

It is more helpful to encourage counselees to bring out the anger, whatever it is, and train them to distinguish between good and bad anger, so they can deal with each appropriately, since each has to be handled very differently from the other. Most cases though will require that the counselee engage in strategies for both.

For counselees presenting with uncontrolled anger, the wisdom literature suggests that a key strategy is helping the individual learn ways of decelerating the arousal process. (This is not explicitly stated, but can be inferred from the fact that the righteous is described as “slow to anger,” Proverbs 14:17, 29, 16:32, 19:11; c.f. Ecclesiastes 7:8-9.) Developing skills for managing anger can decrease its destructive consequences, as well as give counselees time to ask important questions about their anger and grow in self-awareness. Scriptural admonitions against ungodly anger can motivate the counselee to gain mastery of this powerful emotion. Other doctrines, such as union with Christ or justification, will be crucial in this as well, addressing the guilt and shame that frequently accompany unbridled anger.

Counselees may also exhibit repressed anger, due to the belief that anger is intrinsically sinful. Such a belief may have been formed by misunderstandings of Scripture, as well as from learned ways of behaving that originated in their family-of-origin and other previous life experiences. Scripture can be used to deconstruct the anger-is-always-evil belief and to develop appreciation for its potential for good. Where anger is a legitimate reaction to evil—including evil directed against themselves—the counseling relationship can serve as a context for such feelings to be validated, perhaps for the first time. A significant goal for such counselees is the ability to experience their anger honestly, rather than repress it. As with uncontrolled anger that is deescalated or slowed down, the ability to experience repressed anger presents the opportunity to become inquisitive about what one’s anger means and to engage in deeper soul work.

When it comes to processing righteous anger, Christian counseling has a significant advantage over its secular counterparts in the form of prayer. The Psalms, especially, are filled with emotional venting to God. This brings up the somewhat controversial question of whether it is permissible to express anger toward God. Some contend that while complaints, questions, and grief are acceptable emotional contents of prayer, anger is not—rather it is blasphemous in

that it is making accusations against God (see Jones, 1996; Powlison, 1996b). There are good grounds for this concern. Scripture portrays anger *directed at God* as a response of the fool (Psalm 2:1-3; Proverbs 19:3). However, limiting the emotions in the Psalms and other biblical texts to grief, questions, and complaints does not seem to do justice to the emotionality of the texts. In addition, whatever emotions we attribute to the texts, many passages express outright accusations against God (Psalm 44:9-19; Psalm 77:6-9; Jeremiah 20:7; and Lamentations). It would seem that Scripture distinguishes between a defiant, unbelieving railing against God and an emotional outpouring of anger, grief, doubt, and complaint in the presence of God. We may surmise that such unedited outpourings of one’s emotions will sometimes result in the expression of sinful emotions that need transformation, but the presence of such prayers recorded in inspired Scripture indicates God can “handle it.” In reality, it may be that in the honest expression of anger that transformation has already begun.

A Case Study

Having explored the relevance of a theology of anger to soul care, perhaps it would be helpful to think through its practical implications in a specific scenario. Take for example, a Christian woman who seeks counseling after discovering her husband’s involvement in an affair. She is still in somewhat of a state of shock and confusion, but also reports feelings anger, grief, and guilt. In fact, she will probably bring with her a myriad of concerns and issues into the session: self-image related to her husband’s unfaithfulness, marriage conflict, questions regarding remaining in the marriage, etc. For our purposes, we will focus on her anger.

As a well-taught Christian, she comes knowing that she has to forgive her husband, but feels guilt over unrelenting feelings of anger and betrayal, saying that she knows she is “not to let the sun go down on her anger.” After exposure to Scripture’s theology of anger, she is able to let go of her overly literal interpretation of Ephesians 4:26. Instead, she allows herself to feel her anger, and eventually begins to find relief in prayer and journaling. She is able to identify ungodly ways her anger seeks revenge, and grows in her ability to leave this to God as she more deeply internalizes that God is angry on her behalf. She becomes curious about the intensity of her anger against her husband, and is able to be more honest about unresolved anger she holds toward her father for leaving her mother. In her newfound expression of

anger, she comes to recognize the degree to which she had previously repressed this emotion and the hindering effect this has had toward intimacy in her marriage. She finds encouragement that her anger can be an expression of hope, as she feels that her marriage is something worth fighting for.

Conclusion

As one broadly scans the many different Scripture passages addressing anger, it seems that to do justice to all of the biblical texts requires that we take seriously anger’s potential both for incredible good and for incredible evil. Aristotle comments on the difficulty of realizing this good potential saying, “Anyone can be angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy” (Lester, 2003, p. 117). Anger is an inevitable emotion in a fallen world, and can lead to either an escalation of evil or godly resistance to evil. Unfortunately, many people grow up with deficient training and modeling of how to rightly handle this powerful emotion. The Christian counselor has the privilege of helping individuals grow and develop toward experiences and expressions of anger that more clearly reflect the *Imago Dei*.

