. This proposal attempts to keep intact God's impassibility while offering a way to understand the Bible's language of God's emotions. This Thesis will take a similar line of reasoning to what God's affections and emotions are and what they reveal about God himself. Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine; 18 (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 412-13.

⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 *Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 428-29.

about love and salvation. James Hamilton has asserted that the theme of the Bible is, “Salvation through judgment to the Glory of God”⁹ and that this theme can be traced through the entirety of the Scriptures. If that is the case, then suffering people are at the center of God’s salvific actions because sin (from which mankind is saved unto God’s glory) causes suffering.

Genesis 3 and 4 show the connection between sin and suffering. In Genesis 3 once Eve took the fruit and ate from it and immediately the Scriptures reveal suffering. First, Adam and Eve felt shame. Because of their shame, they sewed fig leaves and revealed internal suffering.¹⁰ Second, in 3:8-12 Adam shows that he is both fearful of God when he comes to commune with him in the garden and that he blames God in some measure for his sin.¹¹ This is the direst situation with God and brings with it eternal suffering as he has sinned and stands at enmity with God. Third, Adam also blames Eve for his sin by saying, “The woman you gave to be with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (3:12), showing that there is relational strife and suffering involved in this sin. Fourth, the curses for both the man and woman in 3:14-19 indicate several parts of suffering by living in a fallen world. Suffering from then on is built into the fabric of every human experience from childbirth (16) to manual labor (17-19).¹² Lastly,

⁹ James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 56.

¹⁰ Although the text does not explicitly state that Adam and Eve felt shame many commentators see this passage as the undoing of innocence stated in Genesis 2:25 that states, “Both the man and his wife were naked, yet felt no shame.” Calvin explains that although he believes that Adam and Eve did not feel “true shame” (That is a shame that leads to repentance), “we are all infected with the same disease; for, indeed, we tremble, and are covered with shame at the first compunctions of conscience” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 1, trans. William Bingham (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 158-59.

¹¹ Most commentators recognize Adam’s statement about the woman that “you gave me” to be an implied indictment against God. Kenneth Matthews states, “Not finished with blame shifting, Adam even accuses God for the tragedy by adding, “the woman you put here with me. . . .” By this Adam charges that the Lord “gave” the woman to him and in turn she “gave” him the fruit. The implication is inescapable: God ultimately is responsible for the success of the tempter and Adam’s demise” K. A. Matthews, *Genesis*, The New American Commentary, v. 1A-1B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 195.

¹² Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 80.

in Genesis 4 the passage reveals the last component of suffering in very explicit terms. The murder of Able by Cane shows that one can suffer under the sinful hand of another image-bearer. Therefore, sin and suffering are two interlaced concepts that run through the entirety of Scripture, and God’s love of sufferers is likewise folded into Scripture’s central theme.

The primary way the Bible describes God’s love for suffering people is by the words mercy and compassion.¹³ As Herman Bavinck states, “the goodness of God, when shown to those in misery, is called *mercy*.”¹⁴ Compassion and mercy are not categories of God’s character that exist on their own. Rather, they are ways in which God’s goodness and love are shown toward people in distress and misery. In mercy and compassion, God’s goodness is actively focused on the individual and moves to the relief of their suffering. As Webster writes, “God’s benevolence takes the beneficent form of mercy in the situation of creaturely distress. Mercy is the directing of God’s majestic goodness to the relief of the creatures in misery and wretchedness.”¹⁵ In the Old Testament, the most prominent Hebrew word used to convey the concept of mercy and compassion is רַחֵם.¹⁶

Compassion (רַחֵם). The most common word used for God’s love directed at sufferers is רַחֵם. This word is primarily translated in the CSB as a derivative of the word compassion throughout the Old Testament whether it is used as a noun, verb, or

¹³ The terms mercy and compassion can be somewhat interchangeable. When this Thesis uses either term they are meant to convey affection for sufferers that leads to an attempt to alleviate their suffering.

¹⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 213.

¹⁵ John Webster, *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*, vol. 2, *Virtue and Intellect* (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 54.

¹⁶ In the CSB the words compassion and mercy occur one hundred and fifty-one times in the Old Testament. Of the times those words are attributed to God’s mercy or compassion only twenty-five times were other Hebrew words translated compassion or mercy. These words were רַחֵם, (13) רָחַם, (4) נָחַם, (7) and רָחַם, (1).

adjective.¹⁷ There are several important factors when considering the Old Testament’s attribution of רַחֵם to God.

First, this term is almost exclusively used about God.¹⁸ Beginning with its first use in Exodus 33:19, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,” and continuing throughout every genre of the Old Testament this term describes God’s unique care and love towards his people in their distress and suffering.

Second, the term is used unilaterally when the object of God’s compassion is in distress but does not make a distinction between suffering through no fault of their own and suffering because of their sin. This is an important distinction to make. God’s compassion presupposes their deserving of the distress they are in. Consider Exodus 34:6-7, which is the full explanation of the name of God. The Lord says,

The LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed: The LORD—the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers’ iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.

The assumption of this passage, when it comes to God’s compassion, grace, and love is that it is “maintained” despite the full view of the sinfulness of the objects of his affection. There are two reasons that Exodus 34:6-7 should have in its prelude the sinfulness of the people to whom God is expressing love. First, the language within the explanation of God’s name bundles grace, mercy, and love with forgiveness. Meaning,

¹⁷ There are two exceptions to this general rule. First, in 2 Sam 24:14 and its parallel passage in 1 Chr 21:13 and Lam 3:22. All of which are plural and are rendered as “mercies” instead of “Compassions.” Second, in one occurrence in Ps 18:1 the word is not used of God but the Psalmist. The term, in this context is rendered as simply “love.”

¹⁸ Tremper Longman III states, “The verb translated *love* (*rahm*) is elsewhere used only to refer to God’s compassion or mercy that God demonstrates to human beings.” He states this referring to Psalm 18:1, one of the only passages that uses רַחֵם to denote something other than God’s love and compassion for people. Tremper Longman, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Volumes 15-16 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic/ InterVarsity Press, 2014), 111.

that when God speaks of compassion, forgiveness is in the foreground of what is happening. The distress the Israelites often find themselves in is at odds with God himself. Indeed, it was in Exodus 32 that the Israelites found themselves in this predicament. This leads to the second reason that this passage has Israel's sin in the foreground.

Second, the immediate context demands that one sees the sin of Israel being presupposed in God's compassionate action. God has just shown Israel this type of compassion in the withholding of wrath against Israel. Israel had bowed down and worshipped the golden calf in Exodus 32 and the Lord did not destroy them, although there were dire consequences for some. This sparing of Israel cannot be seen as anything but mercy and compassion, but if there were any doubt. R. Alan Cole states, "the object of divine grace and mercy is sinful Israel. Without this quality of 'loving-kindness' as God's basic characteristic, Israel would be utterly lost."¹⁹ So when God utters his name in 34:6-7 his compassion and mercy should be seen primarily as toward an Israel who was suffering because of their sin and would continue to do so throughout the Old Testament.

The third factor when thinking of the Old Testament's usage of the term חַסֵּד is that it is generally accepted that חַסֵּד has a significant affective component. John Frame writes that חַסֵּד , as well as other similar words "have strongly emotional connotations."²⁰ Likewise, the term does this both in usage and by referencing the center of the person, namely the womb. Although God's compassion does not have a physical component to it, this analogy is used to show God's deep affection for his people. Leonard Coppes states, "This root refers to deep love (usually of a "superior" for an "inferior") rooted in some

¹⁹ R. A. Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, v. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 235.

²⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub, 2002), 441.

“natural” bond.”²¹ Although this may not be a “natural” bond that God has with his people, it is certainly likened to other natural and deeply affectionate bonds. For example, Isaiah 49:15 says, “Can a woman forget her nursing child, or lack compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, yet I will not forget you.” Likewise, Psalm 103:13 states, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.” Clearly, רַחֵם is meant to convey a deep affection that God has for his people.

The fourth factor is that רַחֵם generally has in view actions that move toward the relief of suffering. A passage that is informative of this emphasis is 2 Kings 13:22-23. It says, “King Hazael of Aram oppressed Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz, but the Lord was gracious to them, had compassion on them, and turned toward them because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was not willing to destroy them. Even now he has not banished them from his presence.” In these two short verses, the writer summarizes a common theme in God’s dealing with Israel. Like many times before, Israel is oppressed by a foreign power and God looks at their oppression and has compassion for them.²² This compassion towards Israel results in both God’s not being “willing to destroy them” (13:23), as well as Jehoash’s eventual defeat of Ben-Hadad’s army.

Lastly, רַחֵם has largely covenantal and relational connotations. The usage of this term in Exodus 34:6-7, when God proclaims the meaning of his name to Moses puts God’s compassion at the center of God’s being as well as his relationship with Israel.²³

²¹ Leonard J. Coppes, “2146 רַחֵם,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 841.

²² This cycle is prevalent among the judges and although the words compassion and mercy do not occur in the judges the sentiment is the same. Israel falls into the hands of a foreign enemy, the Lord sees them, has compassion on them, and from that compassion he delivers them. Although in some places repentance is a pre-condition for God’s compassion in the case of 2 Kings. 13:23 this does not seem to be the case. Leonard J. Coppes, “2146 רַחֵם,” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 842.

²³ Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 103-5.

This proclamation is the beginning of the Lord’s renewal of the covenant after their idolatry with the golden calf. This formula is echoed throughout the Old and New Testaments in referencing God’s covenantal rescuing of Israel from their covenantal unfaithfulness. Nehemiah 9:17 is a helpful verse to show this covenantal and relational aspect of the term.

In Nehemiah 9 the Levites are recounting all the deeds of the Lord toward Israel from Abraham to Egypt. In verse 17, they highlight both Israel’s sin against God and God’s compassion for them despite their sin. Verse 17 says, “They refused to listen and did not remember your wonders you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love, and you did not abandon them.” God’s compassion in verse 17 leads God to not destroy Israel but to continue to forgive and lead them. As T. J. Betts explains,

One of the great mysteries about God is the reality of the simultaneous coexistence of his righteous judgment and merciful compassion. When Israelites time and time again respond to God’s great goodness with rebellion and disobedience, he repeatedly disciplines them but at the same time repetitively shows them mercy and compassion. . . . God’s faithfulness to his covenant with Israel is truly amazing in light of their repeated unfaithfulness to their covenant with him²⁴

So, the compassion expressed by the word רַחֵם is a direct form of God’s goodness and love which is bestowed upon a sinful Israel and relieves them of their suffering and is God’s way of maintaining his covenantal love and fellowship with Israel.

The Manifestation of God’s Compassion in Jesus Christ

The culminating way in which God has manifested his compassion is through his son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the manifestation of God’s love—but not only God’s love. Jesus is the manifestation of God’s compassion as well.

²⁴ Terry J. Betts, *Nehemiah: A Pastoral & Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 125.

First, Jesus's incarnation itself is the ultimate act of God's merciful compassion. Whereas 1 John 4:8 states that the incarnation is the manifestation of God's love, Luke 1:78 states the same of God's compassion. As Luke is preparing the reader for the pending birth of John the Baptist, Zechariah makes a statement about Jesus saying, "Because of our God's merciful compassion, the dawn from on high will visit us." In this passage, Luke conveys Jesus as the "dawn from on high." Darrell Bock states, "the previous mention of visitation in the hymn is associated with Messiah, the horn of David (1:68-69); (R. Brown 1977: 373-74). This observation makes it likely that the Messiah is intended by "rising sun."²⁵ Luke also conveys that Jesus will come because of the "merciful compassion" of God.

Second, Jesus is the compassion of God and therefore embodies Yahweh's compassionate action as a human being. Webster writes, "Crucially, therefore, to encounter the mercy of Jesus Christ is to encounter *God's* mercy . . . because he is ingredient within God's self-proclamation as 'the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious (Exod 34:6)."²⁶ This means that Jesus's earthly ministry exhibited mercy on all fronts. The Gospels depict Jesus's actions as compassionate, as well as the way they depict his emotions in his humanity. B.B. Warfield writes,

The emotion that we should naturally expect to find most frequently attributed to that Jesus whose whole life was a mission of mercy, and whose ministry was so marked by deeds of beneficence that it was summed up in the memory of his followers as a going through the land "doing good" (Acts 10:38), is no doubt "compassion." In point of fact, this is the emotion that is most frequently attributed to him.²⁷

It is precisely the point that compassion is the most frequently attributed emotion to Jesus Christ that is significant to his embodiment of Yahweh's mercy and

²⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 191.

²⁶ John Webster, *God Without Measure*, vol. 2, 52.

²⁷ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*, Crossway Short Classics (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 33.

compassion. In the Gospels, when Jesus's compassion for people is mentioned, the term used is *σπλαγνίζομαι*. This term has several significant connotations that set Jesus's compassion against the greater backdrop of God's compassion towards Israel.

First, *σπλαγνίζομαι*, which is primarily translated as something similar to “moved with compassion,” should be seen as the Jewish writer's attempt to convey *רחם*. This is the Gospel writer's way of connecting Jesus's compassion to God's compassion for his people. *σπλαγνίζομαι* is the strongest emotive term for mercy or compassion in the New Testament. The other Greek terms that can be translated this way are *ἐλεέω* and *οἰκτιρῶν*. Although these two words can be translated as “mercy” or “compassion,” neither fit the same emotive response of *רחם* that comes with the Greek term *σπλαγνίζομαι*.²⁸ One other reason to see *σπλαγνίζομαι* in relation to *רחם* is that although in the Septuagint *רחם* is translated with the Greek term *οἰκτίρω* in Exodus 34:6 as well as other places in the Old Testament, in the Second Temple period *σπλαγνίζομαι* became a popular term to convey God's mercy. During that time *σπλαγνίζομαι* was used in several non-canonical Jewish works to connote the same type of compassion attributed to Jesus in the Gospels.²⁹ This means that as Jesus is healing the sick and preaching to the multitudes, he is doing so in a similar sense to how God expresses his compassion towards Israel in the Old Testament in keeping with him being the Messiah—the bringer of the new covenant and kingdom.³⁰

Also, this term conveys all the same things that the Old Testament concept of compassion and mercy convey—namely, a strong affection toward a sufferer that moves

²⁸ John Aranda Cabrido, *The Portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: A Narrative-Critical and Theological Study* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), 143 n39.

²⁹ Helmut Köster, “*Σπλάγγνον, Σπλαγνίζομαι, Εὐσπλαγχνος, Πολύσπλαγχνος, Ἄσπλαγχνος*,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 7:552.

³⁰ R.T. France connects the first Matthean passage with Jesus feeling compassion for the crowds with his messianic task of shepherd of Israel. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2007), 215.

one to attempt to alleviate their suffering. The first occurrence of *σπλαγχνίζομαι* in the New Testament occurs in Matthew 9:36. This is a summation of Jesus's healing ministry and his heart towards the crowds as he heals the sick and preaches the gospel. In describing what this term conveys R.T. France states that *σπλαγχνίζομαι*,

speaks of a warm, compassionate response to need. No single English term does justice to it: compassion, pity, sympathy, fellow-feeling all convey part of it, but "his heart went out" perhaps represents more fully the emotional force of the underlying metaphor of a "gut response." A further feature of this verb appears through a comparison with its other uses in Matthew (14:14; 15:32; 18:27; 20:34): in each case there is not only sympathy with a person's need, but also a practical response which meets that need; emotion results in caring and effective action.³¹

So, similarly to its Old Testament usage the compassion that is attributed to Jesus in the Gospels is a deep affection that prompts him to act towards sufferers to alleviate their suffering.

