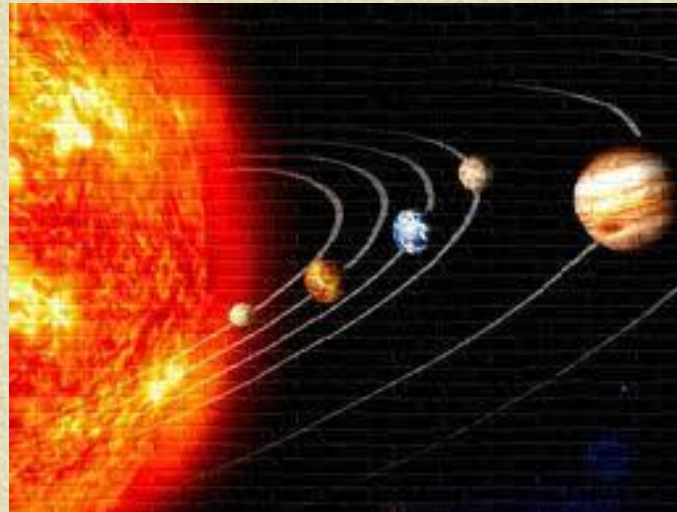


---

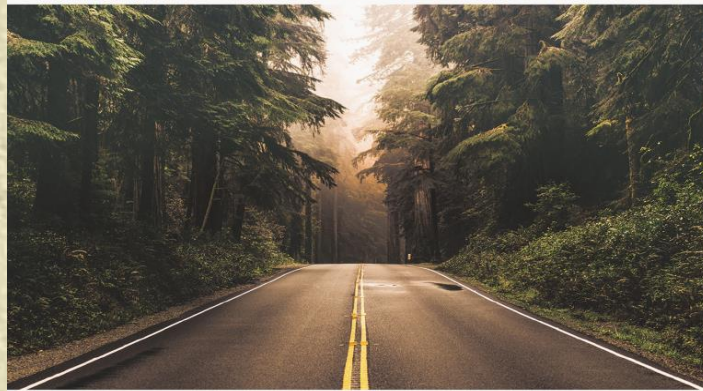
# The *Center* of Christian Counseling



---

ERIC L. JOHNSON

Author of *Foundations for Soul Care*



God &  
Soul Care

THE THERAPEUTIC RESOURCES  
— of —  
THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

# The *Center* of Christian Counseling

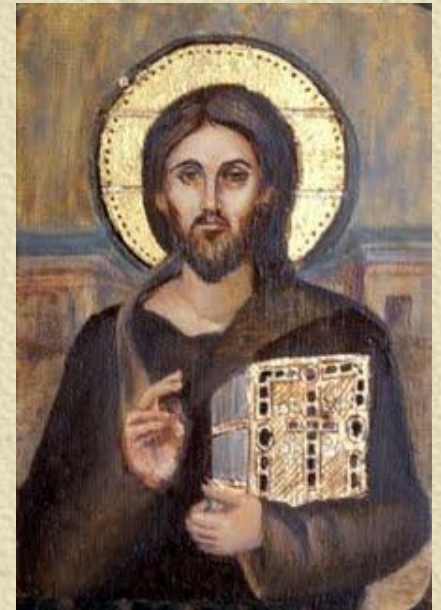
---

- ✦ There are many, many things to focus on in counseling. What ought to be the *center* of our counseling? What ought we to *concentrate on* in our people-helping?
- ✦ Childhood background? Sin? Identity issues? The Bible? Problems that people are having? Strategies to help?

# The *Center* of Christian Counseling

---

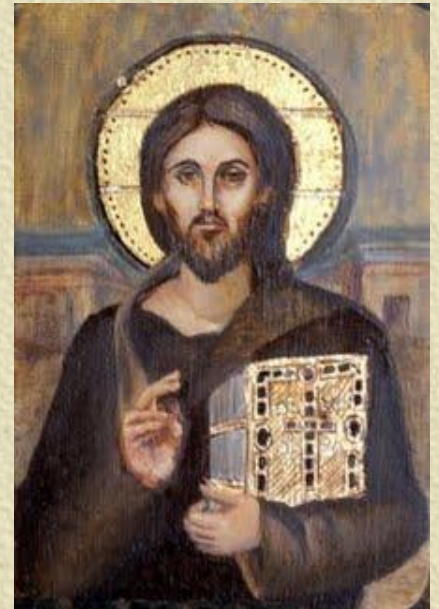
✠ Jesus Christ, the Son of God/Son of Man, revealed through the main events of his story: his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation.



