

Copyright © 2017 Frederick Nobuya Rodeheaver

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.

THE MEANING OF BEING:  
THE CHALLENGES OF EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY  
FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

---

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

---

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

---

by  
Frederick Nobuya Rodeheaver  
May 2017

**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE MEANING OF BEING:  
THE CHALLENGES OF EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY  
FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Frederick Nobuya Rodeheaver

Read and Approved by:

---

Jeremy P. Pierre (Chair)

---

Robert D. Jones

---

Jason B. Oakes

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE .....	v
Chapter	
1. THE MEANING OF BEING: EXISTENTIAL INSIGHT AND BIBLICAL TRUTH .....	1
Thesis .....	6
Methodology .....	7
Study Background: Context and History .....	13
Chapter Summary .....	29
2. MEANING AND BEING .....	31
Anthropological Critiques of the Modern Psychologies .....	34
The Development and Defining Feature of Existential Psychology .....	41
The Existential Feature: Existence .....	52
Conceptual Similarities between Existential Psychology and Biblical Counseling .....	59
The Failed Anthropology behind Existential Psychology .....	66
3. QUESTIONS OF BEING .....	71
Authenticity, Anxiety, and Authority .....	71
What Does It Mean to Be Authentic? .....	75
The Purpose and Meaning of Anxiety .....	84
The Definition of Anxiety .....	87
The Different Types of Anxiety .....	89
The Messages of Anxiety .....	93
The Treatment of Anxiety .....	94

Chapter	Page
Questions of Authority and Meaning in Life .....	98
The Problem of Meaning .....	100
The Creation of a Meaningful Life .....	102
Authenticity, Anxiety, and Authority: The Therapeutic Triad .....	109
4. THE ESSENCE OF BEING .....	112
The Image of God in Man .....	116
The Image of God in Christ .....	125
Christocentric Recasting of Existential Issues .....	133
Conclusion .....	145
5. MEANING AND BEING TOGETHER: PRACTICAL LESSONS FOR THE BIBLICAL COUNSELING MOVEMENT .....	147
The Recognition of Needed Development within the Biblical Counseling Movement .....	148
The Contribution of This Study to the Larger Biblical Counseling Movement .....	153
The Counseling Dynamic .....	158
Conclusion .....	181
6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .....	184
Summary of Arguments .....	184
Suggestions for Further Research .....	188
Concluding Thoughts .....	191
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	194

## PREFACE

Completing a Ph.D. program is quite a feat in itself. Nearly being a high-school drop-out who completes a Ph.D. program is a whole other category of accomplishment. In the end, however, God gets all the glory! May the Lord be pleased to use this humble offering for whatever purposes He intends. He alone is worthy of all praise and glory and to Him be the dominion forever and ever, Amen!

To Lori, the girl with the dazzling eyes, who believed in this task and me more than I did oftentimes— my deepest love, gratitude and appreciation. We’ve shared love, life, children and the promise of eternal life together. It can hardly get better than this!

To my “A-team”, Asher Kahelemeakua, Asa Makana’akua and Anna Momilani— children who have filled their parent’s lives with laughter, delight and joy, I love you dearly. You have given up your father’s attention, time and energy for this project in more ways than you should have, but you never begrudged the work. Yes, Dad is now done!

To my pastors, mentors, teachers and professors thank you all for helping me learn to have a shepherd’s heart, a scholar’s mind, and an evangelist’s passion. A special word of thanks to Dr. Jeremy Pierre, my advisor and friend, who has wonderfully modeled what it is to be a pastor-theologian, thank you! Thank you to Dr. Oakes and Dr. Jones for serving on my committee and for not being taken aback by my Bruce Lee tee-shirt. Thanks go as well to Southern Seminary for having the vision and willingness to make this program available.

To my friends with whom I share the trenches of ministry— thank you!! From Miami to Hawaii and beyond, your fire for God’s glory and the good of His people inspire, humble, motivate, and spur me on in ways you cannot begin to imagine.

To the five churches I have had the privilege to serve and pastor over nearly twenty-eight years of ministry Hope Chapel Mililani, Calvary Chapel Pearl Harbor, Compass Bible Church, Grace Evfree, and now Christ Community Church thank you for being to me family and co-laborers in God's great harvest.

Ric Rodeheaver

Mission Viejo, California

May 2017

CHAPTER 1  
THE MEANING OF BEING: EXISTENTIAL INSIGHT  
AND BIBLICAL TRUTH

The modern biblical counseling movement has been a much-needed revival of practical theology within the church in the last fifty years. From its simple beginnings with the publication of Jay Adam's seminal work *Competent to Counsel* in 1970, the biblical counseling movement has grown into an international, multi-denominational movement that boasts numerous publications, authors, and organizations.<sup>1</sup> Few movements have been as helpful in the church's long, arduous road to reclaim its jurisdictional responsibility to bring hope and help to those seeking wisdom and counsel.<sup>2</sup> Of particular benefit, the biblical counseling movement has reminded the church of the sufficiency, reliability, and practicality of Scripture.<sup>3</sup> The early works of Jay Adam's furnished the church with the necessary resources to think biblically again about the activity of counseling.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the biblical counseling movement has reminded Christians of the priority of the local church as the loci of the redemptive work of Christ on earth.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF), The Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC), The Biblical Counseling Coalition, The Association of Biblical Counselors (ABC), New Growth Press, Twelve Stones Recovery Center, Harvest USA, Peacemaker ministries, et al.

<sup>2</sup>Col 3:16; Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 12:25; 2 Cor 13:11; Eph 4:2; 1 Thess 4:18, 5:14; Heb 3:13-14, 10:24-25; Jas 5:16.

<sup>3</sup>David Powlison, "The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 2-14.

<sup>4</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986); Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resource Library, 1986); Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselors's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

<sup>5</sup>Matt 18:15-20; Rom 8:5ff.; Eph 1:22-23, 2:18-22, 4:12; 2 Tim 3:15; 2 Pet 1:3-9.

While biblical counseling has brought many other benefits to modern evangelicalism, the emphasis on the primacy of Scripture and the local church have caused a “sea change” in the way many Christians view problems in living and the means to overcome them.

Yet, modern biblical counseling has more room to grow and develop in its theories and practices. Jay Adam’s major contribution was the realization that historic Christianity had an inherit framework to understand modern problems in living and a practical way to implement this framework into its current ecclesiastical settings. In subsequent years, others built upon Adam’s work and set future trajectories of growth for the movement.<sup>6</sup> However, Adam’s model, if not his influence, is still the predominant mode of biblical counseling in many churches today. According to some, biblical counseling closely resembles a cognitive-behavioral model of change with the exceptional distinction of believing in a personal God who actively works and intervenes within the daily affairs of the counselee.<sup>7</sup> In terms of practical application, the most common paradigm for biblical counseling includes the pastor (or elder or lay volunteer) and congregant meeting in formal counseling sessions over a brief time span of eight to twelve weeks. In this regard, the typical model of biblical counseling remains true to Adam’s early vision. Thankfully, however, biblical counseling has built in theoretical and practical elasticity that allows for a multitude of styles, models, and applications. Pushing the elasticity of any theory and practice is not always easy however, and biblical counseling is no exception, especially if that push comes from an unexpected or unappreciated source.

History has shown that while pushing the boundaries of any field of knowledge

---

<sup>6</sup>David Powlison, “Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 9, no. 3 (1988): 53-78; Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

<sup>7</sup>John D. Carter, “Adams’ Theory of Nouthetic Counseling,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 3, no. 3 (1975): 143-55. David Powlison, “Orientation to the Field of Psychology” (lecture presented at the Theology and Secular Psychology Graduate seminar, The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, Glenside, PA, 2008).

may be hard, it does happen. For instance, Evangelical scholarship would not be what it is today if not for the challenges presented by the Historical Critical method, which began in the late 1700s. Names like Johann Salomo Semler, Ernst Troeltsch, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Ludwig Feuerbach, Rudolf Bultmann, Ferdinand Christian Baur, and the Tubingen School in Germany all posed significant challenges to traditional understandings of biblical Christianity in general and the reliability of biblical texts in particular. German scholar Gerhard Maier writes, “One of the most far-reaching consequences [of Historical Criticism] involves the burden of proof in historical investigation. It shifted to the one who wished to advocate the authority of biblical statements.”<sup>8</sup> Textual literary methods like source criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism, among others, radically challenged many traditional views of the Bible’s inerrant and infallible nature.<sup>9</sup> Historical criticism scholars began asking questions of the biblical text that other scholars never thought to ask. Other widely held beliefs, like the biblical account of Creation, found itself under the scrutiny of this new scholarship. *Essays and Reviews*, while little known today, was published in 1860 and summed up the arguments of the higher critical method against the traditional understandings of biblical history and the text. This singular publication created such a fire-storm of controversy that it overshadowed Darwin’s publication of the same year, *On the Origin of Species*.<sup>10</sup> Books like *Essays and Reviews* began the age of religious doubt and once held traditional beliefs in the Bible became widely suspect.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 281.

<sup>9</sup>Michael J. Lee, *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2013), 111-12. Detailing the many names, events, and watershed moments in this period is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For the interested reader, it is highly recommended to read Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

<sup>10</sup>Adrian J. Desmond and James R. Moore, *Darwin* (London: Michael Joseph, 1991), 500.

<sup>11</sup>Josef L. Altholz, “The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to ‘Essays and Reviews,’ 1860–1864,” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 51, no. 2 (June 1982): 186; Stephen Neill and N. T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 1-34.

In order to offer an *apologia* for a faithful and traditional view of the Bible, conservative scholarship recognized the need to address the very same questions the historical-critical scholars were asking. As a result, this counter-response sharpened and refined evangelical scholarship and continues to this day.<sup>12</sup>

In the same way that Historical Criticism compelled conservative scholars to ask a wider array of questions, the modern psychologies compel biblical counselors to do the same. “God often allows observant and persuasive error to expose lacunae, crudities, and distortions in His own children’s thinking and practice,” writes David Powlison, the current director of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation.<sup>13</sup> Powlison states that biblical counselors will develop their model through this very sort of cautious yet deliberate interaction:

Their [modern psychotherapies] successes can certainly reprove us, and help us see more clearly places where we are inept and ignorant— as long as we do not counterconvert. Their observations of what makes human life go and not go can inform us- if we radically reinterpret them from within our worldview.<sup>14</sup>

One branch of the modern psychologies that seems particularly suited for this task is the field of existential psychology. While existential psychology and biblical counseling do seem to be strange bed-fellows, this study makes clear that some of the main beliefs regarding human experience within existential psychology have more in common with Scripture and a Christian worldview than even psychologists themselves realize. Both existential psychology and biblical counseling arose in response to perceived errors and imbalances within their broader epistemological fields, both address questions of ultimate significance, both view humanity as a unique entity endowed with amazing

---

<sup>12</sup>Christopher M. Hays, ed., *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 2.

<sup>13</sup>David Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 8.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 16

potential yet fraught with debilitating challenges, and both believe in the inherently social nature and curative power of relationships. While some of these similarities may be found in other psychological modalities, proponents of existential psychology self-consciously admit its similarities to any theistic worldview.<sup>15</sup>

In spite of these similarities however, existential psychology and biblical counseling could not be further apart nor result in such dramatically opposed worldviews regarding human existence and the very questions that are germane to each epistemological system. In part, what makes this study so intriguing is this unique dipolar relationship between these two disciplines. Each discipline sees something true about human nature and the experience of individuality, but neither sees everything about human nature and the totality of the individual's experience. The challenge that existential psychology reveals is that biblical counseling may be more reductionistic in its assumptions about human personhood than many in the movement may recognize. In the same way that historical critical scholars compelled conservative theologians to reexamine their own assumptions, existential psychology causes biblical counselors to assess the questions they ask of Scripture, as well as the assumptions behind those questions in order to make better sense of the human experience and better minister to individuals within those experiences.

Three insights have laid the seeds to this study. First, existential psychology seems to have legitimately emphasized the relative importance of the subjective experience of human personhood. Second, understanding that experience is often the key to developing strong relational bonds and is revealing of an individual's functional theology. Third, the theology and methodology of biblical counseling can grow through the combinations of the first two insights. Therefore, the title of this study, "The Meaning of

---

<sup>15</sup>Irvin D. Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy: An Open Letter to a New Generation of Therapists and Their Patients* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 258-59; Ruthellen Josselson, *Irvin D. Yalom: On Psychotherapy and the Human Condition* (New York: Jorge Pinto, 2008), 56; Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic, 1980), 12.

Being: The Challenges of Existential Psychology for Biblical Counseling,” is an attempt to communicate this in a succinct statement.

### **Thesis**

I argue in this dissertation that an anthropology that is faithful to Scripture requires biblical counseling to account for the totality of the human experience, including the individual’s personal experience. Existential psychology, while captive to its own faulty assumptions, has made individual personal experience its primary focus and thus becomes a helpful dialogue partner to biblical counselors. Although ultimately bankrupt, existential psychology’s emphasis on the experience of individual existence, authenticity, anxiety, and authority are helpful issues for biblical counselors to consider in its own anthropology and systems of care. From these issues, so central to the concerns of existential psychology, I conclude however, that they are more comprehensively answered from a theological framework in the following ways. Biblical counseling understands human authenticity as objectively based in the character and person of Jesus Christ, not simply the individual’s own subjective self-construct. Second, flowing from an objective view of authenticity, biblical counseling understands anxiety as the emotional barometer that indicates the level of discrepancy between an individual’s subjective self-construct and his or her objective authentic personhood as found in the person of Christ. Finally, biblical counseling grounds and limits an individual’s authority in the covenantal framework of Scripture, not personal or cultural concepts of human autonomy that inevitably collapse into radical and often self-contradictory forms of personal subjectivity.

The practical implications of these conclusions refine the positive insights of existential psychology without the erroneous and radical subjectivity that bankrupts so much of its theory. Grounded and guarded by biblical counseling’s theological framework, these insights allow the biblical counselor to investigate heretofore areas of the counseling relationship that were deemed too subjective and therefore unnecessary or

even unhelpful distractions to the counseling task. Being open to the individual's subjectivity in this way opens unique avenues to minister biblical truth. The in-the-moment personal dynamics between the counselor and counselee can now be understood as the data so often helpful but often ignored to discern areas the counselee requires help in. Understanding the dissonance between the individual's subjectivity and biblical objectivity is often manifested in styles of communicating and para-communication enables the biblical counselor to more readily make use of information and data so important to understanding the counselee's experience. In short, the biblical counselor can now delve into areas of human subjectivity, so critical to the human experience, with clear connections to biblical truth.