It is in keeping with the Old Testament usage of the term "compassion" that Jesus's compassion is also two-fold. First, it concerns itself partly with the alleviation of the temporal suffering of the individual. Along with others, France makes the argument that Matthew 9:35-38 is both forward and backward-looking. Matthew 8-9:34 concerns itself primarily with a ministry of healing the sick and other temporal concerns, while Matthew 10-16 sets off a larger teaching ministry. Second, Christ's compassion, because of this forward-looking aspect, is also self-giving and self-referential in a similar way to God's Old Testament usage. When Jesus and his disciples preach the gospel to the crowds, he is offering himself as the solution to the suffering of the people. This is what Matthew alludes to when he says that Jesus sees the crowds as "sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9:36). Grant Osborne observes, "The answer is standing before them, but they don't realize it."³² And so, it is not only a temporary alleviation of suffering but

³¹ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 215.

³² Grant R. Osborne and Clinton E. Arnold, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament, v. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 388.

God himself is the thing that will alleviate man's suffering. It is the bringing of God's kingdom and its radical new realities through Jesus the Christ that will ultimately and definitively alleviate the suffering of the world and wipe away every tear from every eye (Rev 21:4).

Lastly, Jesus's ministry of compassion and mercy does not end with his earthly ministry. Jesus is the mediator between God and man and the writer of Hebrews emphasizes that one major quality of that mediatorial role is "mercy" or compassion. This theme is repeated both in Hebrews 2:17 which says, "Therefore, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every way, so that he could become a merciful and faithful high priest. . . ." Then again in Hebrews 4:16 when describing what the high priest gives in times of need, he says, "Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need." Moreover, Jesus is a high priest who can "sympathize" (4:15). Gareth Cockerill explains that sympathy here "denotes a bond stronger than the English 'to sympathize' (cf. 4 Macc. 13:23). This is a sympathy that leads to active assistance... His sympathetic help empowers us in the midst of all those inherent human limitations that make us vulnerable to temptation."³³

This idea of Jesus as the sympathetic high priest is the same as compassion in so much that it prompts Jesus to take a compassionate stance towards the people under his care. However, this compassion from Jesus also carries with it a similarity with those for whom he cares. Jesus took on human weakness so that when people come to him in "time of need" he not only helps, but he also shares commonality with them. Jesus knows what it is like to be weak and therefore can be approached when people are weak. This is the beauty of the incarnation, that Jesus's compassion also takes on a similarity that

³³ Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids:, Cambridge, U.K: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 225.

prompts him to alleviate suffering and help because he knows what it is like to suffer.³⁴ This is Jesus's continued work of compassion and mercy to those who believe in his name.

Jesus is both the manifestation of God's love and the embodiment of God's compassion. As the Son of God and the Messiah, he is the ultimate way that God alleviates people's suffering and brings them into fellowship with him. Jesus also continues as the "merciful high priest" who mediates between God and man. He continues to comfort his people and show them mercy in this mediatorial role.

Human Love for Suffering People

As has been demonstrated above, mankind's purpose in life is to know God and to make God known through imitation and reflection of God. It was for this purpose that mankind was made in God's image, and this is to be done within the context of relationships. But to understand how people reflect God's character toward people who are suffering one must first demonstrate that people are called to reflect God's love to others. Second, human limitations must be considered when thinking about how people are called to imitate God's compassionate love toward sufferers. Lastly, empathy will be considered as a necessary implication of God's command to have compassion for those who are suffering.

Imitation of God's Compassion and Mercy

The Christian life is a life of love. Jesus, when asked to summarize the entirety of what God requires of people, explained that two commandments stood at the center.

³⁴ Thomas Schreiner explains, "These verses are among the most comforting in the Bible. Does God care? Can he do anything to help if he does? We are given the answer here We have a high priest who is fully human. He experienced the full range of temptations. No temptation was foreign to his experience. He can relate to all of our temptations. He sympathizes with our weaknesses because he experienced those weaknesses as well." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger, and T. Desmond Alexander, and Thomas Schreiner (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 155.

He said, “Love the Lord your God with all your hearts, with all your soul, and with all our mind. . . . The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands” (Matt 22:37 and 39-40). Jesus, in this passage, gives a clear definition of what the new kingdom ethic is. His people are to be marked by loving God and loving neighbor, and this ethic is repeated and explicated in other places in the New Testament.³⁵ However, Luke 6:36 more explicitly relates God’s compassion to how believers in Christ should act toward others.

Luke 6:36 is a simple passage that states, “Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.” This passage is a part of Luke’s Sermon on the Plain and is the culminating statement in a section on loving one’s enemies. There are three important features to this command to be merciful.

First, this passage commands people to imitate God in his compassion reflecting his compassion toward others. He does this by explaining that in loving their enemies they “will be children of the Most High. For he is gracious to the ungrateful and evil” (Luke 6:35). This connection shows that their action is in keeping with their father’s heart and implies that as children they are imitating him. Bock agrees when he writes, “The point is the same as in Luke 6:35. The disciples are to imitate their heavenly Father. God’s character is the guide for our character.”³⁶ This is not unique to Luke. Matthew, Paul, Peter, and James all include compassion or mercy as virtues that are to be taken on by believers.³⁷

Second, the context for this imitative compassion is with sinners in mind. Whereas the other passages in the New Testament that command mercy or compassion

³⁵ Some of these passages include Matt 5:43, 9:19; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 10:25-28; John 13:25; Rom 13:9-10; Gal 5:14; and 1 John 4:7-12.

³⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 604.

³⁷ Matt 5:7; Eph 4:32; Col 3:12; 1 Pet 3:8; Jas 2:13

for believers command them within the context of a local church, this passage goes out of its way to emphasize that compassion and mercy should be shown to those who are “enemies” (Luke 6:27), who “curse you” (Luke 6:28), and who are “ungrateful and evil” (Luke 6:34). Following in God’s compassion and mercy, believers in Christ should show compassion to sinners, even when their suffering is related to their sinfulness. Joel B. Green writes, “This is the nature of the Great Benefactor: he gives even to those who, by their ingratitude and wickedness, portray themselves as his enemies. Just as God is merciful—that is, just as God is active graciously and creatively to bring redemption—so should his children be merciful.”³⁸ So, God’s children should not judge their enemies as unworthy of compassion, because God has shown compassion for his enemies. They are called to imitate him in this grace-filled compassion.

Third, God in this passage judges some men to be sinful and to see their suffering through an evaluation of that judgment. In Luke 6:36, it is evident by Jesus’s continued use of terms such as “evil” and “enemy” that are evaluating both the state of the people and the relationship they have with Jesus’s disciples. Similarly, in the previously mentioned passage of Matthew 9:36, Jesus saw the crowds as, “distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.” For compassion to take root there must be a judgment that there is a need for compassion. God’s compassion can do this innately. When Jesus sees the crowd and God sees the wicked, they perceive the sufferer’s problem and then act toward an alleviation of that suffering that makes sense of the problem. This is part of mankind’s imitation as well. To love like God, people must be able to understand the nature of the problem to help alleviate the cause of their suffering.

So, when considering God’s commands for people to show mercy and compassion, imitating God in his compassion is central. Also, this compassion and mercy

³⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1997), 274-75.

are to be extended to sinners as well as those who are fellow believers.

Human Limitations to Imitating God in His Compassion

God's love and compassion have unique features to them because God is a unique being. Although people are commanded to imitate God's loving qualities such as compassion, they must do so in a way that is distinct to creatures because they are not like God. Specifically, human beings are limited in their capacities; people are finite. As Kelly Kopic writes, "Finitude is an unavoidable aspect of our creaturely existence."³⁹ It is in consideration of these limitations that the purpose of empathy takes shape. There are several aspects to the way people's compassion functions that are fundamentally different than God.

When discussing the attributes of God and the way they map onto the ability of his image-bearers to imitate him, it is important to look at how God's attributes are categorized. There are several ways in which theologians have categorized God's attributes. Some of these include distinctions between immanent/emanant, metaphysical/moral, or communicable/incommunicable. In each of these classifications of God's attributes, the goal is to describe, in some way, how God's characteristics are shared with mankind. John Frame explains, "Many of these [distinctions] are based on the distinction between transcendence and immanence."⁴⁰ However, these distinctions break down because even though some may be more communicable or incommunicable there is always part of God's immanence in his transcendence and always some transcendence in his immanence.⁴¹ There is always a recognition that if God's love is

³⁹ Kelly M. Kopic, *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022), 6.

⁴⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub, 2002), 395.

⁴¹ Frame explains this dynamic aptly by stating, "Reformed theologians have often used the classification incommunicable/communicable. In this terminology, some attributes (the attributes of

communicable that it is only so in a creaturely way. God's love, although communicable, is also transcendent in relation to God's infinity, aseity, and simplicity. These are all incommunicable attributes. So, as God and mankind's compassion are compared, it is the distinction between God's unique way of possessing this communicable attribute that will be examined.

First, God's compassion is complete benevolence and self-giving. God never gains anything by loving or showing compassion and God's compassion always comes bundled with him giving himself as part of the alleviation of suffering. White explains that there are two ways in which God's love is intrinsically different than humanly love. The second of these ways is that when humans love, they become better themselves by that love.⁴² White writes, "our love for them also qualifies us in some way, improving us, as it were. For example, we become better human beings in the ontological order by being just, fair, affable or charitable to other human beings."⁴³ As humans obey God by the power of the Holy Spirit in their love of neighbor they are bettered by that love.

Second, mankind's compassion cannot be redemptive in and of itself. When God shows compassion, he is the one who alleviates the suffering. He does this ultimately through redemption but also through acts of compassion toward immediate needs as well. When people show compassion, they may be able to help alleviate some temporary suffering but are never the single, nor primary cause of that relief, and they can never alleviate their ultimate suffering themselves. This means that any show of true

transcendence, such as aseity, eternity, and immensity) cannot be shared by God and man, while others (the attributes of immanence, such as love, knowledge, and power) can be. But this classification also breaks down. In one sense, all divine attributes are incommunicable. Our love, at its best, is an image of God's love, but it is not divine. God's love is identical to his very essence, and therefore radically distinct from ours, even from our love at its best." Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 396.

⁴² The first way is that people love people because of those people's innate goodness. He writes, "When human beings come to love creatures other than themselves, we do so (1) because other persons are intrinsically good "prior" to being loved by us, and indeed we come to love them based on what and who they are. Their being is a gift to us that precedes us and elicits our love." White, *The Trinity*, 338.

⁴³ White, *The Trinity*, 338.

compassion orients oneself in his or her rightful place as an agent of Jesus Christ and his redemption and not as the one who brings relief.⁴⁴

Third, whereas God is omniscient and knows exhaustively all situations and all beings in those situations, human beings are limited. They only know what is revealed to them about the situation and the person in the situation. God can know everything about the experience of the person in the suffering and therefore, what it would take to relieve their suffering.⁴⁵ However, men are finite and incapable of obtaining this information by themselves. This is an important distinction and is the reason that empathy is necessary for people to be compassionate towards suffering people.

Empathy as Necessary Implication for Human Compassion

How can Christians show compassion to suffering people in a way that both imitates God's compassion as well as respects the creaturely limitations with which God has created them? The most necessary gap to fill between God's show of compassion toward humans and people's compassion for one another is knowledge. If compassion necessitates action to alleviate suffering, then one needs to know the exact nature of that suffering. Without a knowledge of the nature of the suffering then one cannot act in such a way to alleviate that suffering. As a demonstration of this gap, consider Matthew 7:12. Jesus states, "Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do also the same for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets." This passage seems to be a straightforward statement about how people should generally treat others. Indeed, commentators have

⁴⁴ Senkbeil explains how in pastoral ministry they should offer Jesus by writing, "Thus, the essence of pastoral work is not just evoking vaguely religious feelings in people or providing them with a few platitudes to brighten their day. Pastors do not teach mere ideas or concepts; by their ministrations they bring Jesus himself into the hearts and lives of people ravaged with guilt, burdened with shame, and struggling under a boatload of pain in all its dimensions: physical, emotional, and spiritual." Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 14.

⁴⁵ Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:196.

rightly indicated that it is the summation of the ethic of the Sermon on the Mount.⁴⁶

However, there is one important implication of this command to love one's neighbor.

Jesus's command has an empathic implication to it when considering the limitations of human beings. Although academic commentators generally do not apply the passage in this direction, pastoral commentators have done so frequently. Martin Luther wrote,

Now everyone is always so disposed, if he be sick, that he wishes the whole world would come to his help. Am I a poor sinner, steeped in shame, have I a heavy afflicted conscience: then I ought to wish for the whole world to comfort and help me, and cover my sins and my shame. Just such should my attitude be to my neighbor, not to judge and condemn forgive his failings, help him, counsel, loan and give to him as I would that others should do to me, if I were overwhelmed with anxiety and want, with misery and poverty.⁴⁷

In an even more pointed empathic explanation, Matthew Henry writes,

We must, in our dealings with men, suppose ourselves in the same particular case and circumstances with those we have to do with, and deal accordingly. If I were making such a one's bargain, labouring under such a one's infirmity and affliction, how should I desire and expect to be treated? And this is a just supposition, because we know not how soon their case may really be ours.⁴⁸

These two comments on the passage show an important connection with empathy. To show compassion, one must determine the type and extent of suffering that is happening to rightly treat the sufferer in a way that alleviates their suffering. This estimative judgment is a necessary implication of Jesus's ethic of love when applied to sufferers. Although empathy was not a concept understood by the biblical writers, the modern construct of empathy entails an ability to perceive someone from their vantage point, and the ability to resonate and relate to that person in a way that makes sense of

⁴⁶ R.T. France, Grant R. Osborne, and David L. Turner all make this argument. R. T France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2008, 30., Osborne and Arnold, *Matthew*, 276. David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 211.

⁴⁷ Martin Luther, *Martin Luther Sermons: Vol. 4*, trans. John Nicholas Lenker, Accessed on Nov. 4, 2022, http://sermons.martinluther.us/Luther_Lenker_Vol_4.pdf, 90.

⁴⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA, Hendrickson, 1994), 1645.

their experience. The biblical writer assumes this to be an ability people have and assumes it is right and good that they utilize this ability as a way to love them. Empathy achieves this by resonating with the experience of the sufferer while enquiring about their suffering. In the same way that Jesus highlights God's love over and against cruelty in Luke 11:11, "What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead of a fish?" one must understand the plight and need of an individual before offering them relief. Otherwise, well-intentioned Christians might unknowingly offer less than sufficient remedies for their suffering.

To obey Jesus's ethic of love and extend that love toward people who are suffering, one must empathize with them. A person who is empathizing has a disposition of love toward the sufferer and from that disposition, resonates with their suffering. By this disposition, people can relate to this person and act in love toward them in a way that makes sense of their suffering. Without the crucial component of empathy, people, with their limits to knowledge, will be left ignorant of the proper way to care for individuals who are suffering.

Even though empathy is a modern construct, the term speaks to a perceptive ability and desire for understand that is assumed by the biblical writers when commanding Christians to imitate God's love and compassion. Because compassion and love are set biblical terms they serve as parameters for which empathy is to be understood. Empathy, as a disposition of love must be loving in the way the Bible describes love, and must move toward compassion, as the Bible has defined compassion. It is in this way that empathy serves as a necessary implication of the command to imitate God's compassionate love.

Defining Empathy

Perhaps the most difficult thing in the discussion surrounding empathy is attempting to define the term itself. Its definition has been shaped and molded over the

last hundred years of use and therefore one should be careful in making sure the term is understandable and differentiated from other similar terms. This thesis argues that the definition of empathy is a disposition of love whereby one willingly resonates with the suffering of another image-bearer. However, for this definition to be upheld, it must examine three fronts of the discussion on empathy. First, the definition must conceptually relate, in some way, to the way that psychologists and psychiatrists use the term. Second, it must also fall within the parameters of the previously argued biblical framework.⁴⁹ Lastly, the definition will need to differentiate itself from other similar terms such as compassion and sympathy.