# The *Center* of Christian Counseling

---

- ✦ There are many techniques that we can use with both Christians and non-Christians, because of God's *creation grace*. Today we're talking about techniques that can only be used with Christians, because of *redemptive grace*—because they are united to Christ



# The *Center* of Christian Counseling

✦ Obviously, this markedly distinguishes Christian soul care with Christians

What is the center of secular counseling?

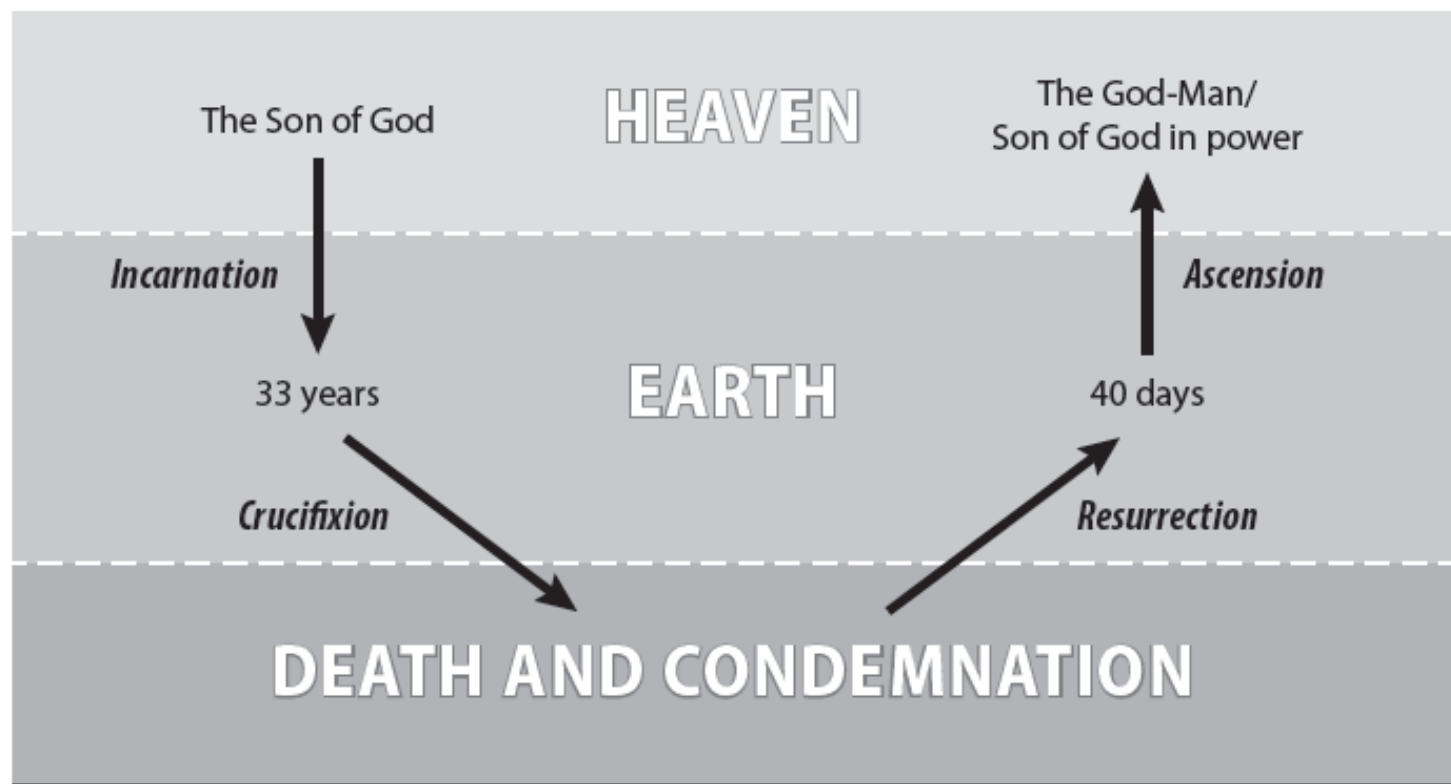
What are the soul-care advantages of Christ being the center of the Christian's life?