My hope is to compel those within the biblical counseling movement to ask new questions and refine current theories and practices to include a more individualized view of human personhood. The conclusions drawn from this study show that the issues so essential to existential psychology's concerns are more comprehensively addressed from a Christological framework grounded in the theological doctrine of the *imago Dei*. The practical implications of this framework recast the existential issues in light of Christ's redemptive work. I accomplish this task by answering four questions:

1. What is existential psychology, why is it relevant to the concerns of biblical counseling and why, ultimately, is it not the answer it hopes to be?
2. What are the important existential questions and concerns about human individuality according to existential psychology?
3. How does biblical counseling provide a surer anthropological foundation that would recast existential concerns about human personhood more accurately?
4. What are some theoretical and methodological improvements that apply to the biblical counseling movement that are necessitated by this study?

### **Methodology**

This dissertation is a content analysis of existential psychology and biblical-systematic theology as they relate to counseling anthropology and the development of the therapeutic relationship. The methodology reflects the main argument of the thesis as it

was developed answering the four questions as presented. In essence this dissertation seeks to understand and appreciate with as much accuracy and charity the perspective that existential psychology has regarding human personhood, and what it does most skillfully in the counseling context. However, the perspective and skillset of existential psychology is not without its shortcomings and flaws therefore this dissertation is also a critique of these weakness while also seeking to recontextualize and recast what is truly beneficial for the biblical counselor. In order to accomplish this, a brief introduction and background chapter begins the dissertation to orient the reader to the pertinent issues and connections between the two disciplines of existential psychology and biblical counseling. The subsequent four chapters are dedicated to answering the main questions that support the thesis. Chapter 2 examines existential psychology in greater detail with particular emphasis on its key distinctive; a focus on existence instead of essence. The chapter concludes with a discussion explaining the failure of existential psychology to be the corrective for human understanding that its proponents hope it to be. Chapter 3 investigates the three unique questions regarding authenticity, anxiety, and authority that form the theoretical basis of existential psychology. Chapter 4 provides the surer anthropological foundation in the theological doctrine of the *imago Dei* as a more accurate way to recast the very concerns of existential psychology as discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 5 applies the implications from the study to the theory and practice of biblical counseling in the local church, specifically with regard to cultivating the counselor-counselee relationship. A brief concluding chapter rounds out the dissertation, summarizing the salient arguments and points made throughout the study and makes recommendations for future work on this topic.

This dissertation seeks to be comprehensive regarding the topic at hand but not exhaustive to the subject. This dissertation is cross-disciplinary and therefore is selective in its topic, i.e., the applicable theoretical and practical benefits of existential psychology

to biblical counseling and thus cannot be exhaustive in covering every element within each discipline that contributes to the thesis.

Due to the cross-disciplinary nature of this study, a wide range of scholarly materials and literary works are utilized, such as academic journals, commentaries, case studies, Scripture, books, novels, systematic theologies, lectures, video recordings, essays, personal correspondence, and other published and unpublished materials.

Several limitations restrict the scope of this dissertation primarily due to space and time limitations. First, because this is a cross-disciplinary study, the level of interaction with the material of each discipline has not been as robust as if this were a single disciplinary study. Second, the focus of this study is to develop a particular aspect of biblical counseling theology (anthropology and the corresponding relational implications of this development) and not toward the entire theological framework of biblical counseling or Christian counseling in general. Third, the amount of material written on the subject of humanistic psychology, and in particular existential psychology, is substantial so that only a small representative portion of this literature has been examined in this dissertation. The practical recommendations suggested within this study are suggestive and not exhaustive. Finally, the topic of this dissertation may have limited application in cultures where the unique aspects of the individual and his or her subjectivity are not appreciated. Cultures that regard the individual as only important in the larger communal context may have difficulty with the fundamental premise of existential psychology's focus on existence verses essence.

In order to place this study in its broader context, some preliminary comments are necessary. This dissertation assumes that biblical counseling has a much deeper view of the human condition because of its epistemological basis in Scripture, but has a much narrower view of the human condition because of its historical development. A view of the human condition fully informed by Scripture provides a robust anthropology that is comprehensive and sufficient for the task of counseling. Scripture's anthropology is both

wide enough and deep enough to adequately understand and address the issues that individual's face. It is wide enough to account for the variations in human temperaments, gender as well as cultural contexts, historical reality, and biology. It is also deep enough to account for the paradoxical expression of these variations in both positive and negative ways without having to resort to a reductionism that is so common in the modern psychologies.

However, it is important to note that biblical counseling as a movement is not the same as Scripture and to critique the movement is not to level a charge against its scriptural foundation. It is precisely because of its infallible foundation that the movement should constantly seek improvement and reform. Biblical counseling needs to be willing to reconsider its own assumptions regarding the individual human experience and all of its theories that do not flow directly from Scripture.

Second, biblical counseling's view of human experience is deep because it accepts the truths of Scripture regarding human experience and the paradoxical expressions of that experience are empirically obvious. Yet, due to the historical and cultural context surrounding biblical counseling's development as a movement, its view of human experience is not wide enough. Therefore, while biblical counseling sees human experience truly, it does not perceive it fully.

These two distinctions are important to keep in mind throughout the study because it explains why biblical counseling can look to other psychological systems as a means to refine its own views. Thus, such an investigation of other psychologies is not a value judgment against biblical counseling's own theories and practices so much as recognition of the importance of self-examination from differing perspectives.

### **Existential Psychology and Biblical Counseling:**

The starting point of this study is a practical understanding of the field of existential psychology in order to appreciate its relevance to biblical counseling. In what

ways is existential psychology related to the larger philosophical movement known as existentialism? What are the origins of this particular school of psychology and what makes it different from other psychological schools? Lastly, in what ways are existential psychology and biblical counseling alike and in what ways are they unlike?

For example, some of these similarities include (1) existential psychology views human beings not as pathological diagnoses, but unique individuals who cannot be reduced to a medical label.<sup>16</sup> (2) Individuals are responsible beings that make profound choices, which determine their life trajectories rather than biomechanical beings that behave in predetermined patterns established by genetics, childhood rearing, or other dominant factors.<sup>17</sup> (3) The counseling relationship between counselor and counselee is seen as a social microcosm of the counselee's social macrocosm. In other words, the issues, reactions, and relational dynamics that exist between the counselor and counselee, are merely reflections of the same issues, reaction, and dynamics, which the counselee faces, in their broader experience. This third point articulates the importance of the counselor-counselee relationship in existential psychology. Often called the "therapeutic alliance" the relationship between the counselor and counselee becomes the actual curative factor during the counseling process. In traditional forms of psychoanalysis the counselor takes the role of a "blank screen"<sup>18</sup> of objectivity and emotional aloofness. The counselor is seen more like a problem-solving doctor who offers remedies for a distinct mental malady. The "therapeutic alliance," as championed by Humanistic psychologies, like

---

<sup>16</sup>Josselson, *Irvin D. Yalom*, 47-48; John G. Finch, *A Christian Existential Psychology: The Contributions of John G. Finch*, ed. H. Newton Malony (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), 117-35.

<sup>17</sup>Josselson, *Irvin D. Yalom*, 49; Rollo May, *The Discovery of Being: Writings in Existential Psychology* (New York: Norton, 1994), 101, 104; Thomas Szasz, "The Person as Moral Agent," in *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. James F. T Bugental, J. Fraser Pierson, and Kirk J. Schneider (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage., 2015), 83-86.

<sup>18</sup>Roy José DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 53; Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 53.

existential psychology, promotes the counseling relationship as a friend walking another friend to a psychologically healthier destination.<sup>19</sup> These three and many other perspectives of existential psychology resonate more clearly with biblical teaching in such a manner that makes a study of their theories and practices a worthwhile pursuit to further refine and sharpen biblical counseling.

One particular area of examination that demonstrates how existential psychology is very unlike biblical counseling is the emphasis on the “existent” rather than the emphasis on the essence of the “existent.” The existentialist view on this issue is the defining element in its entire system. The existentialist view on existence separates it from the myriad of other psychological perspective as well as Christian theology, but for very different reasons. Examining this defining view is critical in understanding the positions of Christian theology, other psychologies modalities, and existential psychology. Therefore, while the other similarities between existential psychology and biblical counseling mentioned have received attention as they pertain to the thesis of this study, the issue of existence is examined more fully as it is the foundational principle that existential psychology is built upon.

Logically proceeding from this general introduction is an in-depth analysis of the three critical questions existential psychology asks in response to their view of existence. The answers to these questions form the therapeutic concepts and practices that form existential psychotherapy (the actual out-workings of care from the epistemological basis of existential psychology). Thus, the framework of existential psychotherapy flows directly out of their anthropology (i.e., their particular view of human nature as existential rather than essential). The therapeutic techniques advanced by existential psychology are

---

<sup>19</sup>Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Approach*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 311; Stanley B. Messer and Alan S. Gurman, *Essential Psychotherapies: Theory and Practice* (New York: Guilford, 2011), 268-69.

uniquely aimed to address the struggles of human personhood as highlighted by the critical questions that are germane to an individual's experience of existence.

Ultimately, however, the lack of any objective anthropology sabotages any theoretical good the theory has developed. It is exactly at this point where biblical counseling excels because it has an objective standard by which human personhood can rightly be understood—Scripture. Nevertheless, while biblical counseling can benefit from existential psychology's tertiary techniques to develop the relationship, existential psychology fails to provide adequate answers to its own questions.

Finally, the practical results of this study on the field of biblical counseling are addressed. Just as the historical-critical scholars pushed evangelical scholars, how does the humanistic-existential counselor push the theoretical and practical boundaries of the biblical counselor's understanding of the counseling relationship? Furthermore, what are the individual and institutional improvements that will result from this study? How will pastors and churches, theologians, and seminaries do counseling differently, theorize about counseling more robustly, and implement counseling more scripturally?

### **Study Background: Context and History**

Like any research, the origins of this study have their genesis in personal experiences, knowledge and observations until they coalesce into a research question that then generates the work. So then, to understand the contribution this work will have to the broader biblical counseling movement, it is important to explain the relationships between these factors.

First, it was my own personal experience of counseling that prompted questions about the viability of biblical counseling's current anthropology. As a result, I began to ask if other anthropological foci resulted in therapeutic practices that cultivated more relational traction between a counselor and counselee, and if so, why? Finally, if other possible anthropological emphasis could help, why did biblical counselors not have this embedded in their own system? For the sake of this dissertation, these questions have

been listed in a linear order, in reality, however, they emerged, evolved, and existed in symbiotic form throughout the course of my research and writing.

### **Personal Experiences: The Beginning of the Question**

I began my studies in biblical counseling in 2003, in Columbia, Missouri, during my first pastorate. Over the years, I have had the privilege of working with many individuals in diverse contexts. As any biblical counselor knows, people need more than good theology and well-ordered information to change. Unfortunately, I often noticed well-meaning counselors misread or simply ignore an individual or their experience. The counselor would quickly point out a theological error in an individual's thinking as if that were their entire problem.

To be clear, the seminal literature within the biblical counseling movement warns against this kind of error.<sup>20</sup> Yet, it happened enough to show that something was amiss in the way the average Christian within the movement conceived of the counseling task. On the other hand, I would occasionally meet counselors who seemed to intuitively address a person's deeper issue, experience, or struggle. This added depth to the relationship far beyond what giving more information could ever have. This "intuitive" sense on the part of the counselor always seemed to infuse the counseling experience with newfound enthusiasm from the counselee. Obviously, the experience of being "known" and "heard" is a galvanizing force that causes people to want more of that kind of help. In *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul Tripp writes that people feel "known" and "heard" primarily when a counselor understands and meets them in their experience.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>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, 2002), 115-40; Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 170-71.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

This process builds the necessary elements of hope, commitment, and trust into the counseling relationship, which are relationally important.<sup>22</sup> The combination of bringing together the individual's personal experience and relevant Scripture in the context of a genuine relationship is incredibly powerful. This biblically grounded dynamic communicates to the counselee that he or she is understood, that there is hope, and equally important, that there is help for them.

Furthermore, I observed the most effective counseling relationships include genuine love, respect, honesty and rich biblical truth. Frequently, these are not formal counseling relationships, but friendships. This is not a new or original conviction to me, but a foundational principle of the biblical counseling movement and a basic premise of Scripture.<sup>23</sup> What these "friendship" counselors lack in technique or technical skill they make up for in relational strength, honesty, and candor. Yet, the majority of the training material in biblical counseling focuses on the transfer of biblical information<sup>24</sup> and little to no emphasis on relational dynamics that can serve as the process by which sin's deeper and more significant impact can be remediated through biblical truth via the counseling relationship.<sup>25</sup> From a Christian worldview perspective, good theology is the basis of

---

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 131-32.

<sup>23</sup>Jeremy Pierre and Mark Shaw, "The Nature of the Biblical Counseling Relationship," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kelleman, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013).

<sup>24</sup>Wayne A Mack, *A Homework Manual for Biblical Living: Personal and Interpersonal Problems*, vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979); Wayne A Mack, *A Homework Manual for Biblical Living: Family and Marital Problems*, vol. 2 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).

<sup>25</sup>Two examples are John Henderson and Association of Biblical Counselors, *Equipped to Counsel: A Training Program in Biblical Counseling, Leader Notebook* (Mustang, OK: Association of Biblical Counselors, 2008); and Howard Eyrich, Edward E. Hindson, and William L Hines, *Curing the Heart: A Model for Biblical Counseling* (Fearn Scotland: Mentor, 2002), which are generally fine resources, yet when they discuss developing the therapeutic relationship, they mention the pertinent biblical passages that suggest this but do not otherwise expound on how exactly these might apply or be developed into a methodology. While these Scripture passages are essentially true (by *essential* I do not mean important or

right living, so while maintaining a high regard for theology, biblical counselors need to develop a stronger relational emphasis as well. Scripture, after all, does not call biblical counselors to minister to people in general, but to the specific individual in front of them who experiences life in a very unique context. In other words, biblical counselors need to continue with robust theology and grow in skill to personalize it to effective personal ministry.<sup>26</sup>

Two final experiences galvanized the topic of this dissertation. A class with Ed Welch on human personality introduced me to the works of Irvin Yalom, professor emeritus of psychiatry at Stanford University, and one of the most well-known existential psychologists alive today. Yalom was my initial entry into the world of existential psychology, its anthropology and relational emphasis. Finally, David Powlison's "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling" caused me to reflect more seriously on the importance of the relationship itself between the counselor and counselee. Also, Powlison's writings that the biblical counseling movement must "press much further in understanding the biblical data about the counselor-counselee relationship"<sup>27</sup> as an area of exploration and advancement help crystalize the connection in my mind regarding our anthropological views shaping the counseling relationship. Thus, it seemed that in theory, biblical counseling had all the necessary elements of a robust anthropology but in practice these elements have not been fully developed.