Psychological and Psychiatric Definitions

Within psychological and psychiatric literature, there is no dearth of definitions of empathy. However, even though there is a significant amount of literature written on the concept of empathy and many disagreements about the nature and usage of empathy, there are some commonalities to this term that emerge within clinical literature. For example, one simple definition that encapsulates most of these ideas is, “feeling and understanding the emotions and experiences of another.”⁵⁰ However, even the authors of this definition recognize that it is fraught with difficulty when considering the complexities of the subject. C. Daniel Batson recognizes that complexity when he identifies eight different phenomena that are referred to when the term “empathy” is used

⁴⁹ To sum up the biblical framework for empathy thus far. Mankind was made in God’s image in that they were created in the context of relationship and with the power to engage in those relationships through thinking, feeling, and acting. Empathy is a way that one image bearer relates (utilizes their capacities) to another in love. More specifically it is a means by which someone shows compassion in that it aids in gathering the necessary information that will allow for a true compassionate show of love toward a sufferer; both in affection and understanding. Because God acts compassionately towards creatures in an analogous way, empathy is required to imitate and reflect God’s compassion and therefore is necessary in fulfilling God’s purpose for relationships which is to know God and make God known.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth A. Segal, Karen E. Gerdes, and Cynthia A. Lietz, *Assessing Empathy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 2.

within psychological literature.⁵¹ This list ranges from a simple feeling of discomfort when seeing the suffering of someone else to emotional contagion (when someone seems to catch the feelings of someone else). But within these eight examples of empathy, two primary categories emerge—cognitive and affective empathy.⁵²

Cognitive empathy is an attempt to understand the emotional and cognitive states of another individual. This understanding is not gained entirely by oneself. This complicates empathy slightly and makes it both a process and a disposition.⁵³ As William R. Miller puts it, “To some extent empathy is innate, but accurate empathy is not. The fact that we can imagine what others are thinking and feeling does not mean that our guesses are correct.”⁵⁴ Being cognitively empathic means that one is open to understanding the experience from another’s perspective. So Cognitive empathy seeks to understand the internal experience and point of reference, with emotions and the meanings of these emotions intact.⁵⁵

Affective empathy is the ability to feel a similar emotion in response to someone else’s emotional state. This may be called “emotion sharing” or the older term

⁵¹ C. Daniel Baston, “These Things Called Empathy: Related but Distinct Phenomena,” In *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy, Social Neuroscience Series* ed. By Jean Decety and William John Ickes, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 6.

⁵² There could be multiple ways to categorize the different phenomena listed. Generally, these are the two categories that are listed. There are, at times, a third category of “compassionate empathy” listed alongside cognitive and affective to explain the desire, alongside empathy, to help the person in distress. Batson, “These Things Called Empathy,” 3-8. Although these other forms of empathy could be included Roman Krznaric and others argue that the dual aspects of cognitive and affective empathy to build the base for the definition is best. Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (New York: Perigee, 2015), 10-12.

⁵³ Carl Rogers recognizes the difficulty of defining empathy as a disposition (a way of being) or a process. Early in Rogers’ own work he explained empathy as, “The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, without losing ever losing the “as if” condition.” However, Rogers later abandoned the idea that it was a state of being and reverted to empathy as a process stating, “I would no longer be terming it a “state of empathy,” because I believe it to be a process, rather than a state.” Carl. R. Rogers, *A Way of Being* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 140-142.

⁵⁴ William R Miller, *Listening Well: The Art of Empathic Understanding* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 4.

⁵⁵ Carl R. Rogers, *A Way of Being*, 116.

“fellow feeling” may be used to describe this. Affective empathy may or may not experience the same emotion, but the purpose is described by the term “attunement.” Attunement is not the same as emotional contagion where someone passively “catches” the feelings of another person. Attunement is described by both having some affective response to the person who is suffering while non-verbally communicating that there is an understanding about the emotional state they are in. Andrew Odgers describes it by saying, “When someone is attuned, they instinctively let the other person know that they’ve understood how they feel, by responding in another sensory modality. For example, if a client comes in with a slow, heavy way of moving that conveys sadness, my voice might automatically adjust to a gentle low tone.”⁵⁶ So, affective empathy is the ability to treat the person in a way that makes sense of their emotional state as well as sharing, in some sense, the emotional state they are in.

With both components of empathy in mind, there should be one more consideration made. In much of the psychological community, empathy is not seen simply as a skill or a disposition but rather a capacity innate to humans. Recent studies have located this innate empathic quality in the brain’s “mirror neuron system.”⁵⁷ These mirror neurons are believed to be a system in the brain that is responsible primarily for motor mimicry as well as the learning of emotional states. Although the mirror neuron system is ubiquitous to all people, it does not operate at the same level in everyone. This means that some people may be more naturally empathic while others may struggle in this area.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Andrew Odgers, *From Broken Attachments to Earned Security* (London: Karnac Books, 2014), 12.

⁵⁷ Stein Bråten, ed., *On Being Moved: From Mirror Neurons to Empathy*, *Advances in Consciousness Research*, v. 68 (Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub, 2007), 84-86.

⁵⁸ Autism Spectrum Disorder is often associated with a low empathic response. There are several studies that have suggested that people who fall within this disorder have a malfunctioning mirror neuron system and others that have shown that people who are on the Autism Spectrum have lower ability for cognitive and affective empathy as well as a lower empathic accuracy. K. McKenzie, A. Russell, and G. Fairchild, “Empathic Accuracy and Cognitive and Affective Empathy in Young Adults With and Without

From the Psychological literature and research, empathy is based on a biological system (mirror neuron system) and has two primary aspects, the cognitive and affective. This two-part empathy both seeks to understand the emotional and perceptual states of the other person while also responding with an affect that matches that of the other person.

Comparison of Definitions

This thesis has argued that empathy should be understood as a disposition of love whereby one willingly resonates with the suffering of another image-bearer. While comparing this definition with the psychological definition, it is important to explain the importance of each part of the definition so that it can be compared with other conceptual models.

First, empathy is a disposition of love. As this thesis has already argued, love is the operating force in a Christian's life and the primary way they are to relate to one another. Empathy is an aspect of how God commands people to love one another. If empathy is a disposition of love, then its end goal is always a loving goal for the person and is also a manifestation of God's love for the other person. By nature, empathy comports with the New Testament's definition of love. Empathy does not look "to his own interests but rather to the interests of others" (Phil 2:4). It is patient, kind, not self-seeking, and rejoices in truth (1 Cor 13:4-6). Empathy seeks the good of the other person, which is found in the God-honoring relief of their suffering.

Second, empathy willingly resonates with the suffering of another person. Empathy does not simply catch the feelings of others passively. It is a willful attempt to both understand and resonate with their experience in a way that makes sense of their experience as they see it and responds to them in a way that is commiserate with their

Autism Spectrum Disorder," *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 52, no. 2004–2018 (May 2021).

experience.⁵⁹ There are two important points to be made about this. First, this type of relating that seeks understanding must seek it from the other person. This means there must be a skill involved to carry out this disposition. One must be able to enquire about the person to understand their emotional experience, their perception of God, and their world, as well as check to see if that understanding is accurate. Second, the person empathizing needs to match and communicate non-verbally the emotional state of the person they are attempting to help. This means that as the empathizing person understands the emotional state of the sufferer they will use that understanding to guide the words, tone, and even body posture they use when speaking to the person in need.

Comparing this definition with the model put forth by modern psychology there are clear similarities. First, both definitions show a desire for a deep understanding of the individual's perception of their world and their emotional responses. Second, both definitions desire to match, in some way, both the affectual state of the individual as well as treat the individual in a way that makes sense with their emotional state. Both the ideas of attunement and resonance are centered on attempting to match the other person's "pitch," and responding in like kind.

There are also two clear differences. First, this thesis's argument that empathy is a "disposition of love," would not perfectly match modern psychology's definition, although it would not contradict it either. It is not that psychology's definition would be

⁵⁹ It is important to state that this is a willful attempt to resonate. Most of the objections made by Christians who see empathy as potentially sinful, believe this based on two things they see as a potentially dangerous part of empathy. First, that empathy tends to put the sufferer in the "emotional driver's seat" potentially putting the empathizer in a place where they are emotionally reacting sinfully. Second, that empathizing, in some way, disconnects itself from objective truth. The willful resonance with the sufferer is not putting the sufferer in the emotional driver's seat but is attempting to communicate with someone in distress in a way that they will be able to hear them, as well as actively attempting to understand their experience. In fact, the majority of secular literature calls this loss of objective truth and allowing someone else to control your emotions as "enmeshment" and is equally condemned by secular psychologists as unhelpful but is not considered to be empathy at all. Joe Rigney, "Do you Feel My Pain? Empathy, Sympathy, and Dangerous Virtues," *Desiring God Blog*, May 2, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-feel-my-pain>. Douglas Wilson and Joe Rigney, "The Sin of Empathy," Canon Press, October 15, 2019, YouTube video, 1:07:45 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6i9a3Rfd7yI> .

unloving, but it is outside of their scope to deal with love in the same way as defined here. Second, this thesis has limited its definition of empathy to suffering people to emphasize that in empathy is most consciously exercised toward people who are suffering. In psychological literature, their research on empathy extends to all types of circumstances, from immense pain and suffering to simply observing someone eating an ice cream cone. Although, empathy can extend to that wide of a range of experiences the application, however, in most counseling settings will be empathizing with someone's suffering.⁶⁰ Overall, this thesis's definition includes all aspects that would agree with its normal usage within psychological literature and research.

Finally, in the same way that secular psychological literature does not necessarily locate empathy within a disposition of love, a biblical definition of empathy does not necessarily locate empathy within a biological function. This is not to say mirror neurons are not an important factor when thinking about certain issues that arise with empathy in counseling.⁶¹ However, a biblical examination would not speak to the biological functions of empathy directly. It also should be noted that of the definitions that were given, none referenced the biological function in the definitions, even though they likely have mirror neurons within their conceptual framework of how empathy functions on a biological level. So, when examining the key differences between the definition offered here and those offered from a psychological framework, the only key differences come from applying a biblical framework to the definition as well as seeing a specific application of empathy for biblical counseling.

⁶⁰ There may be some applications that extend past suffering to joyful experiences when working with a counselee, but this can be used by applying the same principles based on implications from Matt 7:12 or Rom 12:15.

⁶¹ For examples counseling someone with ASD or someone diagnosed with Narcissistic disorders which score low on an Empathy scale.

Distinctions between Empathy and Compassion

To better understand what empathy is, one must distinguish empathy from similar concepts and words. The word that is most commonly used alongside or conflated with empathy is compassion. In fact, some psychologists have argued that there is a “compassionate empathy,” which functionally erases any distinctions between the two concepts.⁶² However, this thesis will argue that there is a distinction between the two concepts, but both are necessary for a show of love to suffering people. However, to show this distinction, one must look closely at the idea of compassion to see how empathy differs from compassion conceptually and how these two concepts fit together.

Compassion has been biblically defined in this thesis as an affectionate action to alleviate the suffering of an individual.⁶³ Compassion requires two questions to be answered for it to complete its goal. The first question is, “On what basis do I have a compassionate emotion toward the sufferer?” Martha Nussbaum recognizes certain cognitive prejudgments are required for the emotional component of compassion to take place. These are things that must be believed about the person and the situation of the sufferer for the person to show compassion. She explains,

Compassion, then, has three cognitive elements: the judgment of *size* (a serious bad event has befallen someone); the judgment of *nondesert* (this person did not bring the suffering on himself or herself); and the *eudaimonistic judgment* (this person, or creature, is a significant element in my scheme of goals and projects, an end whose good is to be promoted).⁶⁴

There is much that could be said about each of these elements, but the relevant

⁶² C. Daniel Batson, *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social Psychological Answer* (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum, Associates, 1991), 86-87.

⁶³ Like empathy, compassion has a range of disagreements as to the precise definition. For example, Martha Nussbaum defines compassion as “a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person’s undeserved misfortune.” However, as this Thesis has argued the kind of compassion that God and Jesus show in the Bible certainly has a significant emotional component to it but is always accompanied by action. Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 300.

⁶⁴ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 321.

judgment to the question of how compassion and empathy relate is the first judgment.⁶⁵ The question is, “how does one determine the size of the suffering?” If people simply use their own sense to achieve this determination, then it could easily result in there being very little compassion at all. People who have suffered greatly could easily dismiss legitimate suffering because the other person is not suffering to the extent that they have suffered. Or rather, someone who has not suffered very much could not understand the level to which the person is suffering because they do not have a reference point to determine size. Nussbaum explains that “often love takes up the viewpoint of the loved person, refusing to judge a calamity in a way different from the way in which the beloved has appraised it.”⁶⁶ So, compassion should weigh heavily, for love’s sake, the perspective of the sufferer in judging the size of the suffering.

On a similar note, if one uses only the perception of the other person several scenarios could arise that would keep one from having compassion in the most terrible of circumstances. Even though Adam Smith argues that the source of emotional connection with a sufferer is empathic (although the term was not coined yet),⁶⁷ he also recognizes that there are circumstances where the person’s perspective may be a hindrance to compassion. What if the sufferer does not know the extent to which they are suffering? What if the sufferer is a woman who is being emotionally abused and does not understand this category of suffering? She is so confused and manipulated that she truly thinks she is the problem and not her husband’s oppression. Does she not deserve compassion? Adam Smith recognizes this difficulty when he writes that in these

⁶⁵ The second judgment seems biblically inaccurate in that God frequently saves people who are reaping their “just deserts” and Jesus commands that people be compassionate towards their enemies who likewise are not worthy of compassion and yet should receive it because Christians are to imitate God in this respect.

⁶⁶ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 311.

⁶⁷ He writes, “That is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels. . . .” Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12.

scenarios, “The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation, and, what perhaps is impossible, was at the same time able to regard it with his present reason and judgment.”⁶⁸ However, one should not, even in these types of cases, discount the perspective of the sufferer. Even if the person does not recognize the suffering, that would be taken into consideration in the judgment of size. Meaning, that the fact that they do not recognize it as suffering would likely place the individual in a more compassion-worthy place than if they did recognize it. And so, compassion requires the perspective and experience of the sufferer to understand the extent and size of the suffering.

The second question that must be answered for compassion to result in loving action is, “What must be done in order for the suffering to be alleviated?” When looking at someone who is suffering there must be a determination about what the suffering is, the nature of it, and what is required to alleviate that suffering. This is the counseling task and will be taken up more fully in the next chapter as an application of empathy is taken up. The importance in showing the distinction here is that the same information that is needed for the first question of the size of suffering is likewise used for the question of what type of action is needed to alleviate the suffering.

Compassion is limited then by its inability to answer these questions by itself. Empathy is that necessary element for compassion to have the type of information it needs to complete its work. Empathy, in seeking to understand both the perception and emotional state of the individual and resonate with their experience, can adequately and accurately diagnose the extent to which they are suffering, the nature of their suffering, and should be actively involved when considering the action that is required to alleviate their suffering.

So, whereas compassion is the affectionate action whereby someone attempts

⁶⁸ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 15.

to alleviate someone's suffering, empathy is the disposition by which someone gains the requisite knowledge to complete the compassionate action. Even though the relationship between compassion and empathy is close, they are still distinct concepts with discernable features.

Conclusion

Empathy is a modern term but is a necessary implication of God's command to imitate him in his compassion. For people to have compassion for one another they must judge rightly the suffering of the other person as well as how to alleviate that suffering. This is what empathy is able to accomplish. Empathy, as a disposition of love whereby one willingly resonates with the suffering of another image-bearer, is able to relate to the sufferer in such a way that they can understand both what their suffering is and what it will take to alleviate it.