Sara Collins is a counseling student at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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SOUL & SPIRIT

Ψ SOCIETY for CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY
A DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS

2007

Volume 1, Issue 2

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3. A THEOLOGY OF ANGER FOR SOUL CARE

An Interview with Ellen Charry

Ellen T. Charry is associate professor of systematic and historical theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and editor of *Theology Today*. She has written, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (1997), an excellent examination of the formative value of theology in classical Christianity, and she is currently working on a book that will retrieve the Christian doctrine on happiness. She is a theologian committed to the development of a Christian psychology.

Interviewed by Nate Collins

What is your understanding of the definition of Christian psychology?

My definition of Christian psychology is that it is an understanding of the human person that grows out of the Christian belief that we are created by God for God’s purposes on Earth. This is really hard for us to do because we’re riddled with contradiction and confusion about who we are. This is built into the nature of what it means to be human. And so for me, Christian psychology is about getting a clearer picture of who we are in God and what is the “self in God” that we are to grow into. Our identity has been given to us by God, but it is limited and constrained by other features of our existence in time and space. The human person is in relationship to God whether they understand that or accept that or know that or not. Enjoying the fullness of human life is learning to grow into that identity. I believe that Christian psychology revolves around the fact that human beings love. Love is the fundamental orientation of human nature to all that is: self, others, the environment. How well we do at being the creatures that God has created us to be depends on how well we are able to love. When our love becomes distorted, we can’t do that very well. The psychotherapeutic goal [of Christian psychology] is to help people straighten out their love so that we love ourselves and God and

other people and the world in a way that enables God’s purposes for all of us to flourish.

What are some of the problems with the secular psychologies?

I think the problem with secular psychology is that it lacks both grounds for understanding God and a framework for understanding the meaning of life that is larger than the one we construct on our own. That makes life very difficult, because you have to chart a path for yourself, and when one path doesn’t work, you have to try another one. The Christian life is clearer and easier to see because your identity is given to you by God. It’s still hard to figure out how to live our lives well, but it’s a lot easier than needing to fend off the cultural influences on you and figure yourself out in relationship to that. Maybe some people would say that it’s just as hard, because the culture is so powerful that to find the way God wants you to go is also very challenging. That’s why some people think that Christians are weak, because they can’t do this themselves, and they have to rely on God. I think this creates a bond between people that the secular psychological framework doesn’t offer, and it makes the secular worldview have much more difficulty in enabling people to come together for the sake of joint projects and

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creating harmony in the world. Another problem I have with the secular psychological worldview is that it doesn't account for the fact that a lot of the psychological, emotional, and social problems that people struggle with have moral and ethical foundations. Christianity offers a way of understanding our psychodynamics that also has ethical dynamics. This is missing in secular psychology. Because it hopes in yourself, it is completely humanistic. Now, it's not that I'm not a Christian humanist. I'm a humanist, but I'm not a secular humanist. And Christianity is deeply humanist in that it's interested in the human project. I think humanism has gotten a bad rap among some Christians who think that all humanism is secular humanism. Calvin was a humanist; Augustine was a humanist, so I think we have to use that word very advisedly. I am a Christian humanist, and I think God is, too. But He cares about us, and He wants us to care about each other, too. So these are some of the things that I think are problematic about secular psychology. But I also think it has important things to teach us. Christians should not be polemical against it, but just use it with great discretion. I think some parts of the Christian community rejected it too much and others embraced it too uncritically. And now we have to find a way that is grounded in a Christian understanding of who we are in God, and being united with God is a way for us to discriminatingly be in conversation with secular psychology. We might not agree with some of its fundamental principles, but perhaps we can make use of some of its strategies and some of its understanding of psychodynamics.

Could you comment on the retreat of Christians out of the practice of soul care in the early 20th century?

I think that took place in certain branches of Christianity. I don't think it was universal, and I think it depends on how you define soul care. Pastoral care has always been a part of the Christian arena. I think for some people in the early 20th century, there became an awareness that Christianity is also a political force in the world. They suddenly realized that Christians could make a difference in the world, whether it came from the

evangelical side of missionizing Africa, or whether it came from the American Rauschenbusch social justice side that we see now in liberation theology. Christians began to see that they could organize themselves in the interest of furthering social justice in the world. What this did, whether on the liberal or conservative side, is that it eclipsed the interior work of the soul. I think that's understandable because sometimes our collective attention centers quickly on "big" problems. When we see big social problems, then Christians turn to that. So I think this is a pendulum thing, and it's quite understandable that some things are more important at certain periods, and then fade away, and then other things become more important, and they are then retrieved.

Could you comment on the importance of the doctrine of creation in the practice of counseling?