---

key, rather I am using the term more technically as universal truth, i.e., true in essence) there is no material to help a biblical counselor think about the existential truth (experience) of the relationship.

<sup>26</sup>David Powlison, "How Does Sanctification Work? (Part 1)," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 1 (2013): 49-66; David Powlison, "How Does Sanctification Work? (Part 2)," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 2 (2013): 35-50.

<sup>27</sup>Powlison, "Crucial Issues," 65.

## **The Anthropological View within Existential Psychology: Introductory Remarks**

The writings of Irvin Yalom exposed me to the field of existential psychology and its desire to answer many of the same questions that historic Christianity had trafficked in for two millennia. I was consistently impressed with how differently existential psychologists saw the human experience from their psychological counterparts, yet because they worked in a closed humanistic environment<sup>28</sup> like their contemporaries, how shallow their applications consistently were—much like their contemporaries. Yet, it was in their emphasis on the uniqueness of humanity that caused them to think so differently, and thus caused them to reflect more carefully on the very human experience of the counseling relationship. Like all psychological modalities, the counseling methodology and relationship is a result of its theoretical views. It is that methodology grounded in its views that is the core of this dissertation, thus before getting into those elements, some introductory remarks are necessary to understand existential psychology better.

Existential psychology as a movement in America can trace its heritage directly to the publication of Rollo May's *Existence* in 1958.<sup>29</sup> As a therapeutic system of psychotherapy, existential psychology operates on the assumption that the inner conflict that people experience is due to their confrontation with the givens of existence.<sup>30</sup> The foundation stone upon which existential psychology stands is the all-consuming question: "How is one willing to live- in this remarkable moment . . . in the face of these unrepeatable opportunities?"<sup>31</sup> This emphasis on existence makes existential psychology

---

<sup>28</sup>By *humanistic* I do not mean the more technical use of this term found throughout this dissertation as referring to the branch of psychology associated with the third wave of behavioral sciences. I use the term in its more general sense referring to the idea that humanity lives in a closed system of reality with no outside revelation or intervention from supernatural forces.

<sup>29</sup>Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, 299; DeCarvalho, *The Founders*, 142.

<sup>30</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 8.

<sup>31</sup>Messer and Gurman, *Essential Psychotherapies*, 261.

so intriguing because what matters most within the theory is what someone *actually* experiences as a unique individual rather than what they are *supposed* to experience according to a diagnosis or as a generic being categorized in a larger class of other individuals only broadly defined.

The word existentialism derives from the Latin root *ex-sistere*, which literally means to “stand forth” or “to become.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, according to its many adherents, existential psychology is about living the human life. Yet, what it means to live the human life; to exist, is also what makes existential psychology so difficult to clearly and concisely define.<sup>33</sup> Depending upon which theorist is consulted, the givens of life that must be confronted vary between Yalom’s rubric of death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness;<sup>34</sup> van Deurzen’s four dimensions of being: the physical, personal, social and spiritual;<sup>35</sup> Bugental’s emphasis on the experience of the subjective; and Frankl’s call to focus on external responsibilities.

Jon Mills offers perhaps the most useful, if not daunting, definition in his article “Existentialism and Psychoanalysis: From Antiquity to Postmodernism”:

Existentialism is a form of phenomenological philosophy that relies on certain reflective methods of studying human consciousness instantiated in the individual, society, and culture, which emerged as a popular general movement characteristic of

---

<sup>32</sup>Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F Ellenberger, *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York: Touchstone, 1958), 12.

<sup>33</sup>In this regard, existential psychology shares the same burden of definition that philosophical existentialism endures. Its broad appeal, as seen in its influence in art, literature, theology and culture, adds to its elusive definition.

<sup>34</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*.

<sup>35</sup>Emmy van Deurzen, *Existential Counseling and Psychotherapy in Practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: SAGE, 2012), 62-63. As van Deurzen notes, her four dimensions are based upon the Swiss psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger’s modes of existence from his Daseinanalysis movement as well as the work of Tillich and Jaspers that add the final fourth, spiritual dimension. These are the *Umwelt*, the physical (biological) dimension; the *Mitwelt*, the social or interpersonal dimension; the *Eigenwelt*, the intrapersonal or psychological dimension; and finally the *Uberwelt*, the spiritual dimension.

twentieth-century European thought represented across many disciplines including literature, the humanities, and the social sciences.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes the experience of existence. To put it another way, existentialism as a philosophy focuses on the experience of experience.<sup>37</sup> Existential psychology, then, as noted, applies the same focus to the individual's psychological experience of life. In short, existential psychology (and existentialism) are hard to define simply because the subject of definition is the individual's experience of life itself.<sup>38</sup> Mick Cooper, professor of counseling at the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, comments that clearly defining existential psychology is such a challenge because of the wide array of human challenges undertaken by those who march under this therapeutic banner: "Rather, it [existential therapy] is best understood as a rich tapestry of intersecting therapeutic practices, all of which orient themselves around a shared concern: human lived-existence."<sup>39</sup>

Because of this unique emphasis, it is not surprising that existential psychology would clash with the modern psychologies and find itself more comfortable with the rising tide of humanistic psychologies rather than traditional psychoanalytical or behavioral schools that were predominant in America after the Second World War. Under the umbrella of the humanistic psychologies, existential psychology is categorized as part of the third wave of psychological theories. This third wave emphasized the search for a

---

<sup>36</sup>Jon Mills, "Existentialism and Psychoanalysis: From Antiquity to Postmodernism," *Psychoanalytic Review* 90, no. 3 (June 2003): 269. While Mills' definition is helpful, his dating of existentialism's genesis in the twentieth century is inaccurate. Modern existential thought has its origins in the mid-nineteenth century.

<sup>37</sup>Thus, existentialism is not merely an intellectual abstraction, but pulls its theoretical data from every aspect of life, including thought, emotion, personal and corporate expressions. This also explains why existentialism is uniquely represented in philosophy, art, literature, and film, as well as psychology and theology.

<sup>38</sup>Francis J. Lescoe, *Existentialism: With or without God* (New York: Alba House, 1974), 8. Lescoe offers more than ten definitions, including the most memorable, if rather unrefined, definition by Carl Michalson: "Existentialism is a clandestine wedding of Nordic melancholy and Parisian pornography."

<sup>39</sup>Mick Cooper, *Existential Therapies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 1.

philosophical understanding of human existence that does justice to the “highest reaches of human achievement and potential” instead of the diminished model of human nature so common in first and second wave psychologies.<sup>40</sup> As such, the core theories and concerns, therapeutic techniques and the therapeutic relationship (often called the therapeutic alliance), took on their own unique style, dramatically different than the two psychological waves that preceded them.

The psychoanalytical schools emphasized the past, unconscious intrapsychic conflicts, and determinative childhood experiences as the *sine qua non* of understanding the human psyche, often relying on medical diagnosis and broad categories to define and label groups of individuals. The behavioral schools emphasized the evolutionary development of human personhood via a stimuli-response paradigm. People were no longer personalities making choices, but instead beings that were predetermined by other factors to simply behave according to sets of conditions.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>Donald Moss, “The Roots and Genealogy of Humanistic Psychology,” in *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology*, 3.

<sup>41</sup>Throughout this study, the use of the plural phrase “modern psychologies” has been intentional as opposed to the singular “psychology” in order to emphasize an important point that is relevant to this particular section. Contrary to popular perception, the field of psychology is not a singular monolithic movement comprised of grand unifying theories, methods, and institutions, but is rather comprised of factions, differing schools, and in some cases vastly differing theories. So diverse is the field of psychological studies that referring to the entire discipline in the singular (and thus implying some sense of overarching uniformity or general coherence) would not simply be incorrect but actually misleading. Sigmund Koch, “‘Psychology’ or ‘the Psychological Studies?’” *American Psychologist* 48 (August 1993): 902.

This fact, however, has not prevented the psychological studies from achieving cultural dominance over the epistemological authority regarding human nature. The many differences within the modern psychologies have been categorized within three broad movements (each with its own major theories, theorists, institutions, journals, practices, conferences, etc.) referred to as “waves.” A brief review of the salient anthropological perspectives of each wave is helpful in order to compare and contrast their differences more clearly and establish important similarities between a humanistic anthropology and biblical anthropology.

*The first wave: psychoanalysis.* Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytic method heavily influenced the first wave of psychology. Freud’s theories of the unconscious mind, aggressive drives, and sexual obsession redefined the thinking and modern understanding of human nature. In this wave, human beings were viewed as predetermined, biomechanical, repressed drives seeking sexual satisfaction and release. In first wave psychology, understanding an individual can be likened to psychological archeology or hydraulics. The psychologist digs deeper and deeper through the layers of psychological sediment to

In contradistinction to these two broad understandings of human personhood, existential psychology seeks to understand the individual in the midst of their external

---

discover shards of lost memories, emotions, and experiences, often forgotten or lost to the individual's own conscious memory. The psychologist then pieces together what the individual is like in the present, based upon the discoveries made through this mental "dig site" of the individual's past. Another way of looking at the individual in the first wave of psychology is through the metaphor of a hydraulic pump. Roy Jose DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology* (New York: Praeger, 1991), ix. Libido supplies or denies the adequate mental fluids and the pressure builds or diminishes. If the mental balance is upset, by either too much or too little of these mental psychological pressures the individual experiences neurosis. *The second wave: behaviorism.* A second wave of psychology rose in response to Freud's complex and often bizarre methods of understanding human personhood. Behaviorism, championed by men like B. F. Skinner, John B. Watson, and Ivan Pavlov, claimed to offer a much simpler and more empirically-based method to explain human behavior. Instead of deep intrapsychic conflicts and unconscious drives, behaviorists see human behavior in much simpler terms; what people think (i.e., their cognitions) and the external environments that surround them will determine an individual's action. Human beings are like "slot-machines", an external stimulus produces an output and the internal workings are not important or regarded at all. Roy Jose DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology* (New York: Praeger, 1991), ix. Furthermore, human beings are little more than advanced evolutionary animals that behave in a simple stimuli-response pattern. Therefore, the view of human personhood is not very positive. Human beings, like dogs or other animals, are conditioned beings. *The third wave: humanism.* Yet, another wave of psychological theories began to make its way through the discipline that was very unlike the first two. The main critique these third wave theorists had about the prior two was that both waves failed to capture the "human" aspect of the phrase "human nature." According to first and second wave theorists, the human experience was one-dimensional: passive. Individuals merely react to either situations, drives, or experiences but are never proactive. Third wave theorists claimed that the prior two waves were too reductionistic in their theories and application and argued for a fuller view of human personhood. Thus, they were called "Humanists" because of their incredibly positive view of human personhood. These Humanistic psychologists argued that human beings cannot be simply defined by past experiences, external stimuli, or predetermined biological response. Instead, human beings are individuals with potentiality, possibility, and grand purpose. Additionally, they argued the future shapes the human experience and not the past or even the present. This shift in perspective and critique is the corrective that evangelicalism should have brought to the modern psychologies but failed to do so. Interestingly enough, almost to a man, the founders of this Humanistic wave shared a religious heritage (Judeo-Christian) that in my mind was foundational in the development of their anthropology.

As noted, humanistic anthropology shares some basic observations that are in alignment with a biblical view of man. For example, man, as endowed with purpose, potential, and able to exercise control over his environment, is similar to themes found in Gen 1:26-28. This emphasis on human potentiality has caused third wave psychologists to approach the psychological task and questions about anthropology in a markedly different way than either waves before them, and to varying degrees this includes both evangelical responses to the modern psychologies. However, in spite of this shift in perspective, humanistic psychology, like all the psychologies, being unanchored to any objective standard of truth, bred a host of erroneous and dangerous beliefs that often overshadow any of its theoretical or practical benefits. While some of its core assumptions and practices reveal blind spots in evangelical anthropology the farther it gets from the certainty of its theological heritage (loose as it was to begin with) the more bizarre and dangerous its theories and applications become. Though, with this in mind, the biblical counseling movement can dialogue with the secular psychologies even as they deny the biblical realities they observe. This kind of interdisciplinary dialogue can refine and sharpen biblical counseling's own theories and insights.

stimulations and past conflicts and experiences but in the very present, recognizing an individual's unique presence-in-the-moment as an experiencing-being, morally responsible, actively engaged and made consciously aware of the moment.

Existential psychologists therefore focus almost entirely upon factors that prevent an individual from being able to engage, become aware of, or be who they actually are. As a result, the role of anxiety, meaning of authenticity, and source of authority<sup>42</sup> are large factors in the theory and practice of psychotherapy.<sup>43</sup>

With these introductory remarks in mind it is clear why existential psychology holds a unique curiosity for the biblical counselor. Scripture affirms man as the crown of God's creation (Gen 1:26-27, 31; Ps 8:3-6); unlike the rest of the created order which produced after their own kinds (Gen 1:11-12, 21, 24-25), man was the direct creation of God's unique care (Gen 2:7; Job 7:17). Man alone was bestowed with the task to image God, act as his steward over the creation, exercise dominion, and reflect his glory. Therefore, humanistic psychology rightly perceives the amazing potential, capacity, and promise within human personhood.

However, because the humanistic psychologies are blinded by the same atheistic worldview that plagues all the psychological systems, they cannot see the most important variable in anthropology: man's amazing potential, capacity, and promise exist to fulfill his task as God's image-bearer. In a word, humans are covenantal beings. Unless this critical variable is included in the equation, the anthropological question can never truly

---

<sup>42</sup>In existential psychology, the concept of authority and meaning are directly tied to each other. If an authority exists, then by and large an individual's meaning is derived from that authority. However, the converse is also true—if there is no authority, then an individual is free to determine their own meaning. So the issue of authority in an individual's life is important in determining personal meaning as well, which has huge theological and practical implications as can easily be imagined and does a lot in explaining the radical personal subjectivism so rampant in society. If no final, absolute authority lays claim over humanity, then all manner of relative authorities (state, societal, personal) can determine meanings.