CHAPTER 4

APPLYING EMPATHY IN BIBLICAL COUNSELING

The goal of every counseling relationship is to help the individual with whatever suffering or struggle they are dealing with at the time. This means that the foundation for the relationship between the counselor and counselee is one of compassion. However, as has already been stated, compassion is limited until it receives the necessary information to be able to understand their suffering, emotionally feel for the person in their pain, and seek to alleviate it. Empathy is required as the disposition by which one gains this information. This chapter will draw attention to the type of information that is needed to help compassion take its full effect, helpful ways in which this information can be gained, and the heart of the counselor as he or she interacts with that information. Additionally, empathy is not the information gained, or the process that is used to gain the information. Instead, empathy is what happens when a virtuous heart interacts with the story of a suffering person, motivating them to gain the information, informing the way the counselor should gain the information, understand the person, and then respond to them with compassion. To that end, this chapter will first examine how empathy informs compassion. This will specifically look at what aspects of the counselee's story the counselor should be looking for and how that information helps a counselor to see their counselee with compassion and work to help them alleviate their suffering. Second, this chapter will look at some practical ways in which counselors should draw out this information and engage in the act of listening with the counselee, that are methodologically consistent with empathy, and therefore, are "empathic." Third, this chapter will address the heart of the counselor and the typical ways in which

counselors fail to make the move from empathy to compassion.

How Empathy Informs Compassion in Counseling Relationships

If counselors are called to help suffering people, then the counseling relationship is a compassionate enterprise. If counselors are to love their counsees in the way that God loves suffering people, then they must allow for empathy to inform their compassion by motivating them to look for several different categories of information embedded within their counselee's story. In all forms of Christian Counseling, there is an emphasis on gathering data and using that data to inform the counseling trajectory. Although the organization and labeling of the information differ between groups (Biblical Counseling, Christian Psychology, Integrationists), they each look for three different main factors. First, they are listening for descriptions of the various physical and external factors of the suffering and struggle. Second, they are looking for the way that these external and physical factors have impacted the person. Third, they are looking for the way that the person has responded to those factors. These three ways of informing the counselor's compassion follow a purposeful progression. This progression starts with the external circumstances of the individual's world and moves further toward the counselee and how they are impacted by and react to their world and circumstances. It is also progressive in the sense that each step builds and depends on the previous step. If a counselor does not consider external circumstances, physical factors, and the way the counselee is impacted, before considering the way they are responding, then there is a significant chance he or she will miss something important about both how these events or circumstances have impacted the counselee as well as how and why they are reacting the way they are. One must empathize progressively and purposefully.¹

¹ A good example of this progression and the necessity of it is when discussing Roger's concept of empathy Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto, Heather Daveidiuk Gingrich, and Fred C. Gingrich state, "The first part of Roger's definition [of empathy], that is, the ability to identify with someone's experience,

Empathy Informs Compassion by Helping Discern External and Physical Factors

The first way in which empathy informs compassion is through discerning external and physical factors in the counselee's life and the circumstances surrounding their presenting issue. This would include things like what happened if there was an inciting event, what the context of their life looks like generally, as well as past events that may have some relationship to the present struggle and suffering. Some of the more distinct aspects of this information may be the counselee's cultural and religious background, socio-economic status, or parts of their family background. All these types of factors help a counselor to understand the counselee's suffering in relation to the significant events and factors in his or her life.

Second, it seeks to understand the physical components at play in the counselee's body. Understanding potential genetic factors, illnesses, lack of sleep, or exercise could be important in considering the counselee's suffering and informing compassion. Although some physical factors are outside of the professional purview of the biblical counselor, they should encourage the counselee toward gaining the information from professional experts.² Various illnesses, for example, can cause many of the same symptoms that would bring someone to counseling, and if this is not discovered may result in a lack of ability on the counselor's part to help give wise counsel to bring

is similar to the expression 'walking in another's shoes.' This does not mean that you should try to imagine how you would feel in a similar situation (which is the tendency of most people), but rather that you attempt to understand how your counselee would feel in that situation given their genetic makeup, personality, family background and other life experience." In this example the authors point out that one must use the information gathered about the counselee's external and physical factors, family background and other life events and experiences and use that information to walk in their shoes. The later steps of empathy are dependent on progressively intimate information. Elisabeth A. Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto, Heather Davediuk Gingrich, and Fred C. Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling: A Faith-Based Integration*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 127.

² Charles D. Hodges, *Good Mood, Bad Mood: Help and Hope for Depression and Bipolar Disorder* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2012), 187-91.

about alleviation of the suffering.³

These components of a person's experience inform compassion because they give situational context for the suffering and concrete context for the world in which the solution must be applied. If empathy is to inform compassion accurately, the physical and external components of the experience of the counselee must be considered.

Empathy Informs Compassion by Helping Discern Active Heart Dynamics

The second way in which empathy informs compassion is by discerning the active heart dynamics of the counselee. These dynamics can be understood as the way in which a person's heart reacts to events and situations. In many ways, the active heart dynamics are much of what empathy seeks to draw out. As was stated in chapter two, the active heart thinks, feels, and intends or commits. As a counselor uses empathy to explore the counselee's inner world, they will need to see the layers of the heart that lie behind the initial thinking, feeling, and committing the counselee is doing in the moment or in the event that brought about the suffering. For these three categories Pierre explains that people interpret through a set of beliefs, they feel (emote) through a set of desires, and they choose through a set of commitments.⁴ Identifying these core beliefs, desires, and commitments allows the counselor to understand their counselee's unique experience of suffering. So, to truly understand a person and their suffering one must understand how their heart is actively responding.

First, it informs compassion by discerning how a person's heart is responding by revealing insights into what the person is thinking and believing. Central to the way that people respond to suffering is found in their interpretation of their world and events

³ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 123-24.

⁴ Jeremy Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016), 50.

within it, as well as the core beliefs that lie behind those interpretations. The counselee's language and assumptions about their suffering are coded with judgments about the meaning of the suffering (or lack thereof), people's motives behind their actions, and God's position within their suffering. In the previous chapter, the question was raised about a woman who was being abused but was not consciously aware that it was abuse at all, but rather thought it was normal. Not only is it important to recognize that specific perception (or lack of perception), but also why they have that perception. Why do they believe their experience is not abuse? Is it because they think they are the problem or is it because they do not understand their experience to fall within the bounds of abuse? Their belief would modify the counselor's assessment of their situation and the compassion that would follow it. In this way, both the interpretation of their suffering and their beliefs that lie behind are a necessary part of empathy's informing of compassion.

Second, it informs compassion by discerning how a person's heart is responding by revealing insights into what the person is feeling or desiring. Generally, empathy is thought of as a way to understand the way someone relates emotionally to a situation. Much of the literature devoted to the practical skill of empathy is geared at helping counselors not only express objective facts about what happened in the counselee's world but to include their "emotional content" and the meaning behind the content.⁵ Emotions convey values and desires, and are inherently relational, in that they are a reaction to something going on in the counselee's world. In its most basic form, the belief of a person leads the counselee to see the events as either positive or negative events. Also, the emotional content conveys something of the value system of the counselee it is helpful to use this information to inform compassion.⁶ The way someone

⁵ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 134-135.

⁶ J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith, *Untangling Emotions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 70.

emotionally reacts to a situation many times conveys what they value in those moments and can give perspective on how great the suffering is for the individual. Knowing and understanding what values and desires loom large in the life of the counselee is an indispensable aspect of empathy's informing of compassion.

Third, it informs compassion by discerning how a person's heart is responding by revealing insights into what the person is choosing or committing to. Commitments are largely revealed in choices. People's choices ultimately reveal loyalty or allegiance to a particular desire over others. Pierre says it this way, "A choice is the outflow of complex structures of commitment. Choices in daily life reveal those established structures of commitment. . . . Why would a mom choose to peruse Twitter for a half hour rather than help her children with their homework . . . in these moments, her actions show a greater loyalty to her own ease of mind than to the good of her children."⁷

Understanding the types of choices a counselee is making in the midst of or in reaction to their suffering helps the counselor to discern what relationship their greatest commitments play into their suffering.

All Christian counselors, no matter the framework, deal with the beliefs, interpretations, desires, and commitments that the heart has, although they may use different terminology to describe it. In more integrative circles, beliefs, interpretations, and commitments oftentimes are collapsed into emotive language when discussing empathy. John C. Thomas and Lisa Sosin are good examples of this. When describing what they call "advanced empathy," they use sample dialogue with a counselee who is struggling with the loss of his wife. He had ignored his wife's opinion about driving through the night, had gotten into a wreck, and had died. They suggest the counselor respond to this retelling of the story by saying, "it sounds as though you feel responsible

⁷ Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 44-45.

for your wife’s death because you failed to take her advice.”⁸ When explaining why this response is helpful they write that this counselor “recognizes the guilt that the counselee feels and the active part that such an emotion plays in his contemporary existence.”⁹ However, what is helpful about this response is that the counselor does not just help reveal an emotion. In reality, the counselor had uncovered both an emotion and an underlying belief/interpretation of the event (that inattention to his wife’s opinion had led to her death). Bob Kellemen recognizes the importance of empathizing with more than just emotions as he encourages readers to seek “what it is like to be him [the counselee]—to be his character through his longings, perspective, motivations, feelings.”¹⁰ These perspectives and motivations enable the counselor to fill in their understanding of the counselee’s world. It is for this reason, the desires or emotions, beliefs, and commitments need to be recognized and used to inform compassion because all of them affect what may be the need of the counselee to relieve their suffering.¹¹

Empathy Informs Compassion by Discerning the Counselee’s Relational Contexts

As was explained in Chapter two, all of mankind’s heart dynamics and capacities were meant to be used inside of relationships. Men and women live relationally within four distinct spheres of life. They live in relationship with God, others, and the

⁸ John C Thomas and Lisa Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition: Equipping the Christian Counselor for the Journey* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2011), 156.

⁹ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 156.

¹⁰ Robert W. Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations: How to Care like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 147.

¹¹ Arthur J. Clark, a non-Christian mental health professional, also argues that one should take into consideration non only the emotional content of someone’s experience with empathy in mind but also his or her cognitive structures. He writes, “Schemas represent cognitive structures comprising a person’s fundamental beliefs and ingrained assumptions about life. These core convictions and basic premises may be adaptive or dysfunctional in the context of a lived experience and have significant implications for empathy and empathic understanding” Arthur J. Clark, *Empathy and Mental Health: An Integral Model for Developing Therapeutic Skills in Counseling and Psychotherapy* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 65-66.

world generally. Understanding the way that the heart responds in relationship within these spheres informs compassion by offering context to both the experience of the individual in their suffering as well as how their responses affect those primary relationships.

First, it informs compassion by considering the points in which their active heart dynamics affect their relationship with God. All active heart dynamics are committed in relationship with the counselee's creator and therefore should be understood primarily in relation to Him. What this means is that even when considering other relational dynamics, a counselor should always see that there is a theocentric dynamic to those relationships.¹² God has commanded not only the way that the counselee should relate to God but also to others, the world in general, and themselves as well.¹³ As the counselor considers the counselee's relationship to God, compassion should compel them to love their counselees regardless of their sin. However, examining the places in which the counselee's heart responses are contrary to God's design and law will help the counselor offer the right cure to their suffering. Understanding the way that sin in their desires, beliefs, and commitments affects the counselee's relationship with God is integral information for compassion to move towards the alleviation of the counselee's suffering.

Second, some active heart dynamics are lived out in relationship with other people. People's emotions, beliefs, and choices affect other people, and/or are a reaction to other people. Although the counselee's relationship with other people is a subordinate

¹² Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp explain how even relational dynamics with others should still be seen as theo-centric. They write about an internal conflict about whether they wanted to continue to be married and were fantasizing about being single. They wrote, "That evening in the grocery store parking lot, my problem was not just that I did not love my family as I should. My problem was that I did not love God as I should." Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2006), 25.

¹³ Herman Bavinck essentially makes this argument when he says, "Morality is thus to live in appropriate relationships to people according to some requirement. (For us, this requirement is God's law)." Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Ethics*, vol. 1, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 61.

relation to that of their relationship with God, it can often seem more immediately impactful to the counselee's present situation. Counselees will feel the pressure of interpersonal relationships in their daily life as they interact with people. As Elyse Fitzpatrick and Dennis Johnson say, "Yes, our relationships are very important, and many of us spend enormous amounts of effort, time, and money looking for the key to making our relationships stronger, more satisfying."¹⁴ Discerning how their heart responds to others informs compassion by understanding the relational context the counselee is in.

Third, some heart dynamics are lived out in relation to the counselee's general world or circumstances. Again, this relationship should be seen similarly to the relationship with other people. It is found within the greater sphere of a relationship with God because God has given Christians commands and promises relating to how they should and should not think, feel, and act in this relationship. However, considering this relationship within its own category is helpful when listening for information to inform the counselor's compassion for a counselee because the way a counselee is when they walk into the counseling room is significantly affected by the way their heart has responded and interpreted the events and circumstances of their life. The counselee's age, job, geographic location, major events both past and present, and other circumstantial elements all are contexts in which the counselee is reacting. Pierre explains the significance of listening to this aspect of their story by writing, "Humans experience is one continuous act of interpreting what on earth is going on. We cannot not assign meaning to the things that occur in our lives."¹⁵ So, throughout the lives of the counselee, their hearts are interacting with and interpreting the meaning of their story. This is essential information when attempting to understand their world and how their suffering

¹⁴ Elyse Fitzpatrick and Dennis E. Johnson, *Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 151.

¹⁵ Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 165.

is impacting them as people.

Empathy Informs Compassion by Helping Discern Passive Heart Dynamics

The final way that empathy informs compassion is by discerning what Jeremy Pierre has labeled, “Passive Heart Dynamics,” which he defines as “the imprint that external conditions make on the heart’s beliefs, values, and intentions.”¹⁶ These passive dynamics connect the external and physical components of the counselee’s experience to the internal heart functions. While external and physical components are more sheer facts about their experience, discerning passive heart dynamics attempt to see the effect of those events, factors, and relationships on the heart of the counselee. These passive dynamics show that people are not only actors in their own stories but also are acted upon and this must be considered. Also, whereas previously it has been explored how the counselee responds within their different primary relationships, passive heart dynamics describe how these relationships can affect the counselee, and their capacities, and form them in some way. In many respects, passive heart dynamics are some of the more difficult truths about a person’s life and round out their experience to further explain their active heart reactions.

First, it seeks to listen to the counselee’s story and major relationships and understand how their present reactions to their suffering have been shaped by major relationships in their lives. Parent, sibling, and spousal relationships can greatly shape and mold one’s heart in both positive and negative ways. They can greatly influence the way people relate to one another, their understanding of how God perceives them, and even the way their conscience perceives right and wrong. As was stated in chapter two, mankind’s heart is designed to live in relationship with others: relationship with God,

¹⁶ Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 90.

other image-bearers, and the world around them. Christians are called to shape one another within these relationships, and in some respect, all humans are shaped by their closest relationships, starting in childhood, and continuing throughout their lives.¹⁷

Second, it seeks to understand major events and possible trauma in their past and how those events have shaped their present reactions and suffering.¹⁸ It is not only important to look at the relationships that have shaped a counselee's life but at what level of force those relationships have shaped them. Traumatic experiences, either enacted by evil actions of people (e.g., abuse, rape, betrayal) or by circumstances (e.g., car crash or sudden loss of a loved one), can make these dynamics longer lasting and the experiences that arise from it, more potent. In the book *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse*, Diane Langberg introduces Meeka to the reader. Meeka was repeatedly sexually molested by her father at an early age. In chapter five Langberg explains how this early and repeated sexual trauma impacts Meeka's world. Her withdrawal from others, risk-taking behavior, depression, inability to concentrate, and other symptoms plague Meeka and many of these experiences are, in some respects, owing greatly to the impact of being sinned against in heinous ways. Langberg sums up the counselor's duty by writing, "An understanding of the above responses to an extreme traumatic stressor is vital. Too often the survivor is seen by herself and others as 'nuts,' 'crazy,' or 'weird,' unless her responses are understood within the context of trauma."¹⁹ Although this level of trauma is

¹⁷ The Proverbs demonstrate both a positive and negative correlation to a friendship's impact on an individual. People whose close friends turn toward evil tend to turn toward evil (Prov 18:24) and whose close friends delight in what is good tend to honor God in the same way (Prov 27:17). Likewise, Matt. 18:6 seems to indicate at least some causal effect that people can have as they relate to others. This relationship should not negate responsibility, but the relationships should be taken into consideration when thinking about compassion and the size and context of suffering.