I think some people begin to think Christianly from the doctrine of creation, and some people begin to think about human nature and Christian psychology from the doctrine of the Fall. My concern with people who begin with the doctrine of the Fall is that they have trouble finding a way of repair. Sometimes the goal can become turning away from the defect, rather than repairing it. I think that God created us good, but we're confused and divided within ourselves... conflicted. But I think that God wants us to be built back into the goodness of His creation. For me, the doctrine of creation is very important because it permits repair of the soul. This means that it is our very self that is repaired and strengthened. This is a more helpful and positive orientation to Christian nurture.



Him to wield such immense power without corruption.

The Scriptural commands to refrain from revenge and love one's enemies do not prohibit feelings of anger, but provide parameters and direction for what one does with it. As with all other emotions, it is to be channeled and directed by a love of God and neighbor. In fact, belief in God's anger is a significant component of the believer's ability to relinquish revenge. In reference to Romans 12:19, Schreiner (1998) comments that an assurance of God's future wrath against injustice is a critical component in the ability to love one's enemies.

Perhaps the most frequently noted verse in defense of anger is Ephesians 4:26: "Be angry and yet do not sin." What is significant is the double imperative—for anger, and against sin. On the basis of Psalm 4:4 (which Paul is presumably referencing), some argue that it would be better translated, "if you are angry, do not sin" (see O'Brien, 1999, pp. 339-341). Either way, the first imperative is interpreted; Paul is making a distinction between anger and sin, implying that it is not inherently evil. The instruction to "not let the sun go down on your anger" need not be taken literally to mean that anger must be fully resolved by nightfall. It is a figurative way of exhorting a prompt response to anger (O'Brien, p. 340). Perhaps a contemporary parallel would be: don't try to "move on," while carrying unresolved anger in your soul.

Not only is anger sometimes legitimate—sometimes it is a necessary response. Common wisdom recognizes that in some contexts a lack of anger would be indicative of moral deficiency. Anger is a God-like response to blatant evil and injustice. One *should* feel anger in response to reports of violent killing, child prostitution, or heinous war crimes, and so on. Of course, getting angry at something that is a legitimate evil does not guarantee that one's anger will necessarily be godly. But an absence of any emotional protest in

the face of such events would be a sign of moral weakness rather than moral strength. Scripture indicates that there is such a thing as "righteous anger" by various accounts of anger positively portrayed (Numbers 25:10ff; Exodus 32; Psalm 119:53, 139:19-22; 2 Corinthians 7:11). This must be held with caution though: it is all too easy to over-identify our own personal interests with God's and rationalize unholy anger as "righteous indignation." Judging the righteousness or unrighteousness of anger requires wisdom and transparent, interdependent living within the body of Christ, as our capacity for anger is transformed from its deformed state to one that is increasingly able to respond in concert with the heart of its Maker.

All this raises the question: If anger can be virtuous or vicious, is it neutral? Is anger something that simply is, which may then be managed or expressed in ethical or unethical ways? Lester (2003) provides a compelling case that it is not (see esp. ch. 10). Defining anger as an arousal pattern in response to perceived threat, Lester ties this into the concept of narrative, arguing that personal narrative is the context out of which people interpret what is threatening to them and what is not. Often anger that has "gone bad" has roots in one's narrative that still is in need of the Gospel's transforming, healing power. He argues that individuals are responsible to allow their personal narratives to be transformed by Scripture, thus redefining what they find threatening. If this is true, it is insufficient and even irresponsible to focus on helping people manage their anger in a godly way without exploring why they are angry in light of their whole narrative.

In summary, the best way to account for all that Scripture says regarding anger is to view it as part of the *Imago Dei*, and originates in creation. The human capacity for anger is a good created structure but has become warped by the Fall and is often hijacked for evil. With little effort, it can create great destruction and harm, but by

God's grace it can be redeemed and become a force for great good.

Application to Soul Care

As is well-known, many clients will bring issues of anger into the counseling room—if not as a presenting problem, then often as a component of what they are struggling with. As previously alluded to, a key role of the counselor is aiding the counselee in understanding and evaluating their anger. Anger, like other emotions, can serve as a signal, pointing us to inner dynamics, beliefs, values, and narratives. Through exploration of these largely unconscious dynamics, the counselee can gain self-awareness, which in turn creates possibilities for deeper applications of the Gospel, and a reconstruction of beliefs, values, and narratives into greater conformity with the truth revealed in Scripture. Understanding the capacity for anger as originating in creation, reflecting God's own character, and holding potential to empower for good, can provide hope to the counselee that this part of them that is so often a source of shame has the possibility of redemption and usefulness.

Talking of anger in categories of good and bad is somewhat artificial and misleading, because the vast majority of experiences and expressions of anger will not fit neatly into one category or the other. This is perhaps the greatest counseling challenge when dealing with anger. It is probably more accurate and helpful to think of individual instances of anger along a continuum of lesser to greater godliness or anti-godliness.