<sup>43</sup>Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, 305.

and fully be answered.<sup>44</sup> Because of this theological blindness, humanism has been the fount of many aberrant and destructive concepts of the individual,<sup>45</sup> ranging from simple narcissism to radical personal subjectivity. In response, the church has avoided embracing nearly every humanistic belief about man. Understanding this response is helpful in realizing why, even with an anthropological contribution, existential psychology was not seriously considered by the biblical counseling movement in its nascent days. While this cautious response is wise, it has been perhaps too rigid. There is much more to the humanistic psychologies and existential psychology in particular than their excesses, and the church would be wise to carefully reengage the conversation within its rightful, theological context.<sup>46</sup> It is my hope that this work begins to get this conversation started again.

### **Historic Factors That Contributed to Biblical Counseling's Anthropology**

Belief systems do not appear whole cloth from thin air. They are embedded in historic and cultural situations that give shape and form to their ideas. To understand why biblical counseling's anthropology may have developed with its own particular blind spots, it is helpful to know the historic context that first gave rise to biblical counseling.

On the one hand, the evangelical world had two markedly different responses to the rise of the modern psychologies, yet upon closer inspection, they both responded in a very similar manner.<sup>47</sup> What follows is a brief observation of these differing yet similar

---

<sup>44</sup>J. E. Colwell, "Anthropology," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, The Master Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988).

<sup>45</sup>Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, 292.

<sup>46</sup>Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, 293; Powlison, "Cure of Souls," 30, 35.

<sup>47</sup>For a fuller institutional history of the development of these two movements, see David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010). This section is only a brief observation of evangelical responses as it pertains to the topic of this dissertation.

responses and why neither response was sufficient to answer the challenge posed by the modern psychologies, particularly in its anthropology.

**The response by the broader evangelical community.** The first major response by the evangelical world was integrating psychology and theology, led by Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California.

Unfortunately, this integration seemed to go in only one direction, which was the infusing of psychology into theology and not the other way around. The Christian counseling response was either too impressed by the secular psychologies to actually critique it or was devoured by them.<sup>48</sup> Ironically enough, with the exception of one of Fuller's founding psychologist, John Finch,<sup>49</sup> who actually espoused theories similar to existential psychology that were in opposition to the prevailing views of anthropology in the psychological community, the majority of Christian counseling and psychology adapted the modern psychologies with little biblical-theological modification regarding their views of man.

**The response of the biblical counseling movement.** A second major response by the evangelical world was to delineate a distinctly biblical methodology in counseling which became the biblical counseling movement.

As I briefly outlined, the biblical counseling movement, spearheaded by Presbyterian minister Jay Adams, responded by articulating a distinctly biblical theology and methodology for dealing with problems in living. The movement reinterpreted the new vocabulary of the modern psychologies in distinctly biblical terminology<sup>50</sup> and offered a

---

<sup>48</sup>David Powlison, "Critiquing Modern Integrationists," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 25. Powlison, "Crucial Issues," 76.

<sup>49</sup>Finch, *A Christian Existential Psychology*.

<sup>50</sup>For example, bulimia as gluttony, peer-pressure as the fear of man, narcissism as pride, addictions as lusts and slavery. In effect, by finding the semantic biblical analog, the moral weight of the

more conservative approach in dealing with psychological problems. In so doing, the biblical counseling movement developed a robust approach in dealing with many common sins and difficulties that individuals struggled with throughout their lives. Yet, for the purposes of this research, two criticisms are important to note regarding the biblical counseling movement that have a direct bearing on the applicability of this study.

First, while biblical counseling has helped Christians articulate a methodology of dealing with the more obvious and overt sins (i.e., anger, lust, greed), known by the Reformers as “high-handed” sins,<sup>51</sup> it has done little in articulating a methodology for dealing with or understanding sin’s deceptive nature (i.e., self-deceit, unawareness, ignorance, blindness, irrationality, and foolishness). In other words, where the Bible uses metaphors and terms such as rebellion, transgression, and wickedness<sup>52</sup> to describe “sin,” biblical counseling has done well helping individuals recognize such behavior and turn from it. However, where the Bible uses such metaphors as blindness, drunkenness, deafness, or metaphors of a brute beast,<sup>53</sup> all which share in common a fundamental unawareness and internal disconnect between actions and reality, biblical counseling has failed to offer any equally robust theory or therapeutic practice.

Second, the biblical counseling movement approached counseling from its theological framework, which offered robust doctrines that helped understand individuals as a collective (i.e., humanity) but not necessarily individuals who are unique instantiations

---

“disorder” was reclaimed and thus the individual was also a responsible agent instead of being merely a victim.

<sup>51</sup>“High-handed” sins refer to the obvious moral dilemmas faced in such situations when a clear right course of action and conduct is apparent along with an equally obvious wrong course of action and conduct

<sup>52</sup>Exod 23:21, 34:7; Deut 9:4, 13:5; Josh 22:16; 1 Sam 12:17, 15:23; Pss 36:1, 106:6; Isa 9:18, 58:1; Ezek 3:19; Luke 11:39; Acts 8:22; Rom 5:14; Gal 6:1; Heb 3:15; Jas 1:21; Jude 11.

<sup>53</sup>Deut 28:28; Pss 38:13, 73:22; Isa 35:5, 42:18, 43:8; Jer 13:13; Hab 2:15; Ezek 23:33; Isa 6:10; 43:8; Zeph 1:17; John 12:40; Rom 2:19; 2 Pet 1:9; 1 John 2:11; Rev 3:17.

of that collective. In other words, what it means to grow in knowledge, holiness, and righteousness<sup>54</sup> for a middle-aged, emotionally abused, and divorced female Asian-American will look markedly different from for a teenage, Caucasian, male from an intact, wealthy family. To be sure, there will be similarities, but wise counsel stems from understanding the differences, how they relate, and how they connect back to the larger theological framework.

By contrast, the Christian counseling movement moved in the opposite direction. Instead of working from a strong theological basis, Christian counseling focused on the therapeutic nature of the work with little, if any, connection to theological framework.

In spite of these very different approaches to the counseling task, Christian counseling and biblical counseling also responded in a very similar way, which is why neither offered a very through-going critique of psychology's main topic of concern: its anthropology.

Both Christian and biblical counseling responses to the modern psychologies were the responses of practitioners rather than theorists. Instead of critiquing the very anthropological theories of the modern psychologies, both movements responded to the practical application of those ill-informed theories. Christian counseling sought to adapt the applications of the modern psychologies while biblical counseling sought to refute them and offer their own applications. Both were busied implementing their particular responsive strategy that neither adequately considered how their own view of human experience was shaped by many of the same reductionist assumptions that shaped the view of human experience the various psychologies put forth.

In other words, the view of pathology espoused by Freud resembled the biblical notion of man's fallen nature enough so that the rest of Freud's anthropological framework

---

<sup>54</sup>The common Reformed understanding of growth in sanctification (cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

was not examined thoroughly to see if in fact it was even correct. Freud, saw one element of man's nature (and thus experience) and built everything on that limited perspective. So, the modern psychologies, following Freud, presented a reduced view of human personhood that resembled, in some degree, the biblical notion of the fall, rather than question this theory more fully, the Christian counseling and biblical counseling movements responded to the outworking's of psychology's diagnoses, therapeutic practices, institutions, and applications. All the while, neither movement recognized the reductionist thinking about the human person at the core of the modern psychologies. There was enough of a "fall" doctrine in the psychologies to distract biblical counselors just as there was enough of a "redemption" doctrine to distract Christian counselors from the deeper anthropological error prevalent in the psychologies.<sup>55</sup> The reductionist error of the modern psychologies is that none of the theories is robust enough to conceive of human persons as simultaneously creatures of creation, fall, and redemption.<sup>56</sup> However, since both sides within evangelicalism were also engaged in an in-house jurisdictional battle,<sup>57</sup> neither were compelled to reassess if even they understood just how different the biblical view of

---

<sup>55</sup>I use these terms "fall" and "redemption" in reference to the views of secular psychological modalities with only the faintest hint at their meanings from a Christian standpoint. By the use of the term "fall," I mean that the psychologies recognized inherent pathology that all humans share, thus seeing an impact of sin yet not referring to its true name. Likewise, by the use of the term "redemption," the psychologies propose to offer individuals a way to ameliorate or overcome these pathologies and live better lives. Finally, the use of the term "creation" alludes to those elements of man's inherent potential and capacities as a created being in the *imago Dei*, whereas non-Christians would merely consider them innate to human personhood. While the modern psychologies do not use the traditional terms and their associated meanings like sin and salvation, they most assuredly assume the same kind of dynamics. See E. Brooks Hollifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Sin to Self-Realization* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

<sup>56</sup>I.e., man as covenantal being. With the notable exception of Otto Rank, one of Freud's early associates, who regarded man as a "theological being," no psychologist until the humanists even had a category for man as anything other than psycho-social-biological being. Moss, "The Roots and Genealogy," 14.

<sup>57</sup>Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 149-51. Jay E. Adams, "Response to the Congress on Christian Counseling" (speech given at Congress on Christian Counseling, Atlanta, November 10, 1988).

human personhood was from what modern psychology taught. Table 1 helps locate the emphasis of each theory’s anthropology.<sup>58</sup>

Table 1. Anthropological emphasis of differing theories

	Creation	Fall	Redemption
Biblical Counseling		X	\
Christian Counseling	\		X
1 <sup>st</sup> wave psychologies		X	\
2 <sup>nd</sup> wave psychologies		\	X
3 <sup>rd</sup> wave psychologies	X		\

**Summary.** Advancing theories in any movement takes time and perspective. Theoretical implications have to be tested, and practices need to be developed, refined, modified, or discarded. Practitioners and theorists debate, balance, and counter balance one another until finally new insights or perspectives enter the equation and all the variables begin to change, new theories get introduced, and the process begins all over again.

On the one hand, it could be easy to conclude “the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light” (Luke 16:8b).<sup>59</sup> After all, it stands to reason that it should have been Christians, not humanists, to offer a more biblically-based psychological anthropology. It should have been Christians who challenged the theoretical premise of the modern psychologies’ view of human personhood rather than other psychologists. It should have been Christians who argued for a more human understanding of human experience.

---

<sup>58</sup>While every theory has a more pronounced emphasis on one aspect of human personhood, indicated by the “X,” every theory also comprehends, to a lesser degree, other elements of human personhood, indicated by the “\.”

<sup>59</sup>All Scripture references are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

On the other hand, it is hard to imagine biblical counseling developing any differently than it has since its founders and ideas were inexorably bound to the historical, theoretical, and cultural context that also bound evangelicalisms larger response to the modern psychologies. With the passing of time, the intellectual and practical landscape changes and the emphases shift. What once was so clear can be questioned, and what was once only hinted at can receive priority.<sup>60</sup> The fundamental issues of Scripture's sufficiency in counseling have been established, and biblical counseling practices and institutions founded and matured; margin now exists to do what early practitioners and theorists could not: reflect and refine. Such as it is, that is the trajectory of the topic of this dissertation. With time and perspective, issues not so clear become clearer, and connections that were barely visible through the "fog of war" come into focus.

For all the reasons mentioned, I am convinced that the biblical counseling movement has room to grow in its anthropology and that growth will directly influence the way the counseling relationship is utilized as a primary ministry tool itself rather than simply a means to an end.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 introduces the general topic of the dissertation. The chapter provides the thesis and rationale for the entire work. Because the purpose of this dissertation is to offer a corrective by way of contrasting two divergent, yet similar disciplines, it is necessary to include those factors that highlight the need, discuss the shortcomings and strengths of each discipline, and explain the connections between the two. The methodology and limitations of the study are then presented. Chapter 1 will end with a

---

<sup>60</sup> Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, xii, 94, 97. Adam's was clear that his early writings were merely foundational work for the biblical counseling movement. He consistently called on others to build upon, refine, correct, and mature his work. Thus this present work should not be interpreted as a refutation of Adams but merely an advancement of, and answer to, his call for other thinkers and participants within the movement to continue what he started.

chapter-by-chapter summary of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 lays the necessary groundwork for the reader to grasp a working understanding of existential psychology as a subset of humanistic psychology and psychology in general. Key figures, theories, reactions, and events will be discussed so the reader is able to appreciate and simultaneously critique existential psychology as well as follow its development and see its connections to biblical theology and counseling. The defining distinctive of existential psychology will be examined and its importance discussed in terms of how all other psychologies and even biblical counseling fails to appreciate this emphasis. The chapter ends by highlighting the deficiencies of existential psychology and why it ultimately fails to be the anthropological corrective for understanding human personhood

Chapter 3 discusses the three critical questions that existential psychology asks in response to their unique emphasis on existence discussed in chapter 2. Questions and answers regarding authenticity, anxiety, and authority form the basis of existential psychology's theoretical conceptions of human personhood and its therapeutic care as well.

Chapter 4 will critique existential psychology's primary shortcoming by providing the objective ground for being. This theological grounding will be established by looking at the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and its necessary corollary of the *Imago Christi*. Once this ground is established it will be clear that the key to true humanity comes by being in Christ. Finally, the three existential questions examined in chapter 3 can be recast through this Christocentric perspective.

Chapter 5 discusses the recognition within the biblical counseling movement to develop the counselor-counselee relationship. The bulk of the chapter discusses a methodology and practice that develop and strengthen the working relationship between counselor and counselee and conclude with some applicability of this same methodology to small group counseling ministries as well.

Chapter 6 reviews the salient points and critiques of both existential

psychology and biblical counseling's anthropology and counseling relationship practice, reviews the overall argument made in the study, and makes recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### MEANING AND BEING

In Psalm 144:3-4, King David asks and answers a question that highlights the existential dilemma with which the modern psychologies must grapple: “What is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.” These two verses highlight the reality that man is a self-reflecting being who yearns for the transcendent yet is doomed to an existence that is fleeting at best. The preacher in the book of Ecclesiastes proclaims “Vanity, vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever” (1:2-4). Finally, the book of Job is riddled with existential angst: “Man is . . . few of days and full of trouble . . . like a flower and withers; like a shadow and continues not . . . if he dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:1). These are just a few of the existential cries that dominate the book. In fact, Ernest Breisach states that existentialism is merely picking up Job’s questions<sup>1</sup>—questions about life, death, and ultimate meaning.