✦ He is outside us and our subjectivity

✦ This center is relational—he is the great physician and lover of our souls

✦ This center is exceedingly beautiful

# The Main Events of Christ's Story



**Fig. 12.1.** Key Events in Christ's story

# Son of God/Son of Man

---

## Christ's Incarnation and Life and the Care of Souls



“In Christ, God’s nature becomes lovely to us, and ours to God.”

Richard Sibbes



# Soul-Care Teaching from Christ's Incarnation and Life

Jesus Christ is the union of God and humanity in one person: *God became a human to rescue humanity*

- ✦ He reconciled God and human beings in his own body and soul, forever. God manifested his glory and showed he desires our wellbeing
- ✦ This underscored that humans are in the image of God and have the capacity for perfect, finite correspondence
- ✦ Human life and the created self are good and worthwhile: our bodies, personalities, faculties, activity, relationships, even self-love

# Soul-Care Teaching from Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

Jesus Christ is the Word of God: *He showed us  
what God is like concretely*

- ✦ God is holy, good, wise, and earnest
- ✦ Though the greatest of beings, God is unimaginably humble
- ✦ Broken, hurting, and sinful people are important to God

# Soul-Care Teaching from Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

Jesus Christ laid aside his divine rights (Php 2:6-7), for a time, in obedience to his Father and for humanity: *He exemplified the divine strength as a pattern for human life*

What is *kenosis*?

Activity based in strength of character that entails self-denial (the turning from one's own satisfaction, rights, benefits, or goods) for the glory of God, and the wellbeing of others and ultimately oneself.

# Soul-Care Teaching from Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

Jesus Christ is the True Human: *He showed us  
what humanity is supposed to be like*

- ✦ Christ on earth was the ideal of mental wellbeing
- ✦ Christ lived in dependence on the Father (Jn 5:19).  
He did nothing “from himself/out of himself”  
(*aph heautou*), only what he saw the Father  
doing

# Soul-Care Teaching from Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

Jesus Christ was in the likeness of sinful flesh (Ro 8:3), yet he never sinned: *He identified himself with humanity in order to redeem it*

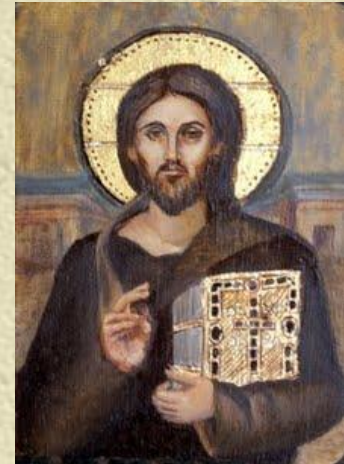
His perfect humanity developed and his character was improved through suffering: *To grow and develop is good and even suffering can be turned into good*

# Soul-Care Teaching from Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

The union of Christ's greatness and humility show he is "excellent":

*He is a beautiful human  
being to behold*



In stark contrast to secular versions, Christian soul care brings the life of Another directly into therapeutic considerations

# Psychospiritual Benefits of Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

## Union with Christ in his life

Christ became to us “wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1Co 1:30) He *is* our righteousness (justification by faith)

When believers read the life of Christ, they are reading *their* life, credited to them, in which they are identified by the Father (Christ's active obedience)

# Some Psychospiritual Benefits of Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

1. Christ is our role-model whose perfect life has been credited to believers
2. He is our ultimate comparison criterion
3. Christ and our Need for Idealization

We were made to have heroes

Danger: Unconscious sinful desire to imitate God autonomously



# Psychospiritual Benefits of Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

## 4. Christ and our Need for Identification

Danger: Over-identification, Unmediated by  
Christ

Redemptive identification grows in accepting  
there is no absolute identification

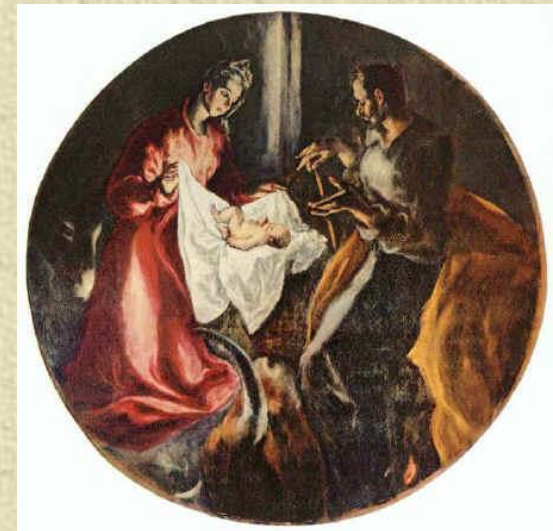
## 5. Following Christ's Example in Kenosis: The Advanced Call of Cruciformity