When sinful anger is identified, repentance is in order. This entails helping the counselee acknowledge the wrong before God, and turn from it, in light of the Gospel. The challenge, here, is promoting such repentance without promoting repression and denial, so common among Christians who take the Bible seriously. Unfortunately, this results in the anger simply "going underground," so that it never gets resolved.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE SOCIETY FOR CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

The Society exists to promote the development of a distinctly Christian psychology (including theory, research, and practice) that is based on a Christian vision of human nature.

Amplification of the Mission Statement

A Christian vision of human nature is shaped primarily by the Christian Scriptures, as well as Christianity's intellectual and ecclesial traditions. However, a Christian psychology will also be critically informed by other relevant

sources of psychological truth, particularly its own reflection, research, and practice, but also the psychological work of other traditions (e.g., secular psychology), philosophy, human experience, and the other human sciences. While God's understanding of human nature is the goal of a Christian psychology, given human finitude and the existence of distinct Christian traditions, the Society welcomes those working from any perspective within the historic Christian Church.

Implementation of the Mission Statement

The Society will seek to advance the development of a Christian psychology by creating opportunities for dialogue and fellowship through its newsletter, website, and conferences, and by encouraging reflection, research, publishing, soul-care, education, and training that are intentionally committed to the realization of a distinctly Christian psychology.

anger (Lamentations 4:11). Anger is also symbolized by objects—such as a cup or winepress (Revelation 14:10, 19). Doubtless, anger often leads to ungodly action, but one need not define anger as an action to keep it under the jurisdiction of morality or personal agency.

Anger: A Virtue or a Vice?

But Powlison is correct that anger is often expressed in action and always something with moral implications. Scripture speaks unambiguously about the powerful capacity of anger for evil and the havoc and destruction it can produce in human lives and relationships—not only relationships between humans, but also in relationship with God. It is found repeatedly in various lists of vices recorded in the New Testament (Galatians 5:19-21, Colossians 3:8, 2 Corinthians 12:20, Ephesians 4:31). Paul instructs that prayers should be untainted by anger or quarreling (1 Timothy 2:8). James warns that human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness (James 1:20). Proverbs contains numerous references to the fool as angry: the angry person stirs up strife (29:2); if rescued from the consequences of his anger, he will only have to be rescued again (19:19); and he should be avoided lest one learn his ways (22:24). The Psalmist warns his reader to cease from anger and forsake wrath (Psalm 37:8). Perhaps most sobering are Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount, where He draws a tight correlation between anger and murder (Mt. 5:21-22), indicating that divine judgment is not only rendered upon actions, but also the heart disposition from which such actions can spring. In addition Christ commands that His people love their enemies and refrain from taking revenge (Matthew 5:43-48, Romans 12:17-21), which He beautifully exemplified as He subjected Himself to the suffering of the cross.

In reflection on the above sampling of texts, many have come to the conclusion that anger is inherently sinful. In church history, anger was included in the lists of the seven deadly sins, and many Christians consciously or unconsciously believe that the only legitimate response to their emotions of anger is guilt, followed by repentance and the elimination of any angry feelings. But a more thorough examination of Scripture necessitates a more morally complex understanding of this powerful emotion.

A thoroughly negative appraisal of anger creates difficulties when one considers the revelation of God and Christ in the Bible. Throughout Scripture the emotions

and actions of anger are attributed to the triune God and the incarnate Christ. This is the most problematic issue for a wholly negative assessment of anger: it would seem to implicate God. Though it would be a distortion to say that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, this divine emotion state is hard to evade in a casual reading through the Jewish Scriptures. And consider the book of Revelation (see above). Liberals tend to prefer Christ over the God of the Old Testament, but the Gospels record instances of His anger as well—cleansing the temple, becoming indignant with His disciples (Mark 10:14), and rebuking the Pharisees and looking upon them with anger (Mark 3:5).

Some theologians have argued that when Scripture attributes wrath to God, it is using phenomenological language and should not be literally interpreted as attributing emotion to God, but rather as a description of the outworking of His judgment and its end results.¹ This view has had adherents throughout church history. It was very prevalent among the church fathers, as they emphasized God's impassibility in an attempt to distinguish the God of Scripture from the emotionally volatile gods of the Greco-Roman period (Elliott, 2006, p. 224). Similarly, Calvin (1989, I.17.13) spoke of Scripture's references to God's wrath as examples of God descending to accommodate Himself to human language. While some of Scripture's descriptions of God's wrath are clearly illustrative, it seems an overstatement to take the actual emotion of anger to be illustrative or allegorical. The anger of Jesus, who is perfect God and perfect man, seems to sanction the human anger emotion-system as something created good, but corrupted, not something originating in the Fall.