¹⁸ Darby Strickland defines trauma as, "The word trauma refers to the emotional, spiritual, and physical disruptions that occur when a person is overwhelmed by extreme suffering. Their relationships with God and others are often significantly impacted because of what has happened." Darby Strickland, "Foundations of Trauma Care for Biblical Counselors," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 36, no. 2 (2022).

¹⁹ Diane Langberg, *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2003), 68.

extraordinary, it is paradigmatic of how trauma can shape the heart and should be weighed as an aspect that will inform the compassion of the counselor.²⁰

Third, it seeks to understand how the counselee's cultural, religious, and economic background has shaped their view of the world and perception of what is good and desirable. Embedded within different cultures and backgrounds are different value systems and conceptions of what is good and bad. Samuel J. Alex, Esther Liu, and Michael R. Emler explain how this affects the counseling task,

The connection to counseling is obvious. What we believe is true, right, and good does, indeed shape our actions. . . . For example, ethnic groups whose cultures value the individual emphasize the pursuit of personal goals, such as self-reliance and independence from others. Whereas ethnicities that value the group (family, community, and church) emphasize its welfare over the personal good of the individual. People with these backgrounds tend to behave accordingly.²¹

Getting to know a counselee's cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds can help a counselee see the way they have been shaped on some very fundamental levels. This will allow the counselor and counselee to explore how they have affected the counselee's suffering both in positive and negative ways.

As the counselor discerns the impact of these factors on the heart of the counselee it will help them to determine both the size and nature of the suffering. Helping the counselee to see what are active and what are passive heart dynamics allow the counselor to help them see the fullness of their suffering and the impact it has on their present reactions. If compassion needs to understand the reason that people are suffering and the nature of their suffering, counselors must seek to understand the circumstances that brought their counsees to their suffering.

²⁰ Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson likewise see trauma (specifically in domestic violence) to have effects on the body and the soul. They write that counselors should be, "considering the diminishing effects on the person's ability to function in freedom and personhood, in both soul and body." Jeremy Pierre and Greg Wilson, *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church* (Fearn, U.K.: Christian Focus, 2021), 74.

²¹ Esther Liu, Emler Mike, and Alex Samuel J., "Why Cultural Context Matters in Biblical Counseling," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 36, no. 1 (2022): 24-29.

The Practice of Empathy in the Counseling Relationship

Now that it has been established how empathy informs compassion, the question must be asked, “What types of practices are both consistent with this framework and will help gain the requisite knowledge needed to inform compassion?” All Christian counseling forms emphasize a need to empathically gather information and communicate understanding and affection for the counselee. Biblical counseling and integrationist counselors have written about these skills and their necessity for the counseling relationship. Within these two perspectives, there is much that is agreed upon and several points of disagreement.²² The goal of this section is to examine several principles of the application of empathy in the counseling relationship from both integrationist and biblical counseling perspectives to apply this thesis’s framework.²³

Pre-Counseling Conceptualization

The first principle that should be examined when applying empathy in the counseling relationship is considering ways that the counselor can prepare himself or herself for the first counseling session. The first way a counselor can ready themselves to show empathy is by making themselves familiar with the type of issue with which they are dealing. The question of counseling competency on specific issues is recognized by both biblical counselors and integrationists. Bob Kellemen writes about the counselor’s competency by highlighting four areas of competency. These qualities are Christ-like character, biblical content, counseling competence, and Christian community.²⁴ Although

²² Although there are several points of disagreement between the two perspectives the goal of this section is not to compare and contrast the two perspectives but to offer one cohesive application, that also draws attention when there are disagreements between the two perspectives.

²³ As this section deals with applying the framework, it will center on several integrative and biblical counseling books. However, because in this area many biblical counselors and integrationists appeal to secular empirical research and observations, it will also use a handful of these types of resources that are used by both biblical counselors and integrationists.

²⁴ Robert W. Kellemen, *Consider Your Counsel: Addressing Ten Mistakes in Our Biblical Counseling* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 79-80.

all four of these are helpful for a counselor to consider, attention will be directed toward this third competency area, counseling competence.

There should be a recognition that although the Bible is sufficient to speak authoritatively to every counseling issue, it does not follow that every counselor is equally competent to utilize the Bible for every issue. There is a level of competency needed, both in terms of knowledge and experience with an issue to be truly competent and helpful. Thomas and Sosin explain that “Some counselors lack the skills and competency to effectively help in every case.”²⁵ And Kellemen agrees when he has counselors ask two important questions about competency. He has them ask, “What is my level of biblical knowledge, formal training, and personal research about this subject?”²⁶ and “What’s my level of supervised experience with this sensitive issue?”²⁷ These two principles of competency are helpful for counselors to consider; knowledge and experience.

So, in terms of preparation for empathizing with an individual, knowing the general way in which someone experiences this issue is immensely helpful. A counselor should read books on the issue, speak to other counselors who have greater experience counseling this particular issue, or read the *DSM* or other secular literature that seeks to describe and categorize both external and internal experiences of people.²⁸ In terms of

²⁵ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 49.

²⁶ Kellemen, *Consider Your Counsel*, 82.

²⁷ Kellemen, *Consider Your Counsel*, 83.

²⁸ Although the biblical counseling movement at times has had a more hardline approach of skepticism toward the *DSM* and secular empirical research on particular issues, this can be a good starting point for anyone to understand how a person struggles with a particular issue. In recent years several biblical counselors have written defending the use of the *DSM* and using it in helpful ways. Jones, Kellen, and Green interact with it in most of their chapters on specific counseling issues. Robert D. Jones, Kellen Kristen, and Green Robert, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville: Baker Academic, 2021). Nate Brook’s blog article for the Biblical Counseling Coalition are both good examples of this trend. Nate Brooks, “Understanding the DSM,” *The Grace and Truth Blog*, last modified February 21, 2022, <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2022/02/21/understanding-the-dsm/>.

experience, there should be an understanding that the more experience one has counseled on a specific issue, the more adept one should be at dealing compassionately and empathetically with their counselees.

There is, however, a needed caution from biblical counselors when it comes to thinking that knowledge and experience prepare for counseling. There may be a tendency for some counselors to think that because they know what the experience that accompanies a specific issue is generally that they will know how to counsel a specific person who has this issue. This is a misguided notion that should be guarded against. Counselors do not counsel issues but suffering people, in all their image-bearing particularity. As Jones, Kellen, and Green aptly put, “We biblical counselors focus on people, not categories. We don’t counsel abandoned people, alcoholics, or anxious people. Rather, we counsel Mandy, whose husband abandoned her; Joe, who drinks too much; and Meredith, who is filled with anxiety.”²⁹ Each person has a presenting issue but also a specific way they are responding to that issue, a specific context in which they are responding, and a distinct set of values, beliefs, and commitments that flavor their experience. So, in keeping with this caution biblical counselors should use their pre-case conceptualization, based on a general understanding of the issue, and experience counseling the issue as a starting place to inform compassion. Knowledge and experience can help a counselor to know what types of questions to ask, however they do not know the answers to those questions going into the first session.

Second, a counselor can prepare to be empathic by having counselees fill out questionnaires that allow for the counselor to understand, to some degree what is happening in the life of the counselee before they have their first session. From the earliest days of the biblical counseling movement, there was an encouragement to have

²⁹ Jones, Kellen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 171.

counselees fill out a “Personal Data Inventory.”³⁰ Many introduction books to both biblical counseling and integrationist psychology include an example form to use for intake.³¹ Although, the amount of information changes depending on the organization these inventories ask a plethora of questions that allow the counselor to walk into the first session with a reasonable idea about the presenting issues and some other information about their lives. There are several reasons to ask these questions before the first session, but the most important is that it prepares the counselor to have some basics of the counselee’s story, presenting problems, and some background information. Similar to research that the counselor can do on the presenting issue, this type of pre-counseling preparation can prepare the counselor for empathy by giving them some starting information that is specific to the counselee, which allows them to start to fill in their understanding of their suffering.

Third, a counselor can ready themselves to show empathy by understanding their own emotional state and past experiences. As the counselor is preparing by researching and reading the personal data inventory, they should consider their personal experience with the counselee’s presenting issue. It would be easy for counselors to assume that their own personal experience is the same as their counselees and therefore they may be tempted to project their own experience into the life of their counselees. Understanding where they are emotionally regarding the type of issue that is being dealt with will help them differentiate their own emotions and experience and the emotions and experiences of the counselee they are trying to help. Unlike the previous two pre-counseling preparations, being self-aware of one’s own experience does not gather information to inform compassion. Instead, self-awareness is used to try to remove self-

³⁰ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 200.

³¹ Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 200., Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations*, 359-65., Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 585-89.

imposed barriers or preconceived notions to understand what the counselee is thinking and feeling. When counselors cannot separate their thoughts and feelings about the counselee's situation and presenting issue, they risk being uncompassionate and focused on themselves rather than their counselee's suffering.³²

Observing Non-Verbal Communication

Empathy, to be effective, must be paired with a developed ability to observe different forms of communication. Communication is a skill that depends on one person communicating to another and the other person receiving that communication and understanding what they mean by it. There are many forms of communication; the most obvious form being verbal. The sharing of words that convey the way the counselee understands their suffering is the primary way that a counselor will receive communication from their counselee. However, without taking into consideration other forms of communication a counselor may misunderstand the actual state of the individual sitting in front of them. All forms of counseling recognize that there are non-verbal forms of communication and that these forms are helpful for counselors to observe and understand. The biblical counseling movement's early practitioners such as Jay Adams and Wayne Mack called this type of information gathered by the counselor "Halo Data."³³ Several types of non-verbal communication can aid a counselor in understanding their counselee.

The first type of non-verbal communication is body language. Considering body language when counseling opens a multitude of different variables to consider. There are both conscious and unconscious forms of body language that should be considered by counselors. Facial expressions, the use of space between counsees (in

³² Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 128.

³³ John MacArthur and Wayne A. Mack, *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, The John MacArthur Pastor's Library (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2005), 144-145.

marriage or family counseling) or between counselee and counselor, and the counselee's overall countenance or posture are all forms of conscious body language. Unconscious forms of body language involve the autonomic nervous system. These types of body language might include dilated pupils, perspiration, facial flushing, or nervous twitching. These forms of communication, although not entirely conscious, are oftentimes connected to "cognitive, physical and emotional triggers"³⁴ and can help a counselor understand their counselee and what makes these responses come about. All body language, conscious and unconscious, is helpful information for counselors to consider when empathically connecting with their counsees.

The second form of non-verbal communication for counselors to consider is paralinguistics. Paralinguistics is "the study of the tone of voice."³⁵ For a counselor to understand the communication from their counselee they should not only consider what they say but how they say it. Wayne Mack asks questions to clarify how this is important. He asks, "Does their tone of voice communicate hope, or does it communicate hopelessness? Does it communicate anxiety or peace? Anger or forgiveness? Love or hate? Interest or indifference?"³⁶ Two other aspects of speech that can be helpful to observe are rate of speech and inflection. The rate of speech can, at times, denote anxiety, panic, or even anger when the rate increases. It can be helpful for the counselor to take note of the normal rate of speech for the counselee and notice when they slow down or speed up.³⁷ Inflection is important to take notice of because it can entirely change the meaning of phrases, denote sarcasm or other forms of humor, and also changes between

³⁴ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 68.

³⁵ Timothy E. Clinton, George W. Ohlschlager, and American Association of Christian Counselors, eds., *Competent Christian Counseling*, 1st ed (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2002), 210.

³⁶ MacArthur and Mack, *Counseling*, 145.

³⁷ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 66.

English-speaking cultures or when English is not the native language of the counselee.

With each of these forms of non-verbal communication, there is a danger in assuming that the way that the counselor would utilize these forms of body language is the same that the counselee does and that the assumptions that they make are accurate. Counselors must not do this. They should be alert to non-verbal forms of communication but always inquire about them, to know exactly what they mean. In a similar way, self-awareness is used here to protect the counselor from making assumptions about any of these forms of non-verbal communication. It may be true that their way of communicating is non-verbal. As will be explained with verbal forms, if there is something in these non-verbal forms that seems pertinent to understanding the way that the counselee is relating it is important to confirm whether this is true or not before assuming that it is.

Attending

Attending is one of the primary skills that accompanies discussions of empathy. Attending deals with the presence of the counselor in the room. It tends to be physically oriented, dealing with how the counselor presents himself or herself nonverbally to the counselee (even though there may be vocal aspects to attending). Attending can be defined as, “supporting your client with individually and culturally appropriate verbal following, visuals, vocal quality, and body language/facial expression.”³⁸ This set of skills’ purpose is to make sure that the counselee receives the comfort and instruction of the Word of God by the counselor in the way that the counselor intends it. They are meant to break down any communication barriers that are unnecessary and distracting to the counseling process.

³⁸ Allen E. Ivey, Mary Bradford Ivey, and Carlos P. Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling: Facilitating Client Development in a Multicultural Society*, Ninth edition (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2018), 57.

The first aspect of attending is the body language of the counselor. Both biblical counselors and integrationists use some version of the acronym S.O.L.E.R. to remind counselors of how they should posture themselves in a counseling room during the session. Wayne Mack modifies the popular acronym by adding a “V” to make it S.O.L.V.E.R. By this addition Mack combines the remaining parts of the definition for attending into one, helpful, acronym. The “S” stands for squared shoulders. Squaring the shoulders shows the counselee that they are attentive and ready to listen and interact with them. “O” stands for open stance. This means that the counselor should not cross any part of their body. This nonverbally communicates to the counselee that they are free to share and be open with the counselor.³⁹ The “L” stands for leaning forward. As the counselor listens to the counselee’s story they should lean slightly forward to, again, show that they are listening and present with the counselee. This can even convey that they are connecting with them emotionally. Sbanotto writes, “This movement generally takes place as a nonverbal way to close the gap between the counselor and the counselee, often taking place when the counselee’s emotion increases or the story of the counselee is telling intensifies.”⁴⁰ The “V” stands for vocal quality. Generally, counselors should adopt a gentle vocal tone, volume, and rate of speech. They should neither be aggressive nor passive but rather reflect “tenderness and compassion.”⁴¹ Concerning the vocal tone, there is a higher variable of preference when thinking about tone. As Ivey et al. explain, “Keep in mind that different people are likely to respond to your voice differently.”⁴² Therefore, a counselor may need to vary their tone depending on the counselee. The “E” stands for eye contact. Although there are cultural considerations that should be made,

³⁹ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 141.

⁴⁰ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 89-90.

⁴¹ MacArthur and Mack, *Counseling*, 107.