# Therapeutic Strategies Based on Christ's Incarnation and Life

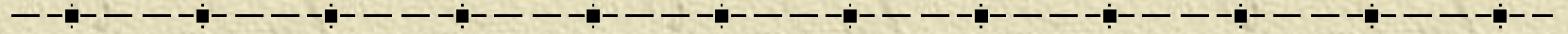
---

A father says he has a hard time apologizing to his daughter after they get into an argument, because “I’m the parent and I shouldn’t have to bow and scrap before her when she’s in the wrong.”

Kindly bring up the paradox of the Son of God humbling himself by becoming a baby, in order to love us, even though we’re in the wrong



# Therapeutic Strategies Based on Christ's Incarnation and Life



For a woman who is feeling condemned by others for some sin, have her imagine she is the woman in John 8 and then have her close her eyes, while you read it aloud.

# Therapeutic Strategies Based on Christ's Incarnation and Life

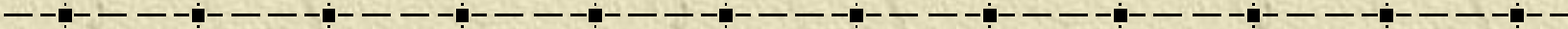
---

For someone who is overwhelmed with a sense of her badness and is having a hard time grasping that she is holy and righteous in Christ say, “We are all selfish sinners by ourselves, and it is good that you are aware of that. But God has joined you together with Christ forever, so that all the good he has done has been given to you and credited to your account, so you are considered by the Father to be as good as Christ is.”

“Let’s read Mark 1 and see how Christ lived on earth to give to others. Close your eyes and accept that all of his goodness has been given to you and replaced your badness.”



# Therapeutic Strategies Based on Christ's Incarnation and Life



For a person who is filled with shame about how broken she is, ask her to acknowledge and connect with that feeling, and then say to her three times, Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Then, ask her to repeat after you three times, Jesus said, “Blessed am I, the poor in spirit, for mine is the kingdom of heaven.”

# Therapeutic Strategies Based on Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

With an anxious counselee, invite him to close his eyes and identify the anxiety he is feeling in his body. Then, think of Jesus Christ having the same kind of body you have and meditate on how his perfect divinity permeated his human body and transformed whatever human anxiety he would feel in his body.



Well, you have the divine Holy Spirit inside you. Let him in his divinity do the same to your anxiety; let him dissolve it and transform it in your body.

# Therapeutic Strategies Based on Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

For someone who is feeling really stuck and unable to make a change in getting triggered by his wife. Have him close his eyes and take a moment owning that feeling of powerlessness, and then invite him to imagine he is the man in the story that Jesus is going to heal, and then read slowly John 5:2-8, and imagine that you are that person stuck in feeling helpless to change your behavior with wife, and you hear Jesus say to you, "Rise up, you can do it, you can change," and let yourself feel his power entering your body and get up. Then imagine the present situation.

# Therapeutic Strategies Based on Christ's Incarnation and Life

---

For someone who is talking about her sadness and loneliness and is already in her emotions, invite her to close her eyes and acknowledge those feelings for a few moments, while you pull out the Bible and then read Matthew 11:28-30: “Come to me, all how are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Imagine Christ saying that to you. What do you want from him? Let him hold you in his arms and tell you again. “Come to me...”



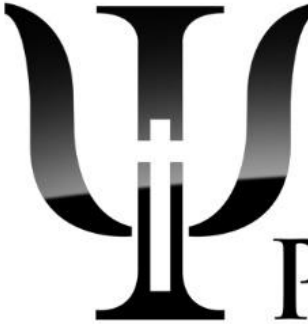
# Incarnation Teaching for Counselors

- 
- ✦ Believers (e.g., pastors, counselors) are New Creation “incarnations” of Christ to others



---

[www.Christianpsych.org](http://www.Christianpsych.org)



SOCIETY *for*  
CHRISTIAN  
PSYCHOLOGY