Existentialism, however, is not simply about the weary and the woeful. Indeed, existentialism in general, and existential psychology in particular, is about living all of life aware and in-the-moment.<sup>2</sup> To do this, though, existential thinkers have to answer a more fundamental question: What does it mean to exist, to be human? King David asks it,

---

<sup>1</sup>Ernst Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism: From Kierkegaard to Sartre: A Complete, Authoritative Guide to a Major Philosophy of Our Time* (New York: Grove, 1962), 134.

<sup>2</sup>James F. T. Bugental et al., “Existential-Humanistic Psychotherapy in Action: A Demonstration with James F.T. Bugental,” 2006, accessed September 12, 2016, <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?>. Carl Michalson, ed., *Christianity and the Existentialists* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1956), 5.

Qoheleth asks it, Job asks it, and any individual or group who wonders about how to live must ask it. More recently, psychologists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries began to ask it, and their answers began to shape contemporary culture's understanding of man.<sup>3</sup>

The rise of modernism, which dominated twentieth-century thought, ensured that only human knowledge—not divine revelation—would be acceptable as fact.<sup>4</sup> Traditional notions of man being created in the image of God were cast aside as mere religious dogma. Thus the stage was set for a whole new answer to the age-old question *what is man?* As a result of Americans' new-found love of psychology and the changing culture, the time was ripe for a new, more modern and scientific answer to the question of anthropology.<sup>5</sup> First, psychoanalysts produced their vision of man with all his inner conflict,<sup>6</sup> psycho-social-sexual drives,<sup>7</sup> the deep and mysterious unconscious realm laden with all manner of social and personal guilt. Next, behaviorists produced their vision of man as a programmable machine, responding only to external stimuli and totally predetermined by environmental factors.<sup>8</sup> Finally, a third group of psychologists (the so-called “third force”) arose in response to and protest against these diminished views of human personhood. They were called humanists because of their emphasis on reclaiming

---

<sup>3</sup>Stephen A. Mitchell and Margaret J. Black, *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought* (New York: Basic, 1995), 213.

<sup>4</sup>Eric L. Johnson, ed., *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 15.

<sup>5</sup>Philip Cushman, “Psychotherapy to 1992: A Historically Situated Interpretation,” in *History of Psychotherapy: A Century of Change*, ed. Donald K. Freedheim (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1992), 25ff.

<sup>6</sup>Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic, 1980), 6; Philip Cushman, *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy* (Cambridge: Da Capo, 1995), 115; Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1949), 55.

<sup>7</sup>Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, 9-13.

<sup>8</sup>James Bugental, “Humanistic Psychology and the Clinician,” in *Progress in Clinical Psychology*, ed. Lawrence Edwin and Bernard Riess (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1966), 7:228.

the “human” element of what it means to be human.<sup>9</sup> Rather than seeking to define man based on pathologies or control variables in an experiment, the humanists sought to define man by what was right and positive within him. In other words, they sought to understand man from his potentials and strengths rather than from his ills and dysfunctions.<sup>10</sup> Among the humanists were existential psychologists and a new vision of anthropology that emphasized the *existence* of the individual as a unique human person rather than the *essence* of human personhood in general.

Unfortunately, however, because this third wave of psychologists arose from the same modernistic assumptions that gave birth to the first two waves of psychology (psychodynamic psychology and behaviorism), it too suffers from an anthropological blindness that prevents it from seeing the human person fully. While the humanistic psychologists’ vision may be clearer than their predecessors’, they still failed to capture human personhood in all of its created beauty.

This chapter provides a critique of the anthropology of the first two waves of psychology from the perspective of the humanistic psychologist themselves. Next, it surveys the historical development and explanation of existential psychology and

---

<sup>9</sup>In order to prevent confusion, an important pedagogical note regarding the relationship between existential psychology and humanism is necessary. In the behavioral sciences, psychological humanism is the theoretical umbrella that covers many other theories such as existential psychology. In the same way that the term “Christian” is a rather broad term that encapsulates those of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions, psychologically speaking a humanist can encapsulate an existentialist. For example, although all Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians share certain core beliefs, they do not share numerous other beliefs that distinguish them from each other (sometimes sharply). Similarly, all humanists share certain anthropological beliefs while not sharing numerous other beliefs, such as those that distinguish an existentialist from a humanist. Though these beliefs may be very distinct, they are not so distinct as to exclude the person holding them from the humanist family. The point is that all existentialists are humanists in the same way that all Protestants are Christians; but not all humanists are existentialist just as not all Christians are Protestants. Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable to discuss humanism in a paper about existential psychology because in order to truly grasp existential psychology one must also grasp its larger theoretical framework—humanism.

<sup>10</sup>Donald Moss, “The Roots and Genealogy of Humanistic Psychology,” in *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 13.

identifies its core distinguishing feature—existence. Finally, this chapter demonstrates the conceptual similarities between existential psychology and biblical counseling, and concludes with an explanation of existential psychology’s own failed anthropology.

### **Anthropological Critiques of the Modern Psychologies**

As noted in chapter 1, existential psychology was a response to the reductionistic and determinist views of Freud and part of a cultural movement away from such bounded and negative views of human personhood.<sup>11</sup> Currently, existential psychology is quite affable with and even complimentary of the legacy of Freud and his theories. For example, some existential psychologists would agree with Freudian theorists and clinicians that inner conflicts result in psychologically unhealthy lifestyles while perhaps debating the source of such conflicts. In traditional psychoanalysis, for instance, unconscious sexual and aggressive drives are held to cause anxiety, which then leads to defense mechanisms in an individual’s life. According to existential psychiatrist Irvin Yalom, however, the awareness of the ultimate concerns of life is what fuels anxiety and results in a different set of defense mechanisms.<sup>12</sup>

An existential psychologist would part ways with most other psychologists because humanists in general and existential psychologists in particular understand humans as beings who organize their world through a lens of telic congruence rather than organismic congruence.<sup>13</sup> Suffice to say that both the existential psychologist and

---

<sup>11</sup>Benjamin B. Wolman, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Psychoanalysis*, A Henry Holt Reference Book (New York: Henry Holt, 1996).

<sup>12</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 9-10.

<sup>13</sup>Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Approach*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 86, 118. Telic congruence would define an individual’s organizing theme as something they are becoming and striving toward—some kind of end goal. In this regard, existential psychology is in harmony with a Christian worldview. Existential psychology views the person as driven by a desire to understand ultimate meaning and purpose in life, while the Christian worldview holds that the ultimate purpose and meaning for each human is to reclaim the full *imago Dei*. Organismic congruence, in contrast, is a psychological value that embraces what humans currently are rather than what they might become.

psychoanalyst consider themselves as “psychodynamic” in orientation because they agree that inner tensions (dynamics) drive external actions (behavior). Of course, this amenable truce today covers a much more acrimonious earlier relationship between the two schools of thought.

Abraham Maslow, one of the early founders of the humanistic movement in psychology, was one of the more vocal and colorful critics of psychoanalysis. Maslow not only disparaged its deficient views of human personhood, which he believed could themselves be considered evidence of psychopathology, but implied in the introduction to his book *Motivation and Personality* through the use of conspiratorial language that it was a deliberate attempt to quiet the humanist revolution.<sup>14</sup>

Carl Rogers, another founding member of the humanist movement in psychology, was convinced that psychoanalysis could not see man accurately because its lens for psychopathology was simply too large. In other words, there was no room in Freud’s system for people simply to be normal,<sup>15</sup> an experience that Gordon Allport, another founder of the humanist movement, found to be personally true. As a young man, Allport met Sigmund Freud. During their brief interaction, Allport found himself nervous and felt the need to fill the conversational gap between himself and the psychoanalytic mastermind. In doing so, Allport recounted the actions of a young boy on the train he had recently ridden who complained to his mother about the dirty condition of the railroad car. Freud, without hesitation, asked if Allport was the young boy, implying that Allport might be struggling with some various complexes. Reflecting upon the situation later, Allport realized that Freud’s views of pathology colored everything to such a degree that the master of psychoanalysis could not distinguish simple nervousness from a pathological

---

<sup>14</sup>Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), ix-xi.

<sup>15</sup>Richard I. Evans, *Carl Rogers: The Man and His Ideas* (New York: Dutton, 1975), 30.

complex.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in Freud's world, there was no simple emotion or reaction but only pathology and complexes.

Furthermore, Allport disagreed with Freud's typological reductionism.<sup>17</sup> He believed there simply was no evidence to support such theorizing, and more to the point a person cannot be known by a single trait or set of behavior patterns. Rather, one must take into account the whole person to understand the individual as a human being and not as an abstracted type.<sup>18</sup> In time, other theorists and studies would validate Allport's claims.<sup>19</sup> The lack of objective evidence to support Freud's (meta-physical) theories of man combined with the overzealous pathological view of human nature led members of the humanist movement to criticize psychoanalysis as more of a religious dogma than a science.<sup>20</sup> Years later, authors such as Don Browning and Paul Vitz would draw the same conclusions regarding the quasi-religious and ethical nature of the psychologies in general.<sup>21</sup>

According to early humanists, psychoanalysis failed to provide an adequate anthropology because its theories were unable to conceive of normal human interaction

---

<sup>16</sup>Richard Evans, *Gordon Allport: The Man and His Ideas* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970), 4-5.

<sup>17</sup>Typological reductionism occurs when an entire behavior pattern is extrapolated from a single trait that is recognized in an individual's personality. Freud was certainly guilty of this kind of reductionism, particularly when it came to his psycho-sexual stages of development (i.e., oral, anal, phallic, latency, genital).

<sup>18</sup>Evans, *Gordon Allport*, 7.

<sup>19</sup>Joseph Wolpe and Stanley Rachman, "Psychoanalytic 'Evidence': A Critique Based on Freud's Case of Little Hans," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 131, no. 2 (1960): 135-48; Stanley B. Messer and Alan S. Gurman, *Essential Psychotherapies: Theory and Practice* (New York: Guilford, 2011), 109.

<sup>20</sup>Evans, *Gordon Allport*, 11-12; Evans, *Carl Rogers*, 88; James F. T. Bugental, ed., *Challenges of Humanistic Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 346.

<sup>21</sup>Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 6-7; Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 17-18.

without pathology and to appreciate the whole person rather than his constituent parts. In short, in the eyes of psychoanalysis, people were reduced to pathologies and psychological parts so that there were no human beings *per se*.

The anthropological views of the second wave of psychology, behaviorism, did not bode much better than its predecessor, psychoanalysis. Behaviorism was a reaction against the perceived anthropological errors of psychoanalysis, as well as a desire to establish a “science of man” that was truly based upon scientific methods rather than upon metaphysical or mental constructs that could not be subjected to scientific analysis. Early behaviorists believed that the same principles used to study man’s physical environment could be used to study man himself.<sup>22</sup> This purely objective method of studying man as one would study trees, rocks, or weather patterns, however, did not take into account internal processes, mental events, or emotions but focused instead entirely upon observable behaviors. Man was reduced in this case not to an intra-psychic pathology but to an orderly machine, or part of the furniture of the natural world. If the psychoanalyst erred focusing too exclusively on deep psychic structures and insight, the behaviorist erred in the opposite direction with an exclusive focus on simple behavior and conditions.<sup>23</sup> The environment acts and man reacts, which causes other actions, and so on.

Thus, this early form of behaviorism is markedly deterministic and reduces man to mechanistic actions and reactions—to nothing more than an object.<sup>24</sup> Carl Rogers, one of the most outspoken critics of behaviorism, remarked that if the behaviorist world were ever to be created along the lines of B. F. Skinner’s *Walden II*, it would “destroy the

---

<sup>22</sup>Mary Van Leeuwen, “The Behaviorist Bandwagon and the Body of Christ. pt. 1, What Is Behaviorism?” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 31, no. 1 (March 1979): 4.

<sup>23</sup>Messer and Gurman, *Essential Psychotherapies*, 110-11.

<sup>24</sup>Van Leeuwen, “The Behaviorist Bandwagon. pt.1,” 4; Carl Rogers, “Some Questions and Challenges Facing Humanistic Psychology,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1965): 1.

human person.”<sup>25</sup> Gordon Allport was equally concerned about the behaviorists’ approach, which he referred to as “person-destroying psychologists.”<sup>26</sup>

Rogers lamented that if any of his work in the behavioral sciences contributed to bringing about such a world he “want[ed] none of it.”<sup>27</sup> A world in which human beings were controlled, modified, and conditioned based on objective science would create “a pseudo-form of the good life which includes everything save that which makes it good.”<sup>28</sup> The humanists recognized the glaring blindness of what the behaviorists considered a person to be—a biological machine that simply changed behavior that was predetermined by external variables.<sup>29</sup> James Bugental coined the term “mechanomorph” to describe the behaviorist’s inadequate view of man in which man was held to be merely a mechanism that changes its behavior.<sup>30</sup>

As indicated, the behaviorist view leaves no room for mental processes, moral accountability, or spiritual realities.<sup>31</sup> The behaviorist believes, as Skinner’s fictional portrayal of a utopia—in *Walden II*—made frighteningly clear, that science can condition man and create whatever society wants. John Watson proclaimed that, using the science of behavioral therapy, he could condition any child to become either a criminal or a

---

<sup>25</sup>Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy: A Distinguished Psychologist’s Guide to Personal Growth and Creativity*, Sentry ed. 60 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 391.

<sup>26</sup>Gordon Allport, “The Psychological Nature of Personality,” *The Personalist* 34, no. 4 (1953): 353.

<sup>27</sup>Rogers, *On Becoming a Person*, 391.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Bugental, *Challenges of Humanistic Psychology*, 346.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>31</sup>Mary Van Leeuwen, “The Behaviorist Bandwagon and the Body of Christ. pt. 3, A Christian Examination of Applied Behaviorism,” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 31, no. 3 (September 1979): 129.

scientist.<sup>32</sup> Many critics see in the behaviorist's premise the contradiction that they themselves missed. Mary Van Leeuwen rightly deemed the entire behavioral system of behavior modification as self-contradictory: "How, we are forced to ask, can a totally-determined organism transcend his environmental determinism to take charge of the environment that totally determines him?"<sup>33</sup> While the humanists themselves did not make this argument, their foundational beliefs in human personhood consisting in freedom, self-actualization, and responsibility assume this same line of reasoning.