How, then, can this be reconciled with Christ's association of anger and murder? A closer examination of the text reveals that the verb translated "is angry" in Matthew 5:21 is a present participle, indicating continuous action. The range of its meaning covers more than simply an experience of anger, but additionally a harboring of it, a holding on to or nurturing of it. This is consistent with the following prohibitions that Christ offers in the rest of the verse to elaborate His point. It also allows for an interpretation that takes the danger of anger seriously, without ruling out possible godly expressions.

Similarly, the inclusion of anger in the New Testament lists of vices can be

¹ Elliot (2006, pp. 224-5) provides a short discussion of representative theologians (including Dodd, Lohse, and Bultman) who hold this view.

legitimately understood as censuring only sinful expressions of anger. Commenting on Galatians 5:20, Bruce (1982, p. 248) notes that the word translated "outbursts of rage"... can be used in a nobler and less than noble sense," and is elsewhere used of divine judgment. Given that the purpose of these lists is to describe fleshly living, rather than speak exhaustively on the topic of anger, it is fair to assume that they are referencing anger in service of evil, and not all possible instances of anger.

Notably, the wisdom literature attributes anger to the wise as well as the foolish, while noting a difference in how they become angry. The main distinction is one of speed—the fool is quickly angered, while the wise is slow to anger (Proverbs 14:17, 29; 16:32; 19:11; c.f. Ecclesiastes 7:8-9). This principle is later reflected in qualifications for elders (Titus 1:7-8). Elliott (2002, p. 222) comments: "We could say that anger is a general characteristic of the character of the ungodly while it is rare and more difficult to arouse in the godly." In addition to the many practical benefits of being slow to anger, its significance lies in the wise person's greater ability to reflect the *Imago Dei*, since God Himself is slow to anger (Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 103:8).

James echoes this wisdom principle, adding the caveat, "for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). As with other passages already discussed, the context allows us to understand James to be speaking of sinful anger. However, it is possible that he is also giving his reader insight into the dynamics of anger in fallen humans. Anger is a powerful emotion, closely related to both a sense of justice and the desire for revenge. Perhaps no other emotion so tempts us to "try on the robes of omnipotence," as it were—attempting to wield justice and reestablish a sense of "rightness," when we feel there has been a violation. Anger can positively energize work against evil and defense of the oppressed, if such resistance and protest are combined with the recognition of our creaturely dependence and ultimate hope in God's final judgment. However, often our attempts deteriorate into returning evil and violence with evil and violence, because we seek for power beyond the realm God has assigned to us. Like the ring in Tolkien's trilogy, creatures cannot possess or exercise absolute power without becoming corrupted or dominated by it in the process. God alone has the power to inflict what evil truly deserves, and only He is filled with infinite love, benevolence, and goodness that enable

Faith and Foundational Brokenness: Patterns of Control, Expectation, Escape and Rescue

V.G. Murphy, M.A., L.P.C. and M.W. Murphy, Ed.D. (cand.)

Counseling people can be an arrogant task. To claim to know what makes a person tick, and to know what may help them through the bondage that prevents them from living life to the fullest requires one of two things—either a huge ego or a huge God. Christian counseling, in particular, needs to reflect the greatness of the God we worship and acknowledge what He has told us about our brokenness and limitations. It is for this reason that we have approached counseling from the perspective of sin and its consequences. A confluence of compassion for hurting people, played out in our psychological studies, and love for Old Testament theology has led us to the perspective from which we begin.

Mark McMinn once said in a presentation to the community, "Sin is bigger than you think." He has gone on to publish two books developing that thought (McMinn, 2004, 2008). McMinn has distinguished himself as a Christian counselor who believes that the Christian doctrine of sin should undergird all of our thinking in counseling. In his study of Genesis, Paul House (1998), a noted Old Testament theologian, has shown that the root of all of our current brokenness can be laid at the feet of our first parents, Adam and Eve. The Christian teaching on sin provides an important part of a solid foundation for counseling. We have seen the profound effect this foundation has had on numerous lives, as those who grasp hold of it begin to apply it to their lives. It has the power to root out the deepest strongholds of brokenness as the journey to surrender begins.

So the best place to begin is the beginning, the book of Genesis. A brief overview of the creation story shows that God created the world and all things in six days. On Earth, He created a garden of perfection, called Eden and culminated His creative acts with the creation of man and woman. He placed them in Eden where they were to work and expand its boundaries to fill the Earth. His intention was for mankind to live in that perfect world, in perfect harmony with God and with each other. Jesus reviewed that purpose when He said we were to love God and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30; see also Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

But something went wrong with this perfect plan that God had for humankind. In the freedom that God gave them, Adam and Eve chose to disobey their Creator and seek godhood (or at least undermined God's

authority) for themselves. Through this act they brought calamity upon themselves and all of their offspring. It is this fall from grace that defines our foundational brokenness today. This fall separated humankind from God, and all humans from each other and from the perfect environment that God had given them (Genesis 3:14-22). God's plan for humankind to live in a perfect world in perfect harmony with Him and with each other was lost and broken.