⁴² Ivey, Ivey, and Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 60.

and there can be too much eye contact, making good eye contact during counseling is an effective way to show the counselee that you are engaged in the conversation. Lastly, the “R” stands for a relaxed posture. The counselor’s posture should be relaxed rather than tense. Although Mack modifies the “R” to stand for “Relational Posture” instead of relax, his encouragement is helpful. He encourages counselors to “Coordinate all your body, head, and facial movements in a way that is most conducive to the comfort of the counselee. Your posture should not be stiff and robotic, but neither should it be so totally relaxed that the person thinks you are about to go to sleep.”⁴³ Even though there are situations in which certain aspects within S.O.L.E.R. may not be helpful for counselors this method can serve as the default setting for counselors, allowing them to make modifications as appropriate to the sensitivities of the individual counsees.⁴⁴

The other aspect of attending is verbal following. Verbal following is allowing the flow of the conversation to be largely dictated by the counselee’s immediate needs and desires. This can be a helpful strategy to understand the counselee better and not allow the counselor’s interests guide the conversation. Ivey et al writes,

Clients tend to talk about what counselors are willing to hear. In any session, your client will present multiple possibilities for discussion. Even though the topic is career choice, a sidetrack into family issues and personal relationships may be necessary before returning to the purpose of the counseling session. But some counselors may not be as interested in career work, and most of their career clients end up talking about themselves and their personal history and end up in long-term therapy.⁴⁵

This does not mean that there are not times when the counselor should redirect the counselee to a more helpful course of inquiry or simply be silent and allow the

⁴³ MacArthur and Mack, *Counseling*, 107.

⁴⁴ The use of eye contact, for example, changes across cultures. Consider this quote. “Among some traditional Native American and Latin groups, eye contact by the young is a sign of disrespect. . . .Some cultural groups (for instance, certain traditional Native American, Inuit, or Aboriginal Australian groups) generally avoid eye contact, especially when talking about serious subjects.” Ivey, Ivey, and Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 59.

⁴⁵ Ivey, Ivey, and Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 64.

counselee to process something that is happening within them during the session, but in general attending to the most important thing for the counselee can be helpful to build rapport and continue to walk into their world and understand them better.

Active Listening

Empathy, by nature, is a relational action and therefore requires two people to communicate. The counselor attempts to understand the world of the counselee and to do that he must enter into a dialogue with the counselee. However, because the counselor is trying to understand the counselee, the dialogue is not an even “give and take” rather the counselor is attempting to draw out the counselee so he can understand him and the way he is reacting to his circumstances. This active listening is essential to the counseling task and without it often results in counselees not feeling heard or in reckless, quickly spoken counsel, which can be destructive. As Jeremy Lelek writes, “One of the most important skills a counselor must develop is the ability to listen with sincere ears. People’s stories are important. Their fears, despair, and pain are often comforted by the compassionate attunement of the counselor’s heart. Quick answers and reckless attempts to solve problems before taking time to listen can be devastating.”⁴⁶ As counselors have listened well and studied the effectiveness of different ways of asking questions and engaging counselees, they have noted several practices that help counselors engage their counselees well and communicate that they are truly understanding them.

The first practice of active, empathic listening is asking questions. In any exchange of information between two individuals, there needs to be a give and take. By nature, this exchange is a question-and-answer cadence whereby the counselor asks questions of the counselee to understand them better. But what types of questions should the counselor ask? What types of questions will garner the type of information the

⁴⁶ Jeremy Lelek, *Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018), 189.

counselor needs to understand the counselee's story better? Jones, Kellen, and Green identify two types of questions to prefer; open-ended and simple questions.⁴⁷ First, the counselor should ask open-ended questions. By open-ended questions, most people mean questions that promote the counselee to fill in an answer, instead of the questioning implying a restrictive answer. Close-ended questions are questions that only can be answered by yes or no, or a "menu list" question. Generally, open-ended questions begin with words like what, where, and how. Closed-ended questions begin with do, does, did, and are.⁴⁸ It is important to note that open-ended questions are not always right, and close-ended questions are not always wrong.⁴⁹ However, when a counselor is attempting to understand the counselee's world and their heart reactions to their circumstances, close-ended questions will not garner as much information or conversation as open-ended ones will. Mack agrees by explaining that counselors should ask "more open-ended questions, so that the counselee could not answer with a yes or no but would have to provide further information."⁵⁰ Allowing the counselee to speak freely about an event will help the counselor to draw out more pertinent information and aid the counselor's task of informing his or her compassion.

The second type of questions to ask are simple questions. The term "simple question" refers to the number of parts to a question the counselor asks. It does not refer

⁴⁷ Jones, Kristen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 173-76.

⁴⁸ There is some controversy over whether counselors should use "why" questions. Early biblical counselors, such as Adams, shied away from why questions, but not for reasons that effect empathy. Integrationists cite studies that state that why questions, by nature, are judgmental and can break down the relationships with the counselee. More recent biblical counselors, who have tended to emphasize heart realities, have asked more why questions.

⁴⁹ Open and closed questions have appropriate uses. Thomas and Sosin explain that open-ended questions are best used "(a) stimulate conversation from the counselee, (b) to encourage the counselee to express himself more fully, (c) to obtain fuller descriptions of the counselee's experience, and (d) to foster the interactive nature of the counseling relationship." While closed questions are used to "(a) obtain specific information; (b) determine whether specific behaviors, symptoms, or signs are present; (c) restrain an overly talkative counselee; and (d) narrow the topic of discussion." Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 167.

⁵⁰ MacArthur and Mack, *Counseling*, 142.

to the complexity of the answer that the counselor wants to hear from the counselee. When a counselor asks a complex question, it is easy for a counselee to get lost in where they are in the parts of the question and when this happens the answer is less helpful. Simple questions allow for focused responses and follow-up questions. Jones, et al. explain, “Asking ‘What did you say to your boss and how did your boss respond?’ is one question too many. Ask one simple, clear question at a time. Then close your mouth and listen.”⁵¹

The second practice of active, empathic listening is reflecting. Reflecting is the act of retelling the information the counselee is saying back to the counselee. Reflecting is a method of interacting with a counselee that is only recently found in biblical counseling material but is a commonly practiced method in integrationist and secular counseling.⁵² It is well supported in empirical studies that reflection, among other micro-skills, has a positive correlation toward outcomes with counsees.⁵³ When developing the skill of reflecting there are three considerations. The first consideration is the purpose for reflecting. Reflecting helps the counselor to convey they understand the counselee. It is a way of “letting counsees know that we are ‘with them’ and able to understand how they feel or think.”⁵⁴ This helps build trust with the counselee. It also breaks up what can otherwise feel more like an interrogation than a conversation. William R. Miller states, “Linguistically a question places a demand on the person for an answer. It is a subtle pressure, a micro-interrogation. Statements typically don’t have that effect.”⁵⁵ This is not

⁵¹ Jones, Kristen, and Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 176.

⁵² Lauren Whitman, *A Biblical Counseling Process: Guidance for the Beginning, Middle, and End* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 22-24.

⁵³ Amanda K. McCarthy, “Relationship Between Rehabilitation Counselor Efficacy for Counseling Skills and Client Outcomes,” *Journal of Rehabilitation* 80, no. 2 (2014): 3–11.

⁵⁴ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 69.

⁵⁵ William R Miller, *Listening Well: The Art of Empathic Understanding* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 28.

to say that one does not ask questions, but a well-placed reflection can move a conversation forward and help the counselor to build rapport with the counselee.

The second consideration is the type of content that should be reflected. There are three spheres of reflection that are important in this skill. First, a counselor should reflect objective content. These are the bare facts of what the counselee has said. These are instrumental in starting to understand their story on a surface level that will allow the counselor to continue to focus on deeper things as they continue to ask questions. Second, a counselor should reflect the heart content their counsees express as well. As they listen and hear their counselee, they should be listening for all the heart and relational dynamics at play in the counselee's story. They should reflect heart content such as what the counselee was feeling, thinking, and choosing in their actions. Lastly, the third sphere of reflection is an empathic reflection.⁵⁶ The counselor can combine the two types of reflection into an empathic reflection. Each of these types of reflections has its place. Not every reflection should just be content, and neither should they all be empathic. Using each type of reflection can be helpful to show the counselee that they are understood and cared for.

The last consideration for reflecting is to notice how one should not reflect. There are several things to avoid when reflecting content. First, the counselor should not parrot back exactly what the counselee has said, but rather summarize or paraphrase in one's own words what they believe the counselee said. This type of parroting can be perceived as "condescending or mocking."⁵⁷ Second, there may be a temptation on the counselor's part to ask questions that focus on what the counselor thinks is interesting. The progression of questions should highlight the counselor's attempt to understand the

⁵⁶ Also referred to as "Primary Empathy" in some works. Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 147-148.

⁵⁷ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 104.

counselee and his or her perception of what is important to their stories. In this way the counselor expresses that they have not only heard what the counselee has said, they understood what he or she meant.

Third, the third practice of active listening intentionally moves from general to specific questions. As the counselor gains more general information, it is natural to move into more specific questions about events, and how the counselee is thinking and feeling about certain events. Jones, Kellen, and Green call this progression a move from “extensive to intensive questions.”⁵⁸ This is a natural progression that moves a counselor from simple general questions about the counselee’s life to more specific questions. In more integrative literature the more intensive questioning is a skill known as clarifying. Whereas extensive questioning looks to understand the overarching story of the counselee, clarifying is about “gaining a deeper understanding of the characteristics and contributions of major elements within their story.”⁵⁹ This turn toward a deeper understanding of their story will also seek to move the questioning toward the heart of the counselee. Asking questions that inquire about how the counselee is thinking, feeling, and choosing in those events will gain a deeper understanding of the counselee.

Lastly, each of these skills and aspects of listening is not reserved for the beginning of a counseling relationship, nor are they in order of how they may occur in a progression. They happen continually throughout the counseling relationship, and they weave in and out with each other. Questions can lead to reflections which can lead to more clarifying questions which can lead to more questions. Empathy through active listening is not a temporary aspect of the counseling relationship but a way of being in the counseling relationship.

⁵⁸ Jones, Kellen, Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 174.

⁵⁹ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 158.

Intuitive Empathy

Thus far this section has emphasized empathic practices that seek to draw out and understand information from the counselee. However, as counselors understand their counsees better, they may be able to have insights and draw connections between parts of the counselee's story that help bring about a new perspective into the question of why the counsees do the things they do. Intuitive empathy (sometimes called advanced empathy) is a type of empathic reflection and therefore is an extension of the reflections previously mentioned. However, they are unique in that they typically move past what the counselee has explicitly stated about their emotions, choices, and perceptions to their underlying beliefs, desires, and commitments. Sbanotto writes, "The purpose of this skill is to help counsees connect not just conscious feelings with content but to also become aware of the feelings, motives, values, and beliefs that underlie their conscious reactions and experiences."⁶⁰ There are several factors when considering intuitive empathy and its use in counseling.

The first factor is that similarly to empathic reflections, intuitive empathy is a way of clarifying. Counselors propose these intuitive reflections as extensions of their understanding of the counselee. As the counselor listens and understands the counselee's story, he or she can help them to have a deeper understanding of themselves. They may be right in this intuition, or they may be wrong. As they do this so they should allow the counselee to clarify whether this reflection seems right to them.⁶¹ One way of helping the counselee to feel secure in contradicting or correcting the reflection is to use more tentative language such as, "It seems like you are saying . . ." or "It sounds to me as

⁶⁰ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 176.

⁶¹ It is important to note that what seems right to the counselee may or may not be right. The counselor could be essentially right in their intuitive empathy, but it does not seem right to the counselee and therefore it is discarded by them. The point of these reflections is to offer insight for the counselee, not for the counselor to be right or wrong. Without the counselee's agreement to the content of the reflection it may not be very productive for the counselor to push further until the counselee is convinced of this issue. Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 176.

if. . . .” This type of language can set the counselee at ease in correcting the counselor if necessary.

The second factor to consider is that not all reflections should utilize intuitive empathy. It is acceptable for intuitive empathy to be an infrequent occurrence in counseling. During a normal counseling session, there will be many reflections a counselor offers and they will be all over the spectrum of reflections from a simple reflection of objective content, all the way to intuitive empathy. Each different reflection has its place, but intuitive empathy should be more sparingly used because it is an attempt to add to what the counselee has stated. It begins to move the dialogue between the counselor and counselee from being centered on understanding toward a place of analyzing the goodness of the counselee’s behavior or heart dynamics, which leads to the third factor.

It is important to see intuitive empathy as a step in the movement towards reframing the counselee’s heart in a more biblical direction. As the counselee gains more insight into their hearts and the deeper controlling beliefs, values, and commitments that drive them they are able, more clearly, to see how the Scriptures reframe the way they should be. Pierre writes, “As people grow in self-awareness, they will inevitably see more clearly how far short they fall of perfection.” But “Self-awareness for its own sake will not yield change. The experience has to be measured against an ideal.”⁶² That ideal is Jesus Christ. Counselors are more gently and accurately able to point their counsees to Jesus as the author and perfecter of their faith as they understand their deep-rooted heart issues. This is the ultimate goal of intuitive empathy; to move the counselee toward seeing Christ as the cure for whatever ails them. Ultimately this is an essential move in the biblical counseling methodology. To apply Christ’s example and Scripture’s frame accurately to the experience of a struggling person, one must understand the heart

⁶² Pierre, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life*, 204-5.

dynamics of their struggle. Intuitive empathy helps clarify those heart realities so the counselor can accurately apply Scripture to those particular heart realities.

Empathic Confrontation

Confrontation has been a part of the biblical counseling movement from its inception with the writings of Jay Adams. Adams's "nouthetic counseling" is primarily based on confrontation. Adams explains what is involved in nouthetic counseling when he writes, "*nouthesis* is motivated by love and deep concern, in which clients are counseled and corrected by verbal means for their good, ultimately, of course, that God may be glorified"⁶³ While Adams is correct that counselee should be confronted, the type of confrontation that Adams encouraged in his writings may not be the most helpful way to confront most counsees. There are several issues with Adams's confrontation method. First, Adams specifically dislikes asking the question "why." Adams writes, "Much time is wasted by asking why. The question 'why' may lead to speculation and blame-shifting; 'what' leads to solutions to problems."⁶⁴ If the counselor is suspicious of answering the question of "why" the counselee does the things he or she does, then they cannot truly understand the counselee. Even the temptation Adams gives is built around, what could be an excellent and helpful realization. If the counselor asks the question "why" and the counselee blame shifts, then the counselor is given vital information as to the state of the heart of the counselee and what may be needed to correct it. Without that knowledge, the counselor will never get past the surface level of the issues at hand. Another critique of this approach is made by Ed Welch. He writes, "Without attentiveness to motives and the inner life, counsees might not feel understood. They will sometimes have a sense that a counselor did not go 'deep' enough."⁶⁵ When confronting, if the

⁶³ Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 50.

⁶⁴ Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 48-49.

⁶⁵ Ed Welch, "How Theology Shapes Ministry: Jay Adam's View of the Flesh and an

counselor only confronts the external behavior, then they are not confronting significant issues that plague the counselee and therefore leave them unchanged in these areas. Likewise, if the counselor never even seeks to understand these internal issues then the counselee may never feel that the counselor is truly seeking to understand before he speaks. Second, Adams's approach to confrontation in practice is more oppositional in nature than understanding and gentle. His encouragement, at times, was to confront the moment that sin happens or is spoken of. Adams gives an example dialogue of this when he writes,

Clara comes to you stating that she has filed for divorce on the grounds of mental and bodily cruelty. Clara returns for the third session. "I tried to get him here but he had other things to do," she begins. "You know what his other things are, of course, I told you all of them."