According to the early humanists, behaviorism failed to provide an adequate anthropology because its theories could not conceive of human personhood as anything beyond a physical machine that responded to external stimuli and resulted in the absence of any human attributes that resembled real human experience.

Thus, it is clear that the founding members of the humanist-existentialist movement were deeply troubled by the anthropological views of the behavioral sciences of their time.<sup>34</sup> This was no mere academic discussion to them but, as James Bugental noted, a conflict for the very soul of man.<sup>35</sup> Bugental may not have intended any particular theological weight in this statement, but Rollo May felt that the only way to understand the human dimension of life was through the study of theology and believed the existential movement in psychology was not merely another psychological reform but

---

<sup>32</sup>Moss, "The Roots and Genealogy of Humanistic Psychology," 3.

<sup>33</sup>Mary Van Leeuwen, "The Behaviorist Bandwagon and the Body of Christ. pt. 2, A Critique of Ontological Behaviorism from a Christian Perspective," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation*, 31, no. 2 (June 1979): 89.

<sup>34</sup>In 1963, the Association of Humanistic Psychologists was founded. It included individuals on a diverse spectrum of beliefs, including atheists, theists, and even elements of the 1960s hippy counterculture human potential movement. The only thing this eclectic gathering of individuals agreed upon was their commitment to do something about their deep dissatisfaction with the domineering presence of behaviorism and psychoanalysis within American psychology. See Roy José DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology* (New York: Praeger, 1991), chap. 1, for a history of these developments.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 83.

a challenge to the behavioral sciences in general.<sup>36</sup> If any one man is to be credited with trailblazing the way for this new vision of man, however, it was Abraham Maslow. Rather than formulating an understanding of man based entirely upon conversations with the “mentally ill” and observations of lab rats, Maslow believed the study of healthy, fully functional individuals was the surer route.<sup>37</sup> Maslow would begin an empirical study of individuals, living and dead, who gave evidence of the highest human virtues who “strained their human nature to its highest limits,” thus showing the potential that individuals clearly had within themselves.<sup>38</sup> Maslow began in earnest to seek out and organize others who shared his concerns, men like Bugental, Rogers, May, and Allport.

The vision for man amongst the humanistic-existential thinkers stood in stark contrast to what preceded them in the psychological sciences. Man was not a predetermined, static biological being but rather an autonomous, creative, dynamic “becoming.”<sup>39</sup> In a similar vein, although in a very different context, Jay Adams, in his landmark book that launched the modern biblical counseling movement, shared this same sentiment—that human beings are really human becomings.<sup>40</sup> The vision that the humanistic-existential movement had of human nature focused on the potential of individuals to realize, choose, and grow in their various capacities and strengths. In fact, the humanists believed that anything that prevented this natural growth trajectory was

---

<sup>36</sup>DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology*, 25, 53.

<sup>37</sup>Moss, “The Roots and Genealogy of Humanistic Psychology,” 13.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology*, 83. According to Martin Heidegger, an influential voice in the world of existential philosophy and psychology, Christianity knew very well the dialecticism of being as a way of becoming. See the excellent chapter on Martin Heidegger’s contribution to existential thought, Erich Dinkler, “Martin Heidegger,” in *Christianity and the Existentialists*, ed. Carl Michalson (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1956), 97-127.

<sup>40</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 74.

itself the pathology that needed remediation.<sup>41</sup> Bugental's 1964 article "The Third Force in Psychology" laid out the orientation of the movement that is held to this day. The five board postulates are

- 1) Human beings, as human, are more than the sum of their parts. They cannot be reduced to component parts or functions.
- 2) Human beings exist in a uniquely human context as well as in a cosmic ecology.
- 3) Human beings are aware and aware of being aware—i.e., they are conscious. Human consciousness potentially includes an awareness of oneself in the context of other people and the cosmos.
- 4) Human beings have some choice and, with that, responsibility.
- 5) Human beings are intentional, aim at goals, are aware that they cause future events, and seek meaning, value, and creativity.<sup>42</sup>

These postulates are the shared vision of the humanistic movement. What differentiates the various strains within the existential movement are the emphasis, degree, and therapeutic techniques employed to achieve those ends.

This introduction to the development of the humanistic-existential anthropological view lays the foundation for a closer examination of existential psychology and its unique contributions that allow it to be a fruitful dialogue partner to biblical counseling in the particular area of anthropology.

### **The Development and Defining Feature of Existential Psychology**

It is important to understand the distinctions between existential psychology and existentialism as a philosophy. This distinction is important to recognize in order to avoid confusing existential psychology with existential philosophy or existential art, existential literature, existential theology, or a host of other creative and intellectual

---

<sup>41</sup>DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology*, 84.

<sup>42</sup>James. F. T. Bugental, "The Third Force in Psychology," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 4, no. 1 (1964): 19-25.

endeavors prefixed with the adjective “existential.” While existential psychology and existentialism share similar intellectual origins and motivations, their development and applications are very distinct. In this sense, the two disciplines are more like distant cousins than siblings.<sup>43</sup> In attempting to clearly understand and define them in both their similarities and differences, the task is a little like explaining at what point east meets west. No matter where one places that point, one is bound to be both right *and* wrong. Nevertheless, a starting point is necessary for any journey, including those that tread upon fields of knowledge.

The first difficulty one will encounter in the study of existentialism is how to define it. The only apparent agreement among writers is that it is difficult to do so clearly.<sup>44</sup> A second difficulty facing the student is an ability to appreciate the very concern with which existentialist thinkers were preoccupied: the reality of the subjective human experience. In contradistinction to existentialism, the prevailing philosophies during the early nineteenth century were dominated by platonic and rational thought.<sup>45</sup>

Plato’s view of *Essence* was that there is a perfect ideal, or form, of which everything on earth is merely a reflection.<sup>46</sup> Thus, any given cat on the street is a token,

---

<sup>43</sup>Roy José DeCarvalho, “A History of the ‘Third Force’ in Psychology,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 30, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 35.

<sup>44</sup>Jean Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, trans. Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1949), 2; Jon Mills, “Existentialism and Psychoanalysis: From Antiquity to Postmodernism,” *Psychoanalytic Review* 90, no. 3 (June 2003): 269.

<sup>45</sup>Jean Wahl, *A Short History of Existentialism*, trans. Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1949), 2-3; James F. T. Bugental, *Psychotherapy Isn’t What You Think: Bringing the Psychotherapeutic Engagement into the Living Moment* (Phoenix: Zeig, Tucker, 1999), 56.

<sup>46</sup>Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 288-89; Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith: A Historical Sketch from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1968), 15-16; Richard Kraut, “Plato,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 619-22. Reinhardt Grossmann, *The Existence of the World: An Introduction to Ontology*, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1992), 3-13.

or imperfect instantiation, of ultimate “cat-ness.” The existential dilemma becomes clear, however, if this method is combined, by way of mathematics, to ontological categories. For example, two unicorns plus two unicorns equal four unicorns. This equation is true mathematically, even if the tokens in the equation—in this case, unicorns—do not really exist (ontologically). So, in the philosophical world of essences, there can be things that are true but not necessarily real; and because this kind of philosophical reasoning has worked so well, particularly in the disciplines of science, one forgets that it requires a certain level of ontological abstraction to omit an actual living individual from the equation (instantiation). Therefore, although the concept of *Essence* works well theoretically, it is easily disconnected from reality, and reality is where real human beings live their lives.

Early existential thinkers, such as Søren Kierkegaard, responded to this omission of the individual’s experience and the subjugation of all subjectivity to objectivity by asserting that reality should not be defined by abstract essence alone but must also include the one who actually experiences it (the existent).<sup>47</sup> They believed that reality is as much a matter of a person’s perception of the world as it is an experience of the world objectively, or as it actually is. Today, this thinking has unfortunately devolved into a radical postmodern subjectivism, but for Kierkegaard and other existential thinkers, the call was for a correction to the dominating rationalism of their day to a fuller understanding of truth and human experience and how the two relate.<sup>48</sup>

The call of the existentialist is that the world of objects has no inherent meaning without a human experience of them. Without the human individual to attribute value and meaning to the objects of the world, the world is merely a self-functioning ecosystem that

---

<sup>47</sup>C. Gratton Kemp, “Existential Counseling,” *The Counseling Psychologist* 2, no. 3 (1971): 2; Rollo May and Irvin Yalom, “Existential Psychotherapy,” in *Current Psychotherapies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock, 1984), 362-63.

<sup>48</sup>Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism*, 26-27, 208.

simply is.<sup>49</sup> Thus, if human experience and the natural world are distinct ontological realities, then the objective methods of science, while effective at discerning properties of the natural world, are useless for gaining access to the subjective world of the individual's experience.<sup>50</sup> Man is more than another object in nature, subject to mere natural forces and dictates of physical law. The human individual is wholly unique and can be properly understood only once this uniqueness is truly appreciated. That men are actually men and not merely tokens dictated to and driven by forces of nature is made clear in one of the finest works of existential literature, Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*.

It is just his [man's] fantastic dreams, his most patent absurdities, that he will desire above all else for the sole purpose of proving to himself (as though that were so necessary) that men are still men and not keys of a piano on which the laws of nature are indeed playing any tune they like. . . . The whole meaning of human life can be summed up in the one statement that man only exists for the purpose of proving to himself every minute that he is a man and not an organ stop!<sup>51</sup>

This passage shows that the prevailing assumptions of rationalism were having a devastating effect on human personhood through the loss of the subjectivity of man as an actual human individual who experiences reality. Therefore, existentialism grew in response to the rationalism of its day. Humanness was being lost amidst the systems of philosophical thought with their cold epistemic concepts and technological innovations that moved individuals into the background while moving generalizations *about* individuals into the foreground. Existentialism was a response aimed at making the case for man's experience of life (subjectivity) as important as the essence of life (objectivity) and thus humanize the concept of what it means to be human.

---

<sup>49</sup>As mentioned, this well-intentioned philosophical correction has become radicalized and resulted in extremes found in such ontologically bizarre questions as "if a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it really make a sound?"

<sup>50</sup>Maurice S. Friedman, *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader* (Amherst, NY: Humanity, 1999), 111.

<sup>51</sup>David Magarshack, trans., *The Best Short Stories of Dostoevsky*, The Modern Library of The World's Best Books (New York: Random House, 1955), 136.

Thus, without question, the central issue in existentialism is anthropology. In the existentialist's mind, the greatest question is *what makes a human being human?* What separates man from machine or one man from another man or an individual from the masses? Friedman notes,

With the existential subject [the individual], we have reached the heartland of existentialism and the area where there is probably the maximum agreement among existentialists. Here each thinker places his stress upon becoming a real person, a "single one," an authentic human being. Here each thinker finds himself in opposition to those trends of the age that level, objectify, depersonalize, alienate, or divide the human person.<sup>52</sup>

Therefore, in the existentialist view, each human being is not merely an instantiation of an essence but an independent, unique existence. Each independent existence is comprised of similar and dissimilar experiences that simultaneously unite individual humans yet differentiate them enough so that every person, while sharing humanity, is his own being.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup>Friedman, *The Worlds of Existentialism*, 111.

<sup>53</sup>It is helpful to have, at least at the broadest level, some idea of the unifying concepts that bind the various streams of existential thought. The following list highlights those concepts mentioned in Francis J. Lescoe, *Existentialism: With or without God* (New York: Alba, 1974), 11-21. While there is a significant amount of conceptual overlap, this list is taken from existential philosophy and not necessarily identical to existential psychology (1) Existence and the individual. Existentialism insists on the focus being the singular individual as the primary point of reference. Existence, not essence, is the emphasis. The actual concrete here-and-now experience of the individual is the main issue. What he experiences and how he experiences it, in all its vibrancy, are the concerns and origins of knowledge. (2) Authentic and inauthentic existence. Regardless of worldview, all existentialists view authenticity as the summit of real living. To be real, genuine, and true to one's nature and purposes is a primary good of every individual. Thus, the freedom to become whatever an individual desires is a cherished value and an existential necessity in order to be truly authentic. (3) Community, I-thou, intersubjectivity. Man is not an island that can or should exist in isolation. In order to lead a meaningful and authentic life, man must be engaged in and establish loving and mutually reciprocal relationships with other human beings. For an individual to be a fully realized "I," there must be an acknowledgement of genuine "thous" with whom the "I" engages. (4) Estrangement, absurdity, homelessness, alienation. These themes are hallmarks common to the atheistic thinkers of the existentialist movement. With the "death of God" concept, the logical conclusion is that life has no inherent meaning. Since there exists no inherent meaning in the universe and God does not exist, man is not placed by sovereign design within the larger world. Thus, the Heideggerian concept of man's "thrownness" into the world that describes man's plight as simply being "thrown" into the universe like one of a million other objects that populate reality. Yet, a desire for authenticity is existentially absurd if life has no inherent meaning: If man desires meaning when the only meaning is the one he himself creates, it is patently absurd that he should feel so strongly about what is only illusory. Furthermore, because man is his own point of reference in a universe without meaning, he is alone; and since his meaning is dependent upon his own creation, the created meanings of other men compete with his own value. Thus, man is at war with other

Likewise, existential psychology, as subset of humanistic psychology, serves as a corrective for the broader fields of psychology, just as existentialism served as a corrective for the broader fields of philosophy. That is to say, these new ways of thinking about or conceptualizing the human subject humanized these disciplines. Humanistic psychology as a movement shares the same general concerns of existentialism—i.e., to view the person as a unique holistic existence, including the individual’s relationship with self, others, and the world. The early humanistic psychologists also accepted many of the existentialists’ claims about and understanding of human nature. In order to understand human nature accurately, a psychologist must first understand an individual’s experience, but more importantly, the psychologist must understand the individual’s experience of his experience. The psychologist then views the individual with the fewest possible preconceptions so that he might understand the individual for who he really is without the filters of theory.<sup>54</sup> Thus, existential psychology and psychotherapy, being part of this larger humanistic stream of psychology, take the existential concerns of authenticity, anxiety, and authority/meaning/autonomy and make them the primary focus of attention

---

men, which prompted Sartre’s famous statement that “hell is other people.” On the other hand, this desperate feature is not found in the theistic thinkers of existentialism, be they Jewish or Christian, because man has not been abandoned and does not live in a universe devoid of meaning. (5) Depersonalization, dehumanization, objectification. Existentialism stands strictly against any reduction of the human person to anything less than human. To the early existentialists, technology was to blame for depersonalizing people. One sees this same dynamic today with particular clarity in the domains of social media. People on the other side of the monitor screen are no longer viewed as humans worthy of dignity and respect; they are merely a profile and a screen name that has been depersonalized and objectified. Consequently, online interactions are often vitriolic, demeaning and anonymous. When humans are viewed as datum, statistics, or objects, they lose their genuine “thou-ness.” Once this occurs, there can be no meaningful “I-thou” interaction, and therefore no real human interaction takes place. Existentialism, on the other hand, prompts the constant dignity of the human individual against any attempt to make man a mere “it.” (6) Phenomenology and existentialism. This last concept of existentialism is a means of understanding conscious experience. In contradiction to phenomenology’s founder, Edmund Husserl, existentialism uses phenomenology to engage the experience of the individual rather than the bracket it out of the equation as Husserl did to get man’s essence.