What was not broken and lost, however, was God's intent for such a life and the human longing for such a life. Humankind simply became unable to live up to its original potential to fulfill such intent. What remains are deeply seated longings for the lost perfection, as well as pain brought about by failed efforts to recover that perfection. These longings can be characterized as three intertwining themes of loss: a longing for a perfect relationship with God; with others; and with our physical world. These longings are reflected in the consequences of Adam and Eve's actions, outlined in Genesis 3:14-22.

The longing for a perfect relationship with God involves a longing to know God's promises, presence, and peace. Jesus taught us that our relationship with God should be love that involves our hearts (emotionally), souls (relationally), minds (rationally) and strength (physically). We tend to try to make God in our image or into whom we want Him to be, but any attempt to relate to God in a way that makes Him less than He actually is contributes to a flawed relationship with him and triggers a sense of loss that must be dealt with.

The longing for a perfect relationship with others is wrapped up in that great command to love others as we love ourselves. The question we must ask is whether we love ourselves as God intended us to? Do we define our self-image as the image of God; as holding the right to be called a child of God; as having been created to give God glory; as being called by God's name? These aspects of a Christian self-image help us to feel God's priority, personal touch and purpose in our lives and relationships with others. Too often, we insist on some other distorted image of self and that distortion shapes all of our relationships with others.

The longing for a perfect relationship with the created world also has three aspects. First, we long for provision, for the filling of

And this is our sovereign friendship with our courteous Lord, that he keeps us so tenderly while we be in our sin, and furthermore he touches us in private and shows us our sin by the sweet light of mercy and grace. But when we see our self so foul, then we think that God were angry with us for our sin. And then we are stirred of the Holy Spirit by contrition into prayers and desire to amend our life, with all our might to appease the wrath of God until the time we find our rest in soul, and softness in conscience. And then we hope that God has forgiven us our sins. And it is true. And then our courteous Lord shows himself to the soul entirely merry and with glad cheer, with friendly welcoming, as if he had been in pain and in prison, saying sweetly thus, 'My dear darling, I am glad you are come to me in all your woe. I have ever been with you, and now you see my loving, and we be oned in bliss'. Thus are sins forgiven by mercy and grace, and our soul worshipfully received in joy, like as it shall be when it comes to heaven, as oftentimes as it comes by the gracious working of the Holy Ghost, and the virtue of Christ's Passion. Σ But because we may not have this in fullness while we are here, therefore it befalls us ever the more to live in sweet prayer and in lovely longing with our Lord Jesus. For he longs ever to bring us to the fullness of joy.

Julian of Norwich, Showings of Divine Love, from chapter 40

our physical needs and comfort. We long for access to the resources necessary to meet this need. Second, we long for protection, a shielding from the pain of suffering in the world, whether it is experienced firsthand or vicariously. A deep desire for safety and security is contained in this longing. Third, we long for power, for the ability to control or influence the world around us. Originally, this power was intended for the function of subduing the Earth as godly stewards, but it has now been distorted into attempts to manipulate the world to our own advantage. When failure in this area is experienced, a loss is felt that also must be dealt with.

Understanding how these three “holes” function in each person we see is crucial to understanding how we are to help people relate to the broken world in which they live. As we gain this understanding, we begin to see new ways to support others as we travel with them on their journeys. As we experience longing, we feel loss, and underneath that loss is pain. Sometimes the pain does not rise to a conscious level, but it exists nonetheless. And pain requires action, just as surely as touching a hot surface requires action. When the source of felt pain is unidentified, fear can set in and that can become the primary motivator for behavior. And always, underneath these created dynamics, is the influence of sin, moving us to autonomy and faithlessness. Eventually, the pattern that gets set into motion is one of demand and control. We define what we require to be pain-free—creating our demands—and

we seek to control our worlds to meet that expectation, apart from faith in God.

Fortunately, this pattern of fear-based expectation and control is not the only option for dealing with our longings. God sent His Son to redeem the world from bondage to that system of thinking and behavior and a hopeless state of lostness. He redeems us from the power, presence, and patterns of sin. The pattern of new behavior that is made possible by the sacrifices of Christ has been labeled by Larry Crabb (1999) as the “upper room” of our hearts. The broken and sinful pattern of behavior he has characterized as the “lower room” of our hearts. The apostle Paul described these two patterns in the book of Romans, “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Romans 7:19). Our task, as counselors, is to help our clients recognize which “room” they are functioning in and to help them move from lower room behaviors to upper room behaviors.