"I don't want to hear such charges behind Marty's back," you respond. "This continuing hostility toward him, even though you told him you forgave him, seems to indicate that you made little or no attempt to bury the issue and start afresh. I don't think that you understand forgiveness. . . ."66

This conversation continues until Clara is in tears. This type of confrontation, in which the counselor is unwilling to even listen to the suffering of Clara, is not what Clara needs. Heath Lambert is right when he writes, "The example of counseling Adams provides in this passage is cruel. Some important elements of counseling are clear (e.g., unchecked anger, unforgiven sin, etc.) but other important elements are completely passed over, for example, issues of suffering and struggle in the life of the counselee."⁶⁷ Confrontation without basing that confrontation on understanding and relationship will put up needless barriers to change.

So, Adams was right that confrontation was biblical and good for biblical

Alternative," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 23.

⁶⁶ Jay E. Adams and Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Casebook*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1986), 186.

⁶⁷ Heath Lambert, "The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988" (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 105.

counselors to do, he was wrong in the way he went about implementing “nouthetic confrontation.” Instead, confrontation should be birthed out of a heart of compassion and implemented in a way that not only conforms to the definition of love but is translated as love to the counselee. Instead of an oppositional or adversarial type of confrontation, biblical counselors should look for ways to empathically confront counsees.⁶⁸

Whereas Adams tended to be overly confrontational and adversarial in his approach to this part of counseling, secular and some integrative forms of confrontation do not quite approach the biblical definition of confrontation. Some secular writers want to “maintain neutrality” and “avoid judgments,” because if they do so “the client will not return.”⁶⁹ However, they do not dismiss the need for confrontation, they are primarily concerned with the manner of the confrontation. Their desire for confrontation to be supportive rather than adversarial is a helpful corrective to Adam’s approach. The main distinction between these counselors and Adams’s way of confronting has to do with the places they typically enter to confront. Ivey, integrationists, as well as some biblical counselors, have found that engaging with the suffering aspects of the counselee’s story, is a more productive place to begin to confront rather than dealing with every instance of sin in the counseling room. A term for this type of confrontation is “Empathic Confrontation” which seeks to communicate the nature of these confrontations. Empathic confrontation builds off the reflecting and observation skills previously mentioned and utilizes them to help a counselee see how their suffering is a result of contradictions within the counselee’s experience. Empathic confrontation is a method whereby a counselor draws out and reflects apparent contradictions in the life of a counselee to help them resolve these contradictions. There are several things to consider with empathic

⁶⁸ This is not to say that there are no times in which a direct, adversarial type of confrontation is necessary. There is certainly a need for harsher rebuke in certain crisis situations, but the pattern of counseling should be toward gentleness and not harshness.

⁶⁹ Ivey, Ivey, and Zalaquett, *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, 231-232.

confrontations.

The first aspect of empathic confrontations to consider is the purpose of these types of confrontations. These confrontations, as they draw out and draw attention to apparent contradictions in the experience of the counselee, are meant to express love for the counselee and help them to align their experience more with God's word. To confront in a loving way a counselor must continue to use all the attending skills previously mentioned, but also, because of the more difficult nature of confrontations, should be especially conscious of several factors. First, counselors should consider whether they have established a "base relationship of mutual trust and caring."⁷⁰ Without this type of trusting relationship, built through empathy, patience, and loving cooperation, these confrontations could easily be seen as judgmental. Second, counselors should always see these confrontations as apparent unless confirmed by the counselee, particularly when they deal with the internal realities of the individual. Counselors should understand their limitations and seek to use these confrontations both to help the counselee raise their insight into their hearts, as well as have more full understanding of the counselee.⁷¹ Lastly, these confrontations should take on the tone of gentleness and humility. Confrontations are inherently difficult, and therefore must be steeped in those types of speech that convey love and help. Kellemen, when explaining confrontations, rightly says that it is not "bold and bullying. It is gentle and patient."⁷²

The second aspect of empathic confrontation is the type of contradictions that

⁷⁰ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 216.

⁷¹ There may be cases in which the counselor is correct with their empathic confrontation or even the intuitive empathy from the previous section, and the counselee does not recognize it as true. It is generally still more helpful for the counselor to move away from the line of confrontation or reflection instead of digging in. Without the counselee's partnership in moving forward, it is likely that it will not practically move them forward. The counselor can always bring it back up if necessary or if it seems integral to the next phase in counseling, it would be helpful for them to ask the counselee to think about it in-between sessions and then circle back to it in the next session to see if the counselee has gained more insight.

⁷² Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations*, 259.

should be listened for. There are two primary contradictions that the counselor should consider confronting. The first is intrapersonal conflict. As the counselor is listening to the counselee's story and hears the way they interpret their world, what they value, and hears what they do in response to others and their circumstances there will be contradictions between these dynamics. In one situation a counselee could express unrelenting commitment to and love of their spouse, and yet they are again drawn to look at pornography and masturbate. There is a contradiction between these two parts of the counselee's story. They may not even realize it. Within this category of intrapersonal conflict or discrepancy, Thomas and Sosin give insight into typical contradictions that happen within people. Counsees may have Cognitive-perceptual, affective, or behavioral contradictions.⁷³

First, the counselee's perceptions may have cognitive-perceptual contradictions. These contradictions could be a counselee's inability to understand the reality of a situation and its consequences or even a counselee's denial of responsibility for a sin they have committed. Clinton and Ohlshlager write that counselors should confront distorted thinking such as, "'No one cares about me.' . . . 'I must be in charge of this meeting or it will fail.' 'I shouldn't have to stand in line like everyone else.' . . . 'He hates me. What other reason could there be for ignoring me like that!'"⁷⁴ These types of breaks with reality should be some of the types of contradictions listened for by the counselor.

Second, the counselee's perceptions may not correspond with their actions. Many counsees come to counseling because they feel they are stuck. They know their desired goals, but their actions seem to go against their goals. Thomas and Sosin give an

⁷³ These three names are from *Effective Skills for Counseling*. Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 213-14. However, the same categories without the names are likewise found in *Therapeutic Expedition*. Thomas & Sosin, *Therapeutic Journey*, 199-200.

⁷⁴ Clinton and Ohlshlager, *Competent Christian Counseling*, 231.

example of this type of discrepancy when they give the following example, “you said you wanted to improve your relationship with your wife, but you continue to commit to various work projects and community activities that take you out of the home.”⁷⁵ This example highlights that the individual has a goal, “improve your relationship with your wife,” but his actions will not and cannot bring this goal about. As these types of contradictions are reflected back it can help the counselee to see the disconnect between their goal and behaviors in ways that they may have not seen before.

Third, the counselee’s stated emotions may not seem to match their nonverbal expression of other emotions. As the counselor observes the counselee and listens to their story they may observe that the way the counselee describes their emotions and the emotions being communicated nonverbally do not seem the same. For example, a husband, in their last session may have expressed that his wife had left for a weekend with her friends, leaving the children at home with him. He expresses this as a good thing and that he had encouraged her to go but as he states all of this, he is notably tense and does so through clenched teeth and a slightly elevated vocal tone. This may not be an actual contradiction that requires further exploration and may have several explanations, but it seems to be and therefore is an apparent contradiction. Using empathic confrontation to draw attention to this apparent contradiction can help to further clarify the counselee’s emotional state and how this event is affecting him.

The second type of contradiction that should be addressed by empathic confrontation is when there is a contradiction between the counselee’s stated faith in Christ and another aspect of their life. All counselees are sinners and so they will inevitably sin in some respect as counselors care for them. They should likewise use empathic confrontation to draw attention to the inherent contradictions between what the Bible says they should do, think, or feel and what they are doing, thinking, and feeling.

⁷⁵ Thomas and Sosin, *Therapeutic Expedition*, 204.

One of the Scripture's roles in counseling is to "judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12), and therefore when the Scriptures are opened there will be contradictions between the counselee's responses and the responses that God has required of them as a believer. These contradictions should be reflected for the counselee to see. The same example of the husband who states love and fidelity to his wife and yet struggles with masturbation should not just be confronted about these being conflicting values but should also be confronted about the sinfulness of this act. To help the counselee, he needs to both confront and resolve the internal conflict of values in his life as well as his life's actions and values with God's values.

After considering the types of contradictions that would bring about an empathic confrontation, the second aspect of empathic confrontations to consider is how this confrontation should happen. In empathic reflections, the goal was to reflect the objective information with the heart dynamics included. In an empathic confrontation, it is helpful to use an "On the one hand, _____, but on the other hand _____"⁷⁶ formula to show the contradiction. As previously stated, the contradictions should all be seen as apparent and understood first to be a way that the counselor can understand the counselee better, but they are also helpful in that they draw attention to sin, allowing the counselee to realize the reality of their sin and to repent. Kellemen explains that the counselee may "respond with acceptance and acknowledgment that results in repentance (new attitudes), restitution (new actions), and reconciliation (renewed relationships). If this is her response, we rejoice."⁷⁷ This is the goal of empathic confrontations; to reflect the counselee's heart back to them in areas of contradiction so that they might see the need for change. Empathic confrontation brings the goal of empathy from a simple

⁷⁶ Sbanotto, Gingrich, and Gingrich, *Skills for Effective Counseling*, 213, Bob Kellemen uses a similar formula Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations*, 262.

⁷⁷ Kellemen, *Gospel Conversations*, 263.

understanding of the complexity of their particular experience of suffering to where that understanding moves toward compassionate action, which is the intended goal of empathy.

The Movement from Empathy to Compassion

In discussions about empathy, the question seems to be always raised as to whether empathy is a skill, a process, or a way of being. Even Carl Rogers moves along a spectrum of this question from his first works to later works, moving from empathy being a state of being to it being a process or skill.⁷⁸ Thus far this chapter has discussed empathic practices and skills that the counselor utilizes to understand the counselee, express that understanding of the counselee, and use that understanding to help the counselee understand themselves on a deeper level. Finally, this chapter will examine how the heart of the counselor functions in empathy and common ways in which the counselor may stop empathy from developing and therefore stop short of the type of compassion that should be imitated in counseling.

The Counselor's Heart

Empathy for a counselor is more than an accumulation of skills to be utilized in the counseling room and gathering information to understand the counselee. It is about how the counselor's heart interacts with that information. It is the way that his love for the counselee and for Christ reign supreme as he or she gently helps the counselee understand their experience more deeply. Without what this thesis calls a "disposition of love," empathy will fall short. Biblical counselors have recognized that certain character traits should be developed in the heart of the counselor for them to effectively engage in a loving way toward their counselees in these early stages of counseling. Jones et al. call

⁷⁸ Carl R. Rogers, *A Way of Being* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 142-43.

these “Relational Graces,”⁷⁹ These graces are both things that should be cultivated within the life of the counselor as well as evidence that the Holy Spirit is working in the heart and life of the counselor for the task of empathy and compassion. Both the skills associated with empathy and the heart of the counselor are necessary for empathy and compassion. Empathy happens when a virtuous heart interacts with the story of a suffering person. These relational graces are understanding, humility, gentleness, and affection.

First, a counselor’s love should make him or her humble in their approach to understanding their counselee’s story. Every skill in the previous section requires a measure of humility. To walk in humility in counseling is to acknowledge several things about oneself. First, humility acknowledges that the counselor is not better than the counselee. They both walk into the counseling room in need of full dependence on the Lord for everything. Both are sinners before God and in need of saving. The moment the counselor perceives themselves as superior, he or she has already judged the person as unworthy of compassion. Second, the counselor is utterly limited in their knowledge. A humble counselor will never assume they know the counselee’s experience because it is at the point of assumption they will stop seeking to understand and will likely not know what is needed to help the person. Paul Tripp explains, “When you assume, you do not ask. If you do not ask, you open yourself up to a world of invalid conclusions and misunderstandings.”⁸⁰ Counselors should attempt to walk in humility as they listen to the stories of their counselees when they fail to do so they will inevitably find it difficult to have compassion for them or empathize with them in their suffering.

Second, a counselor’s love should be gentle. When Paul, in Galatians, lists the

⁷⁹ Jones, Kellen, Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 164.

⁸⁰ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub, 2002), 168.

fruit of the Spirit he includes gentleness and then immediately applies it. Galatians 6:1 says, “Brothers and sisters if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit.” In this passage, Paul sees it as necessary to remind the Galatians of the necessity of gentleness when restoring people who are caught up in sin, how much more should counselors exhibit a spirit of gentleness when dealing with sufferers, regardless of the source of their suffering? These two relational graces are what marked Christ as a place of refuge for sufferers. Jesus says, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn from me, because I am lowly and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt 11:28-29). The same word for gentle here in Matthew 11 is used in Galatians to describe the fruit of the spirit and the spirit with which they should restore people. This relational grace allows counselors to approach suffering counselees with care, the way Christ has approached them. Jones et al. describes what gentleness looks like in the heart of the counselor when they write, “Care, consideration, tenderness, and kindness—in content and tone—must mark our attitude toward those who seek our help.”⁸¹

Third, a counselor’s love should prompt him to be affectionately moved by the suffering of the individual. Romans 12:15 and the command to “Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep” are given to instruct the Roman church on what love looks like when given joyful or grief-filled information from those they love. This does not bring with it a command to shed a tear in every counseling session, however, if a counselor can move from session to session without no emotional feeling toward their suffering counselees, then they have ceased to be compassionate like Christ. Christ’s love for people moved him. Christ shed tears when confronted with people’s suffering and grief and this affection should be a normal experience of the counselor as well.

⁸¹ Jones, Kellen, Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 167.

Ways Counselors Abort Compassion

The reality is that counselors are sinners, and because they are sinners, they will struggle to engage their counsees in the way that Christ engaged people. As counselors engage the suffering stories of their counsees there may be a tendency to cut off empathy and compassion before they can take full root in the counselor's heart. Instead of being like Christ who looked on the crowds, assessed their suffering, and allowed the suffering to move him to compassion, these counselors assess the suffering in ways that prevent compassion.

The first way in which counselors abort compassion is that they negatively compare the counselee's suffering to their own. This means that the counselor may have a similar suffering experience (either personally or through counseling others with similar experience) and use that experience to downplay the suffering of the person in front of them, or they could not have a similar experience and therefore minimize the suffering from a place of ignorance. The counselor decides that the person's perspective is overblown and therefore not worthy of compassion or patience. These judgments come from a counselor who allows their own lens to be authoritative to the experience of another person. As they prioritize their way of thinking about someone else's experience they inevitably isolate the counselee, make it known that they do not truly understand them, and fail to have compassion the way God has had compassion on them.

The second way counselors abort compassion is by perceiving the sinful aspects of the counselee's experience to loom larger than the suffering aspects of the experience. In many counseling contexts, counselors will move too quickly to sin and not dwell on the suffering of the counselee and this, in turn, prevents compassion from developing. Kellemen states his concern with this by saying,

Recently while supervising a counselor during a live counseling session, I observed as the counselor listened as his male counselee talked about his responses to several life losses and ministry difficulties. Quite quickly, the counselor moved into idols of the heart, sharing, "It sounds to me like you have an idol of the heart of comfort and ease. Where can we look in Scripture to see how God wants you to repent of this

heart idolatry?”⁸²

This counselor drew out information that should have moved him toward empathy and compassion, however, his focus was only on the sin of the responses to suffering and did not seek to understand or even make mention of the suffering. He ceased seeking to understand and attempted to address sin without truly understanding their experience. Also, the presence of sin, if understood from a Christian perspective, should not stop compassion but rather invite it. Jones et al. explain that typically show compassion to innocent sufferers. Then they write, “But Scripture goes beyond that. It pictures God showing compassion even to those whose suffering was self-induced.”⁸³ Counselors should allow for the suffering component of the counselee’s story and the sinful components of that story to move them toward compassion.