<sup>54</sup>Kirk J. Schneider and Alfried Längle, “The Renewal of Humanism in Psychotherapy: A Roundtable Discussion,” *Psychotherapy* 49, no. 4 (December 2012): 49; DeCarvalho, “A History of the ‘Third Force,’” 36.

and therapeutic work.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, as mentioned earlier, while all existential psychology is humanistic, not all humanistic psychologists are existentialists, psychologically speaking.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that no single individual or group was the sole fountainhead of existential psychology. Rather, it has grown and evolved through the observations of many individuals who were at odds with the conventional psychological theories, modalities, and techniques of the early twentieth century. While the early existential psychologists appreciated many aspects of the theories of Freud, Jung, Watson, and others, they noted that none of these theories seemed concerned with the person as a whole.<sup>57</sup> The conventional wisdom in psychology understood man as a collection of constituent parts, drives, instincts, and stimuli-response patterns but had no sense of man as an individual. There was no understanding of the “Jack” within Jack. The early existential psychologists were keenly aware that humanity lived in a time of angst, isolation, anxiety, and despair, and the prevailing theories could not capture the impact that these experiences had on individuals.

The model of the prevailing psychologies could describe the causes of these emotions, their significance, and even possibly their meaning, but they could not interpret their effects or integrate them into the lives of the individuals they sought to help. Thus, existential psychology was born of the desire to answer the profound dilemmas of modern life—i.e., feelings of isolation, meaninglessness, anxiety, freedom, and authenticity. These early psychologists found allies in existential European writers such as Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others.<sup>58</sup> It is important to

---

<sup>55</sup>More on the topics of authenticity, anxiety, and authority/meaning/autonomy in chap. 3.

<sup>56</sup>James F. T. Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity: An Existential-Analytic Approach to Psychotherapy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 10.

<sup>57</sup>May and Yalom, “Existential Psychotherapy,” 354.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 354, 364.

note, however, that existential psychology did not develop directly from existential philosophy. Despite the similarities and intellectual overlap, existentialism seemed to confirm, more than create, the ideas of the early existential psychologists.<sup>59</sup> Many of the existential psychologists had already formed their views of human personhood and discovered that they had friends in existentialism that they had not previously known about. Abraham Maslow testified to the helpful corpus of literature that existed in existentialism and its benefit to the field of psychology:

Perhaps this is why I have found it [existentialism] to be not so much a totally new revelation as a stressing, confirming, sharpening, and rediscovering of trends already existing in American psychology [here, Maslow is referring to the growing trend of Humanism]. . . . For this and other reasons, reading the existentialists has been for me a very interesting, gratifying, and instructive experience . . . even though it has not necessitated any fundamental reconstruction.<sup>60</sup>

Ironically enough, while existential psychology found a fast friend within the philosophy of existentialism, its acceptance into the wider psychological community was not as forthcoming in its earlier days; most likely because some existential psychologists take issue with the notion of the unconscious mind so prevalent in Freud's system. In order for beings to be responsible makers of their own meaning who maintain their freedom to do so, they must maintain the capacity to chart their own course, and the unknown governing causality of the unconscious mind stands in direct contradiction to this core tenet of existentialism. Therefore, for existential psychologists to uphold their core belief in human potential, they must consider unconsciousness to be suspect.<sup>61</sup> This fundamental disagreement notwithstanding, humanistic psychology in general and existential psychology in particular are wielding far-reaching influence, and current changes in therapeutic care and contemporary studies reveal the efficacy of the client-

---

<sup>59</sup>DeCarvalho, "A History of the 'Third Force,'" 35, 40.

<sup>60</sup>Abraham H. Maslow, "Existential Psychology-What's in It for Us?," in *Existential Psychology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Random House, 1969), 49-50.

<sup>61</sup>Mills, "Existentialism and Psychoanalysis," 271-72.

therapist relationship.<sup>62</sup> Man is more than a compilation of drives, repressed emotions, and responses to stimuli. Man is not a biological pathology exclusively defined by either neurosis or psychosis.

According to existential psychology, man is a human being seeking his freedom to define and know himself, to be self-aware, to self-actualize, and to be a responsible agent able to shape and mold his life.<sup>63</sup> In short, man is a meaning-maker who drives toward a future purpose in constant relation to himself, others, and the world around him. No other psychological model proffers themes so closely linked to theological categories. Thus, it is not surprising to discover that many of the existential psychologists who blazed the way for this model of psychology, similar to the founding existentialist thinkers, had a religious foundation that framed the issues of life that would later become the focus of their thinking. In varying degrees, the religious backgrounds of these men would shape the creation of humanistic-existential psychology.<sup>64</sup>

While it may be too simplistic to say that *the* principal dividing line between existentialists is primarily drawn on theological issues, it would not be entirely inaccurate. Few, if any, philosophies draw adherents to their ideas that are as starkly contrasted with each other as existentialism has. From the theistic beginnings of Søren Kierkegaard to the atheistic writings of Jean Paul Sartre and the ambiguous “philosophical faith” of Martin Heidegger, existential literature spans the entire spectrum of belief and unbelief. The reason for this diversity is primarily that the priest and Scripture have historically

---

<sup>62</sup>Bruce E. Wampold, *The Basics of Psychotherapy: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010); Schneider and Längle, “The Renewal of Humanism,” 480-81.

<sup>63</sup>Messer and Gurman, *Essential Psychotherapies*, 261.

<sup>64</sup>DeCarvalho, *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology*. In his short biographies, DeCarvalho mentions the religious backgrounds of four of the five founding humanistic thinkers: Gordon Allport, undisclosed Protestant background; Carl Rogers, early Pentecostalism; Rollo May, undisclosed Protestant background and a former student at Union Theological Seminary in New York; and James Bugental, undisclosed Protestant background.

answered the questions that the existentialist tries to answer. Yet, since the traditional notions of man's special place in the universe have been radically altered, it follows that the priest and Scripture were no longer the revered sources of authority they were once believed to be. Therefore, a new narrative of man's self-understanding was required, and the existential literature, as well as its adherents, reveals this struggle in varying degrees.

Nietzsche, one of the foremost of the atheistic existentialists, nicely summarized the genesis of the problem: "Since Copernicus, man is falling from a center toward an x."<sup>65</sup> In other words, when Copernicus discovered that the sun, rather than the earth, was the center of the solar system, it was more than the earth that was displaced; it was humanity's sense of specialness and its unique position in the created order. Thus, the desire to know what it means to be truly human did not begin with philosophical reasoning and the existentialists; it began with the discovery of a heliocentric universe in the natural sciences. Lowith also makes this point:

If we reflect upon the history of Western thinking, a distinct turning point can be seen when the pre-modern concept of an essential human existence within an orderly *cosmos* changes into a chance-existence. The change occurred at the beginning of the seventeenth century, as a consequence of the astronomical discoveries of the sixteenth century.<sup>66</sup>

This sense of displacement led to the sense of "homelessness" and despair found in so much existential writing. Man has no meaning given to him (by some Creator) as evidenced by the fact that all of humanity is thrown into an ever-expanding infinite universe with no apparent meaning or divine order. Therefore, man must create his own meaning in a universe without meaning. It is in this sense that existentialists such as Sartre and Nietzsche speak of the "death of God." That is to say, no absolute exists that can determine values or meanings. Hence, the concept of the "absurd": man feels a sense

---

<sup>65</sup>Karl Lowith, *Nature, History, and Existentialism*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 104.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

of meaning and purpose yet exists in a universe without any. This, then, is the absurdity that each man must face. One need not read further than Dostoevsky's more popular existential literature to notice this deep sense of despair and futility:

The absurd is only too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and perhaps nothing would have come to pass in it without them. We know what we know! . . . It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fists and prayed in its stinking outhouse with its unexpiated tears to "dear kind God"! It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for . . . I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, even if I were wrong.<sup>67</sup>

The theistic existentialist, however, does not wrestle with this issue of "homelessness," absurdity, and despair, for he knows otherwise. Instead of approaching the existential problem from a post-Copernican "death of God" perspective, many others discovered themes in their religious backgrounds that either helped frame their existential quest or supplied the impulse toward it in the first place.<sup>68</sup> A brief look at some of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century reveals the impact that existentialism has had on theological thinking. The theistic stream of existentialism has significantly influenced prominent theologians such as Karl Barth, Rudolph Bultmann, and Paul Tillich.<sup>69</sup> Unfortunately, this influence resulted in a much more subjective theology than it should have, but the point to note is that atheism is not essential to existential thought. On the contrary, existentialism traffics in robust theological themes even if many adherents would not appreciate this truth. In fact, existentialism can only find its truest expression in a theological context because ultimately existential questions are theological questions. According to Karl Jaspers, to deny this fundamental connection between questions of God and (philosophical) existentialism is either a sign of ignorance or dishonesty.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup>Friedman, *The Worlds of Existentialism*, 63.

<sup>68</sup>John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, Theological Resources (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 7.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 215. Paul Tillich in turn exerted a heavy influence on Rollo May, who introduced existential psychology in the US.

<sup>70</sup>Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism*, 133.

It comes as no surprise then, that the writings of the humanistic-existential psychologists reveal this fundamental arch of theologically-infused optimism, even if the theology in question leans left or is not recognized as theology at all. The fact remains; existential questions are more than philosophical or psychological questions, they are inherently spiritual-theological questions. While philosophical and psychological existentialism differ profoundly in their practical applications, they share a core concern: the existence of the unique individual and their experience of their existence. It is now appropriate to discuss this unique emphasis.

### **The Existential Feature: Existence**

As the name implies, above all else the existentialist is concerned with the existing or “being” of the actual individual. From the psychological perspective a human person is not a static collection of memory fragments, genetic codes, programmed responses, or any other fixed element but is a human “being.” In other words, the very nomenclature commonly used to describe people places the emphasis on the fundamental dynamism of human existence. The word “being” is the participle of the verb form “to be,” which is to say, to exist.<sup>71</sup> Rollo May’s driving point in *Existence*, which was the seminal work that introduced existential psychology as a movement in North America, was that the counselor needs to emphasize the counselee’s experience of their own existence. May writes,

The fundamental contribution of existential therapy is its understanding of man as *being*. It does not deny the validity of dynamisms and the study of specific behavior patterns in their rightful places. But it holds that drives or dynamisms, by whatever name one calls them, can be understood only in the context of the structure of the existence of the person we are dealing with. The distinctive character of existential analysis is, thus, that it is concerned with *ontology*, the science of being . . . the existence of this particular being sitting opposite the psychotherapist.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup>Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger, *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York: Touchstone, 1958), 41.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

Chapter 3 will look at the therapeutic focus utilized to understand personal experience, but first a general understanding of the concept of existence itself is necessary. As one might imagine, the more philosophical works have fewer categories<sup>73</sup> that explain the concept while the more psychological works tease these out into as many as sixteen different emphases.<sup>74</sup> What follows is a broad classification of the most common features amongst the various emphases to arrive at a working understanding of existence.<sup>75</sup>

### **Existence Is to Be Self-Aware and Relating**

Of all of God's creatures, human beings are the only beings who are aware of themselves. To sharpen the point, human beings are the only beings who are aware of the fact that they are aware. This reality is observed by the various responses of animals and humans when they see a reflection of themselves in a mirror. Animals only see another animal, humans *recognize themselves*.

This singular fact, human self-awareness, carries a lot of conceptual weight. Bugental calls man's self-awareness a "monumental distinction which pervades all other knowledge of man."<sup>76</sup> To relate to oneself, an individual is simultaneously aware of other implicit realities. First, an individual not only relates to himself but to others around him in a complex web of relationships in varying degrees of subjectivity and objectivity. Second, that self-awareness also implies the recognition of one's finitude. Finally, self-awareness requires an awareness of emotions.

---

<sup>73</sup>Macquarrie, *Existentialism*; Michalson, *Christianity and the Existentialists*; Lescoe, *Existentialism*.

<sup>74</sup>Bugental, "Humanistic Psychology and the Clinician"; Mick Cooper, *Existential Therapies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003).

<sup>75</sup>What distinguishes this list from Lescoe's description of existentialist tenets in n53 is the focus on the therapeutic value of the emphasis. In general, the distinction between existential psychology and existentialism becomes increasingly more apparent as one moves toward application.

<sup>76</sup>Bugental, "Humanistic Psychology and the Clinician," 229.