Recognition, though, is the key. Lower room functioning is our sinful reaction to the pain and longing we face without Eden. We make choices to live for the interests of others and make them our center, or we choose to live out of our own self-interest. In either case we are living in an “identity crisis,” not knowing who or whose we are. We have found it helpful to picture the lower room functioning as one of four positions. These four are shown in Figure 1.

The first position, labeled “Low View of Self: Needing to be Filled,” is the position in

which we neglect who God has called us to be and are and we live placing our expectations on others to fill us and meet our needs. In this position, we are driven by feelings of shame or fear and we tend to hide who we are.

The second position, labeled “High View of Self: It’s About Me and I Can Do It Myself,” is like a carryover from the terrible twos and teenage years. In those years, we believed in our own invincibility and power and our focus was essentially narcissistic. In this position, one is defended, feels entitled and in control. Even so, fear is the central driving force, but it is covered over by anger or pride.

The third position is labeled “High View of Others: Doing It All for Them.” This is a position where our service is valued and idealized. We secretly believe that we can either rescue them or fix them, and there is an often unconscious desire for recognition or acknowledgement for the assistance we offer.

The fourth position is “Escaping: I’m Checking Out.” Here we tend to latch on to something in our environment and what it offers as a way to numb the pain we feel. In this position, we are escaping the stresses of relationship and shut off feelings and close our hearts to caring. Examples of this position include alcoholism, “shopaholism,” “workaholism,” or almost any kind of addictive behavior.

Of course, none of these patterns are effective over the long haul. Idolatry of others, the self, or the environment causes us

to lose track of who God intended us to be. Those with a low view of self come to realize that their expectations of others are not being met as others do not come through for them. Those with a high view of self or others are confronted with a loss of control or personal suffering that they cannot manage. And pain still seeps into the escaping patterns. Some people tend to move from one pattern to the next, testing alternatives to the failing pattern they have already tried. However, most people have one pattern they tend to default to as the stresses of life outside of Eden press upon them.

It is important to remember that these worldly patterns of broken self-interest are both the manifestation and consequences of sin. In Genesis, chapter 3, God described some of these consequences as He turned humankind over to their rebellion and brokenness. As we know, there were four key areas of consequence that were described. The first is painful childbirth, or the entrance of physical and emotional pain, and we might add, the resultant avoidance strategies. The second was man ruling over woman, and here we see the resultant battles for power in human relationship. The third was woman’s desire for man, where she places her expectations of the other above her desire for God. Finally, man was to find his labor toilsome, unproductive and painful. All of these consequences are seen in the above patterns of behavior, though today we see both men and women practicing all of them. Humanity is characterized by a universal pattern of sinful and faulty expectations and attempts to control life to meet them.

If this were the entire story, our lot would be bleak indeed. However, as we noted before, God did not leave us alone, in

such a state. Even in Genesis, He promised a “seed” to the woman who would right the things broken in the Fall (Genesis 3:15). The good news is that Jesus Christ is that seed, and through His life, death, and resurrection, there is another option. This option we call “Identity Christ-Us.” This upper room functioning is where we step out of the lower room of our sinful identity crisis and follow the apostle Paul’s exhortation to “not conform any longer to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). In this place, we are able to live out our God-reliance through Christ. In Him we learn how to communicate our feelings, needs and desires clearly; how to be more assertive and loving in relationship; how to respond to others out of our responsiveness to God as He shares with us our real identity. We become better able to truly express our pain and our joys, as David did in the Psalms, through honest sharing with God. We express our unmet expectations to Him, yet give control over to Him and wait on Him to fulfill our needs. We are able to experience the passions that God has gifted us with in an authenticity that is unknown in the post-Eden world outside of Christ. We have a taste of what it means to have His “kingdom on Earth.” We stand upright in Him and under Him. This process is not about denying our created, legitimate emotions. Rather, it is about embracing them, confessing our complaints to God and trusting God to work through us the outcome that He desires. It is a process of surrender to God and learning to trust Him in all circumstances.

If, in fact, our patterns of coping with life in a fallen world are broken themselves, as we believe is taught in the Bible, some