The third way in which counselors abort compassion is by allowing the emotions of their counselee to drive them toward a quick, or Christless solution. In counseling, counselors often will hear stories that are horrific, uncomfortable, or touch close to their own experience. In this example, the counselor may not stop compassion and empathy by not listening or understanding the counselee’s story but rather as they listen, they may become so overwhelmed by their own emotional state that they attempt to either shut down the conversation or fix the immediate distress for their own sakes by way of lesser help. In a similar fashion to the first two ways, this third way centers the counseling on the preference or perspective of the counselor and not of the counselee or the greater task of Christ in the counselee’s life. It is a type of selfishness and because empathy must come out of a disposition of love, these types of engaging in counseling fall short of empathy.

⁸² Kellemen, *Consider Your Counsel*, 27.

⁸³ Jones, Kellen, Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*, 164.

Conclusion

Empathy, understood as a disposition of love whereby one willingly resonates with the experience of a sufferer, is essential to the counseling task. Counseling's goal is compassion. Compassion recognizes a sufferer and sets out to alleviate their suffering and empathy's role in this action is to understand the suffering. Empathy informs compassion by listening to the story of the sufferer and listening for the way their hearts and bodies have responded to and been impacted by their story to judge the nature and extent of their suffering. There are also set of skills, consistent with empathy, that help counselors to understand their counsees better through observation and listening, to communicate that understanding well, as well as to draw attention to aspects of their story to deepen both the counselor and counselee's understanding. Lastly, empathy is not simply about the type of information to listen for, or the skills required to gather the information it is fundamentally dependent on the counselor's heart to be ready to receive that information with a disposition of humility, gentleness, and affection.

Empathy is not the most important aspect of counseling; however, it is the condition on which everything that comes after it depends. By judging rightly the nature and extent of the suffering of the individual, the counselor is enabled to apply the right gospel balm to alleviate their suffering. Without it, counselors will lack both the compassion of Christ and the ability to help the sufferer.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay E., *The Christian Counselor's Casebook*. The Jay Adams Library. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- _____. *The Christian Counselor's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling*. The Jay Adams Library. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- _____. *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling*. The Jay Adams Library. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- _____. *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption*. The Jay Adams Library. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986.
- Allport, Gordon. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1954.
- Amazon Company News. "Amazon Announces Two New Leadership Principles." July 1, 2021. <https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/company-news/two-new-leadership-principles>.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981.
- Arnold, Clinton E. *Ephesians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament 10. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Augustine of Hippo. "On the Trinity." Translated by Arthur West Haddan. edited by William G. T. Shedd. In *A Select Library of the Christian Church: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, edited by Phillip Schaff, Series 1, vol. 3, *St. Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, 17-228. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. 2012.
- Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*. Pt. 1. Translated by J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958.
- Batson, C. Daniel. *The Altruism Question: Toward a Social Psychological Answer*. Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum, Associates, 1991.
- _____. "These Things Called Empathy: Related but Distinct Phenomena." In *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*. edited by Jean Decety and William Ickes, 3-15. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009.

- Baumgärtel, Friedrich, and Johannes Behm. “Καρδία, Καρδιογνώστης, Σκληροκαρδία.” In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 3, edited by Gerhard Kittel, G. W Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, 605-613. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.
- Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*. Vol. 2, *God and Creation*. edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.
- _____. *Reformed Ethics*. Vol. 1, *Created, Fallen, and Converted Humanity*. edited by John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019.
- Beasley-Murray, George R. *John*, Vol. 36. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- Betts, Terry J. *Nehemiah: A Pastoral & Exegetical Commentary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Luke*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship*. San Francisco: Harper, 1978.
- Bozarth, Jerold D. “Rogerian Empathy in an Organismic Theory: A Way of Being.” In *The Social Neuroscience of Empathy*. edited by Jean Decety and William Ickes. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009.
- Bråten, Stein, *On Being Moved: From Mirror Neurons to Empathy*. Advances in Consciousness Research, Vol. 68. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007.
- Brooks, Nate. “Understanding the DSM.” Grace and Truth Blog, February 21, 2022. <https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2022/02/21/understanding-the-dsm/>.
- Brown, Brené. Brené Brown on Empathy. Educational Video, 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw>.
- Brunner, Emil. *Dogmatics*. Vol. 2, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*. Translated by Olive Wyon. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952.
- Cabrido, John Aranda. *The Portrayal of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: A Narrative-Critical and Theological Study*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010.
- Cairns, David. *The Image of God in Man*. London: SCM Press, 1953.
- Calvin, Jean. *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses, Calvin’s Commentaries*. Vol. 1. Translated by William Binham. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981.
- _____. *Commentary on the Gospel According to Joh. Calvin’s Commentaries*. Vol. 18. Translated by William Pringle. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981.
- _____. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. Peabody,

- MA: Hendrickson, 2008.
- Clark, Arthur J. *Empathy and Mental Health: An Integral Model for Developing Therapeutic Skills in Counseling and Psychotherapy*. New York: Routledge, 2023.
- Clinton, Timothy E., George W. Ohlschlager, and American Association of Christian Counselors. *Competent Christian Counseling*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2002.
- Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2012.
- Cole, R. A. *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 2. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008.
- Collins, Gary R. *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*. 3rd ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Coppes, Leonard J. “2146 םַרְרָ.” In *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. edited by R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. Chicago: Moody Press, 1999.
- Decety, Jean, and William Ickes. *Social Neuroscience of Empathy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
- Dempster, Stephen G. *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 15. Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Emler, Michael. “Understanding the Influences on the Human Heart.” *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 47–52.
- Fitzpatrick, Elyse, and Laura Hendrickson. *Will Medicine Stop the Pain? Finding God’s Healing for Depression, Anxiety & Other Troubling Emotions*. Chicago: Moody, 2006.
- Fitzpatrick, Elyse, and Dennis E. Johnson. *Counsel from the Cross: Connecting Broken People to the Love of Christ*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Frame, John M. *The Doctrine of God*. A Theology of Lordship. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub, 2002.
- _____. *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*. A Theology of Lordship. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub, 2008.
- France, R. T. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2008.
- France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New

- Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007.
- Friedman, Edwin H., Margaret M. Treadwell, and Edward W. Beal. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. 10th anniv. ed. New York: Church, 2017.
- Gardner, Paul. *1 Corinthians*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.
- Green, Joel B. *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1997.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Groves, J. Alasdair, and Winston T. Smith. *Untangling Emotions*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.
- Hamilton, James M. *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 1, *Theology*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003.
- Hodges, Charles D. *Good Mood, Bad Mood: Help and Hope for Depression and Bipolar Disorder*. Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2012.
- Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994.
- Holmes, Jonathan. *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship*. Minneapolis, MN: Cruciform Press, 2014.
- Irenaeus of Lyons. *St. Irenaeus of Lyons against Heresies*. edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Jackson, MS: Ex Fontibus, 2010.
- Ivey, Allen E., Mary Bradford Ivey, and Carlos P. Zalaquett. *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling: Facilitating Client Development in a Multicultural Society*. 9th ed. Boston: Cengage Learning, 2018.
- Johnson, Eric L. *God & Soul Care: The Therapeutic Resources of the Christian Faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017.
- Jones, Robert D. *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- Jones, Robert D., Kristen Kellen, and Robert Green. *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*. Nashville: Baker Academic,

2021.

Kapic, Kelly M. *You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022.

Kellemen, Robert W. *Consider Your Counsel: Addressing Ten Mistakes in Our Biblical Counseling*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021.

_____. *Gospel Conversations: How to Care like Christ*. Equipping Biblical Counselors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.

_____. *Gospel-Centered Counseling: How Christ Changes Lives*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.

_____. *Gospel-Centered Family Counseling: An Equipping Guide for Pastors and Counselors*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020.

_____. *Gospel-Centered Marriage Counseling: An Equipping Guide for Pastors and Counselors*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020.

Kittel, Gerhard, G. W Bromiley, Gerhard Friedrich, and Ronald E Pitkin. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

Koestler, Arthur. *Insight and Outlook*. New York, NY: Macmillan, 1949.

Köster, Helmut. “Σπλάγγνον, Σπλαγγνίζομαι, Εὔσπλαγγνος, Πολύσπλαγγνος, Ἄσπλαγγνος.” In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 7, edited by Gerhard Kittel, G. W Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, 548-559. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1964.

Krznaric, Roman. *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It*. New York: Perigee, 2015.

Lambert, Heath. “The Theological Development of the Biblical Counseling Movement from 1988.” PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009.

_____. *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016.

Lane, Timothy S., and Paul David Tripp. *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2006.

Langberg, Diane. *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse*. Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2003.

Lanzoni, Susan Marie. *Empathy: A History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018.

Lee, Cameron. “Parenting as Discipleship: A Contextual Motif for Christian Parent

- Education.” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 19, no. 3 (1991): 268–77.
- Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. 1st Perennial classics ed. Perennial Classics. New York: Harper Collins, 2002.
- Lelek, Jeremy. *Biblical Counseling Basics: Roots, Beliefs, and Future*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2018.
- Liu, Esther, Michael Emler, and Samuel J. Alex. “Why Cultural Context Matters in Biblical Counseling.” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 36, no. 1 (2022): 7–39.
- Longman, Tremper. *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Volumes 15-16. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic/ InterVarsity Press, 2014.
- Luther, Martin. *Martin Luther Sermons*. Vol. 4, translated by John Nicholas Lenker. Accessed on November 4, 2022, http://sermons.martinluther.us/Luther_Lenker_Vol_4.pdf.
- MacArthur, John and Wayne A. Mack. *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*. The John MacArthur Pastor’s Library. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2005.
- Mathews, K. A. *Genesis*. The New American Commentary 1A-1B. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995.
- McCarthy, Amanda K. “Relationship between Rehabilitation Counselor Efficacy for Counseling Skills and Client Outcomes.” *Journal of Rehabilitation* 80, no. 2 (2014): 3–11.
- McClellan, John. “Humanity: The Need of Theological Anthropology for Everyday Ministry.” In *Theology for Ministry: How Doctrine Affects Pastoral Life and Practice*. edited by William R. Edwards, John C. A. Ferguson, and Chad B. Van Dixhoorn, 89-108. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2022.
- McKenzie, K., A. Russell, and G. Fairchild. “Empathic Accuracy and Cognitive and Affective Empathy in Young Adults With and Without Autism Spectrum Disorder.” *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 52, nos. 2004–2018 (May 2021).
- Miller, William R. *Listening Well: The Art of Empathic Understanding*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018.
- Morgan, Robert J. *Then Sings My Soul*. Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2003.
- Nesbit Sbanotto, Elisabeth A., Heather Davediuk Gingrich, and Fred C. Gingrich. *Skills for Effective Counseling: A Faith-Based Integration*. Christian Association for Psychological Studies. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016.
- Nussbaum, Martha Craven. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. 8. print.

- Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Obama, Barak. "Obama to Graduates: Cultivate Empathy." *Northwestern University News*, June 19, 2006, <https://www.northwestern.edu/newscenter/stories/2006/06/barack.html>.
- Ogders, Andrew. *From Broken Attachments to Earned Security*. London: Karnac Books, 2014.
- Osborne, Grant R. *Matthew*. Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament 1. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.
- Pierre, Jeremy. *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016.
- _____. "Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart: The Centrality of Faith in Christ to the Restoration of Human Functioning" PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010.
- Pierre, Jeremy, and Greg Wilson. *When Home Hurts: A Guide for Responding Wisely to Domestic Abuse in Your Church*. Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2021.
- Powlison, David. "Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies)." *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 5–36.
- Rigney, Joe. "Empathy, Sympathy, and Dangerous Virtues." *Desiring God Blog*, May 2, 2020. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/do-you-feel-my-pain>.
- Roberts, Robert C. "Carl Rogers and the Christian Virtues." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 13, no. 4 (1985): 263–73.
- Rogers, Carl R. *A Way of Being*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980.
- Schreiner, Thomas R., Andreas J. Köstenberger, and T. Desmond Alexander. *Commentary on Hebrews*. Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation. Nashville: B&H, 2015.
- Segal, Elizabeth A., Karen E. Gerdes, and Cynthia A. Lietz. *Assessing Empathy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.
- Senkbeil, Harold L. *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019.
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Sproul, R. C. *God's Love: How the Infinite God Cares for His Children*. 2nd ed. Classic Theology Series. Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 2012.

- Strickland, Darby. "Foundations of Trauma Care for Biblical Counselors." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 36, no. 2 (2022).
- Tancharoen, Kevin, dir. *Marvel: Agents of Shield*. Season 7, Episode 13, "What We're Fighting For." Written by Jed Whedon. Aired August 12, 2020, on ABC.
- Thomas, John C, and Lisa Sosin. *Therapeutic Expedition: Equipping the Christian Counselor for the Journey*. Nashville: B&H, 2011.
- Titchenor, Edward Bradford. *A Beginner's Psychology*. New York: The Maximillian Company, 1924.
- Tripp, Paul David. *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change*. Resources for Changing Lives. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub, 2002.
- Turner, David L. *Matthew*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine 18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Waal, F. B. M. de. *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society*. 1st ed. New York: Harmony Books, 2009.
- Warfield, Benjamin Breckinridge. *The Emotional Life of Our Lord*. Crossway Short Classics. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022.
- Webster, John. *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*. Vol. 1, *God and the Works of God*. London: T&T Clark, 2018.
- _____. *God without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology*. Vol. 2, *Virtue and Intellect*. London: T&T Clark, 2018.
- Welch, Ed. "How Theology Shapes Ministry: Jay Adam's View of the Flesh and an Alternative." *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 20, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 16–25.
- Welch, Edward T. *Blame It on the Brain? Distinguishing Chemical Imbalances, Brain Disorders, and Disobedience*. Resources for Changing Lives. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998.
- White, Thomas Joseph. *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God*. Thomistic Ressourcement Series 19. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022.
- Whitman, Lauren. *A Biblical Counseling Process: Guidance for the Beginning, Middle, and End*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021.

Wilson, Douglas. "The Sin of Empathy." Canon Press. October 1, 2019. YouTube video, 1:07:45. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6i9a3Rfd7yI>.

Wright, N. T. *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, v. 12. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008.

Yarbrough, Robert W. *1-3 John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

ABSTRACT

A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION OF EMPATHY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON THE MINISTRY OF GOD'S WORD

Joseph Edward Hussung, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jeremy P. Pierre

This thesis will argue that empathy is a disposition of love that willingly resonates with the experience of another image-bearer. This disposition is an activity that conveys God's chief design purpose for human relationships, which is to know God and to make Him known.

In the first chapter, this thesis will introduce empathy and the surrounding themes this thesis will examine. In the second chapter, this thesis will examine God's purpose in relationships, as rooted in the *imago Dei* and place empathy within that larger purpose. In the third chapter, it will locate empathy within God's command to be compassionate as God is compassionate (Luke 6:36), showing that empathy is a necessary implication of that command. In the final chapter, it will practically apply the framework within a biblical counseling methodology and to the heart of the counselor.

VITA

Joseph Edward Hussung

EDUCATION

BA, Western Kentucky University, 2007
MDiv., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016

ORGANIZATIONS

Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Garrett Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville,
Kentucky, 2022-

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastor of Worship and Education; Interim Pastor, White Stone Quarry Baptist
Church, Bowling Green, Kentucky, 2008-2011
Student Pastor, Summit Baptist Church, Acworth, Georgia, 2011-2015
Associate Pastor, Living Hope Baptist Church, Hopkinsville, Kentucky, 2016-
2019
Founder/Director, New Creation Biblical Counseling, Hopkinsville, Kentucky,
2021-
Remote Counseling Coordinator; Counselor, Fieldstone Counseling,
Uniontown, Ohio, 2021-