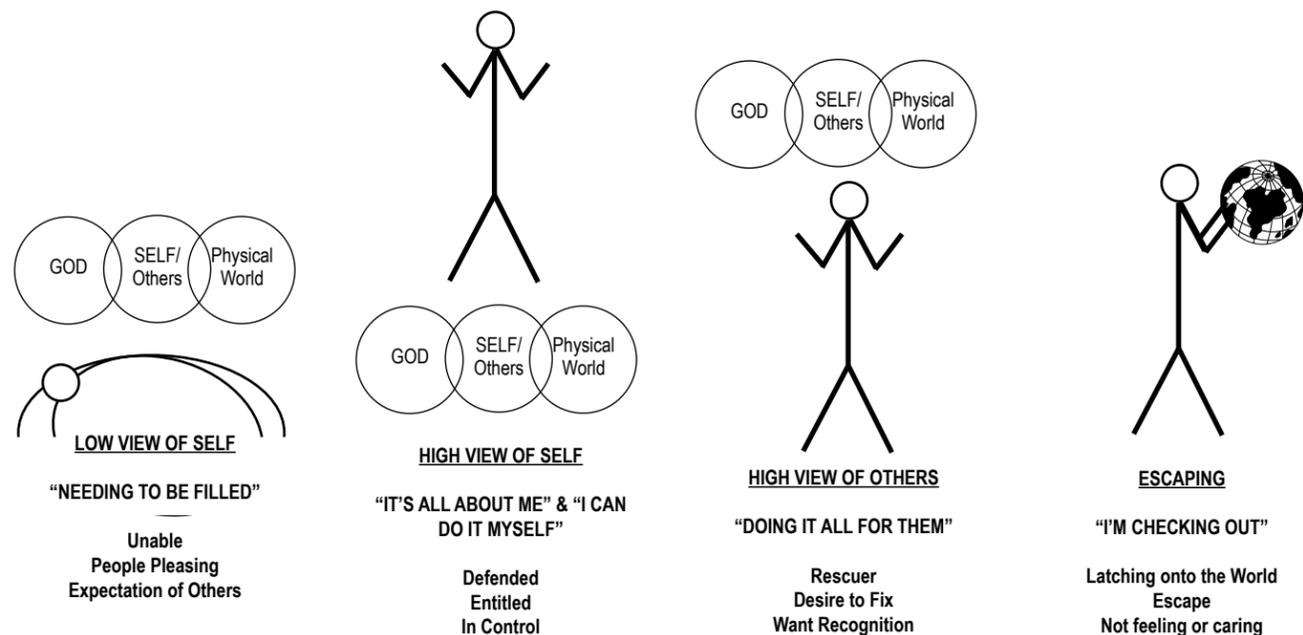
crucial changes in the ways we practice our psychology are needed. Understanding that all of us are simply trying to gain some form of control over a world that is sometimes hostile, allows us to have a great deal of compassion for those who come into our offices. Moving from these broken patterns of control to the place of surrender is a crucial task of therapy. Procedures and treatment plans need to be developed and tailored to address each position. This work is not yet accomplished, though we have some ideas. We perceive the next steps to be a fuller development of the above-described patterns into a more comprehensive view of personality, reflecting both the fallen and redeemed implications of each position, along with the ability to assess which pattern an individual is functioning in. It is our hope to engage a greater mind than ours by inviting the Body of Christ into further dialogue.

Valerie Murphy, LPC, is a Board Certified Professional Christian Counselor and a Spiritual Director in Wheaton, IL. Her husband **Michael Murphy** is Executive Director of Crossroads Community Counseling and the Director of Pastoral Care of Crossroads Community Church in Naperville, IL. Together they co-lead Foundation Counseling and Training (www.foundationcounseling.com) which is dedicated to furthering psychological health through a Biblical worldview.

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Figure 1: Representation of the four worldly position of identity crisis.

FOUR WORLDLY POSITIONS IDENTITY CRISIS



A THEOLOGY OF ANGER FOR SOUL CARE

by Sara Collins

“I just get so angry!” Counselors often hear such an exasperated statement in the course of their work. Emotions are not typically the subject of theology, though not for lack of Scriptural subject matter. While not addressing it in a focused or systematic manner, the biblical text is replete with references, descriptions and even admonitions regarding emotions. Its depiction of God and honest frankness regarding human experience continually address the issue of emotionality. This should not surprise us since God is an emotional Being and so are humans, having been fashioned in His image. In light of this it seems entirely reasonable—though granted, a bit unconventional—to write on

a theology of anger. **Anger as an Emotion**
 Anger is quite pervasively understood to be an emotion—by theologians, psychologists, and common opinion. However, in response to the secular tendency to treat anger as morally neutral, some have reacted by defining in behavioral categories rather than emotional ones. Powlison (1996b), for example, writes, “[Anger] is a moral act of the whole person, not a ‘substance’ or a ‘something’ inside you.... Because anger is something that people do as moral agents, there’s no reason that anger must be vented or exorcised to be truly resolved.” He contrasts his definition with two other approaches to anger (anger

as pent up emotion, and anger as demonic) both of which, he claims, change anger from an act to an object, thereby nullifying the moral agency involved. Yet this may set up a false dichotomy. Categorizing anger as an internal emotion does not necessarily rule out personal agency or moral responsibility for one’s actions or emotions (the moral nature of anger will be explored in greater detail later). In fact, Scripture often describes anger as something internal. It can be stored up (Romans 2:5), poured out (Revelation 16:1), and burst forth (Jeremiah 30:23). A person, human or Divine, can be filled with anger (Nahum 1:2; Jeremiah 6:11), and God is described as giving vent to his