Though I have written in a linear order, it would be a mistake to assume individuals are aware of them in such a process-oriented, logical sequence in ascending order of appreciation over time. Indeed, if individuals “worked” this way the whole argument of the existentialist would have to give way to the view of the behaviorist: that human beings are in fact nothing more than machines that perform the expected outcome once the right input is given. Rather than a straight line, these implicit realities of awareness operate more like a spiral or a helix, one fueling the other as they coalesce around (and into) self-awareness and then spiral out again as self-awareness fuels each of these implicit realities (see figure 1). Bugental’s comments are helpful: “Awareness, as humanistic psychologists usually view it, is continuous, concurrently at many levels, and is not all available to consciousness and certainly not all verbalizable.”<sup>77</sup>

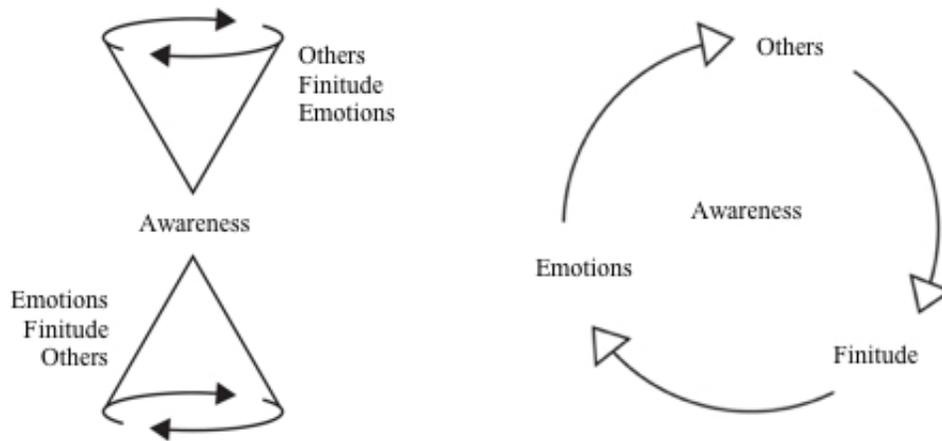


Figure 1. Elements of personal awareness

To be aware of oneself as a unique “I” as opposed to an “it” or “you” demands that an individual answer the question, “What kind of ‘I’ am I?” An individual must know what it means to be himself and not another. Are they a unique existent, standing out from

---

<sup>77</sup>Bugental, “Humanistic Psychology and the Clinician,” 229.

the world of objects around them, and, if so, how? Alternatively, are they like objects around them being handled and moved about and used by the will and wishes of others? Existence means that an individual must be the unique “me” and not merged or absorbed into another, which forces the question that is so popular in modern culture, the question of authenticity: “What does it mean to be the real me?”<sup>78</sup>

Thus, self-awareness understands that an individual is a unique “I” but also that this “I” relates to others who are also unique “I’s” like me but separate from me. Martin Buber, like Martin Heidegger, held that “I’s” are always in relationship with “others.” Buber, however, distinguished that individuals can have either an “I-it” relationship or an “I-thou” relationship to others.<sup>79</sup> In the same manner that individuals choose authenticity or inauthenticity with themselves, individuals can choose to relate to others as real, genuine human individuals, which is the “I-thou” relationship, or as objects (psychological, sexual, emotional, etc.), which is the “I-it” relationship. Furthermore, existence means not simply being aware of these dynamics within oneself and between others but also an awareness of one’s own possibility of non-being—of one’s finitude, of mortality and death.

According to existential psychologists, coming to grips with death can be a very life-imparting realization. Yalom writes, “Although the physicality of death destroys man, the idea of death saves him.”<sup>80</sup> The idea of death brings life because it places on the table in very real and tangible way the limits of one’s own humanity and thereby helps define what an individual can and cannot do in the short time he or she has in their given

---

<sup>78</sup>Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, 52. This merger can be into other relationships, causes, or a whole host of distractions. The fact that someone allows his uniqueness to be lost is not a value judgment against the thing *per se*. People can lose their uniqueness to both virtue and vice. The point is that true existence maintains its uniqueness in the midst of these “others.”

<sup>79</sup>Cooper, *Existential Therapies*, 20.

<sup>80</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 30.

existence. Understandably, this can be emotionally jarring. Carl Michalson states, “The glory and the curse of man is his ability to sense his possible non-being.”<sup>81</sup> The reality of death as the extreme example of an individual’s finitude brings to light the final aspect of self-awareness—man’s emotions.

In all of man’s awarenesses and relations, there is an emotional texture woven through him that is not an accidental product of his nervous system but a revelatory expression of his existence.<sup>82</sup> Existentialism was the first serious philosophy to actually place trust in these emotions rather than dismiss them. These emotions matter; when an individual immerses himself in the experience of these emotions, what he finds is a trustworthy index to his lived reality.<sup>83</sup> In short, emotions are the “sentient antennae,” the subjective human radar, that senses the boundaries of one’s life and responds to the obstacles and possibilities that lead to life’s joys and sorrows.

### **Existence Is to Be an Active Agent**

If existence means to be aware and in relation to others (including oneself), it naturally follows that to exist means to be able to act and interact based upon this awareness. This ability implies choice, which in turn implies a freedom to choose. According to existential psychology, at the core of personal being are freedom and responsibility; decision and action.<sup>84</sup> This belief directly challenges the assumptions of the psychologies that see human thoughts, feelings, and choices as predetermined by

---

<sup>81</sup>Michalson, *Christianity and the Existentialists*, 11.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Granted, emotions can be inaccurate responses and reactions based in immaturity and selfishness (just as rational thoughts can be); however, the point is that other things being equal, emotions are a very powerful means to understand someone’s experience, possibly even more so than the words he speaks or beliefs he professes.

<sup>84</sup>Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, 4.

prior circumstances and events, genetics, and preconditioned responses. In existential psychology, existence means to be an active agent who participates in the shaping of one's own destiny and future. This does not mean that existential psychologists believe in some form of total "free-will." A large part of the existential reality of an individual's finitude is the reality of "facticity" (a term existentialists use to designate the limiting factor(s) in existence).<sup>85</sup> Individuals do make meaningful choices that appear free from a phenomenological perspective.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, the freedom and responsibility to choose is both a bane and blessing within existential psychology. To be a unique "I," man must exercise the freedom of choice to be who he or she is; to "stand out" (exist) or risk being absorbed into the world of objects, to be passive and objectified. To exist is not simply to be aware of awareness, but to choose to be or possibly not be, to choose to gain existence entirely (through making choices to become a unique "I") or to let it slip away. In making one choice, however, he necessarily chooses against another. Therefore, while he chooses *for* something, he simultaneously chooses *against* another thing. This freedom to choose one leads to the guilt that he did not choose another. Thus, no matter how an individual chooses "to become" he chooses to "not become" as well.<sup>87</sup> That is also what it means to exist, to exercise such freedom, to bear the responsibility of that choice and endure the (existential) guilt of its attendant consequences.

---

<sup>85</sup>Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, 147. According to Macquarrie, facticity is the opposite of possibility. In other words, it refers to all the legitimate constraints that individuals are placed within. That one is shorter or taller, richer or poorer, white or black, naturally more or less intelligent— are all factors that limit an individual's freedom and possibilities.

<sup>86</sup>Cooper, *Existential Therapies*, 14; Bugental, "Humanistic Psychology and the Clinician," 229.

<sup>87</sup>An illustration at this point proves helpful. A man marries into a multi-ethnic family that speaks numerous languages. He desires to increase his ability to communicate with his family by learning Japanese (the language of his immediate in-laws). Owing to the reality of his limitations (time, finances, mental capacity), however, he does not also learn Korean or Chinese (the language of his new extended family). Therefore, by exercising his freedom to learn to communicate to some, he also exercised his freedom to not communicate with others.

## Existence Is to Become Something Other Than

Finally, in contrast to psychoanalysis and behaviorism, the existentialist always sees man as moving *toward* rather than coming *from*. For Heidegger, “everything begins with the future.”<sup>88</sup> Man is pulled along from ahead rather than pushed from behind; he is an teleological being as much as he is a temporal being. Just as the writing of this dissertation is not simply the result of past learning but is oriented to an ultimate goal of discovery and accomplishment, thus motives and not merely causes are the sphere of interest for the existentialist. Bugental adds, “Man always intends something.”<sup>89</sup> Far from the blank-slate upon which his environment or genetics or past relationships write, man is a being who intends and is oriented toward something.<sup>90</sup>

Language about purpose, meaning, and future orientation has not been typical in the behavioral sciences. Although psychoanalysts and behaviorists may use similar words, they do not and indeed cannot (to be consistent within their systems) mean the same things. That human beings are really “human becomings” is a unique perspective amongst the humanistic psychologists.<sup>91</sup>

Thus, the questions within existential psychology are clustered around this realization of what is man becoming?<sup>92</sup> Who determines what man becomes? In addition, what determines whether or not he has truly realized his orientation and whether he has

---

<sup>88</sup>Martin Heidegger and Medard Boss, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 159; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: HarperPerennial/Modern Thought, 2008), 313, 343, 348.

<sup>89</sup>Bugental, “Humanistic Psychology and the Clinician,” 230.

<sup>90</sup>This future orientation also explains why the topic of death is a staple within existential psychology. Death is the ultimate state of non-being, the ultimate end of any becoming.

<sup>91</sup>That this kind of language is becoming more acceptable within the behavioral sciences reveals the influence of humanism and not necessarily the evolution of the other psychologies.

<sup>92</sup>There also exists a tremendous amount of overlap between the two aforementioned definitions of existence.

finished his journey? It should be clear at this point that existential psychology, like all the psychologies, does not have the theoretical furnishings to answer its own questions. Each successive wave may have modified, refined, and in some cases improved its understanding of the human person, but none of them have the epistemological perspective necessary to fill in the most important anthropological details. As already explained, because of the unusual role that theism has played in existentialism, existential psychology comes closer than its predecessors in asking the right questions of human personhood and thus bears some closer consideration.

### **Conceptual Similarities between Existential Psychology and Biblical Counseling**

Irvin Yalom, one of the most well-known psychiatrists in America and a pioneer in existential psychology and psychotherapy, affirms the difficulty that surrounds a concise definition of existential psychology. Existential psychology, like its theoretical cousin, philosophical existentialism, can be a difficult theory to define because of its unique historical development and reliance upon intuitions rather than technical functions.<sup>93</sup> That is to say, it is more a way to think about counseling and people than an adherence to strict counseling practices and methods.<sup>94</sup> Some of its major proponents claim they are merely continuing the work of ancient soul healers and place themselves in this unique heritage as well as that of modern philosophers and therapists<sup>95</sup>:

Last, it has always struck me as an extraordinary privilege to belong to the venerable and honorable guild of healers. We therapists are part of a tradition reaching back . . . beginning with Freud and Jung . . . but also to Jesus, the Buddha,

---

<sup>93</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 5.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 69, 71; Ruthellen Josselson, *Irvin D. Yalom: On Psychotherapy and the Human Condition* (New York: Jorge Pinto, 2008), loc. 72, Apple iBook.

<sup>95</sup>Josselson, *Irvin D. Yalom*, loc.75.

Plato, Socrates . . . and all the other great religious leaders, philosophers, and physicians who have, since the beginning of time, ministered to human despair.<sup>96</sup>

In its modern form, existential psychotherapy can trace its beginnings to Martin Heidegger and his work *Being and Time*.<sup>97</sup> Heidegger's concepts of being-in-the-world, existence, being-with, and authenticity provided the theoretical basis for modern existential psychotherapy.<sup>98</sup> As noted, however, it was Rollo May's *Existence*, written in 1958, that gave birth to existentialism as a movement within American psychology.<sup>99</sup> It becomes clear then why existential psychology, more than most other psychological modalities, can become a dialogue partner with the biblical counseling movement. Anthropologically, existential psychology views human beings more as Scripture describes them than their psychological counterparts do. In contrast to the overly objectified descriptions of people in the larger behavioral sciences, existential psychologists see individuals moved by ultimate concerns, such as purpose, meaning, community, and even death. Certainly, past experiences are important, family relations play a significant role, and one's genetic make-up is a factor, but in the end, individuals are responsible for their own outcomes.<sup>100</sup> In other words, while many factors play an influential role, these same factors do not play a *determinative* role. In this fundamental sense, much of existential psychology is in agreement with the Bible.

Conceptually speaking then, the anthropologies of both existential psychology and biblical counseling resemble each other in their views regarding man's intrapersonal

---

<sup>96</sup>Irvin D. Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy: An Open Letter to a New Generation of Therapists and Their Patients* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), loc. 293, Apple iBook.

<sup>97</sup>Martin Heidegger, Joan Stambaugh, and Dennis J. Schmidt, *Being and Time* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010).

<sup>98</sup>Michel Hersen and William H. Sledge, eds., *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapy* (Amsterdam: Academic Press, 2002), 742-43.

<sup>99</sup>Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, 299.

<sup>100</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 218, 226.

structure, interpersonal dependency, and teleological ends.

### **Man's Intrapersonal Structure**

Existential psychology does not parse individuals out between their inner and outer worlds. Both subjective and objective experience combine to make up an individual's experience of life. Heidegger's original belief that philosophical distinctions between the knower and the known are too rigid and do not reflect the reality that individual's experience remains a tenet of modern existential psychology.<sup>101</sup> While separating the subjective and inner world from the objective and outer world can be an interesting and helpful intellectual exercise, individuals do not live or relate in this way.

One primary way that human beings, as God's image-bearers, merge the inner and outer worlds is through the proper attribution of meaning and value to the things in the world around them. In this way, human beings simultaneously make sense of their world and in fulfillment of their covenant nature as *imago Dei*, they reflect the character of God. Thus, worship and the act of meaning attribution are closely related. To the degree that one assigns values and meanings in alignment with God's character, one worships God truly. Likewise, to the degree that one assigns values and meaning out of alignment with God's character, one engages in idolatry. Thus, man is more than the sum total of his psychological parts—parts that cannot be parsed out and analyzed independently of each other in a meaningful way as so often happens in the modern psychologies. Heidegger and existential psychology correctly attempt to view man holistically as individuals who experience life and attempt to assign meaning to it all, but because they miss man's covenantal nature they can only conceive of man subjectively. As Jones and Butman write,

Existential psychologists tend to believe that personality theory reduces human complexity to fundamental rules and universal laws. Rather than personality,

---

<sup>101</sup>Hersen and Sledge, *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapy*, 742.

existential psychologists tend to talk about persons in general or the human condition and in the importance of becoming authentic.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, existential psychology sees all people, not just the troubled few, in need of help and care because all people struggle with the realities of existential angst, even if that angst is severely misunderstood. For example, with themes reminiscent of Romans 3 and 5, Yalom comments that patienthood is ubiquitous simply because human suffering is universal.<sup>103</sup> While existentialists miss the true cause of man's desperate plight as sin and the fracturing of the *imago Dei* (Rom 3:10, 23; 6:23), existential psychology at least understands that all people face a similar fate and that there are not those who are "healthy" and those who are not. All individuals need "salvation" in existential psychotherapy, even if it is simply being saved from existential angst.

### **Man's Interpersonal Dependency**

In Genesis 2, God declared that it was not good for man to be alone and thus created Eve for Adam (v. 18). The fundamental truth that man is a social being is strongly present in existential psychology. The counselor-counselee relationship is not simply a stage on which to play out past struggles with some internalized object representation that the counselor can then redirect for the counselee's benefit, as if their relationship were some sort of emotional-psychological proxy. In existential psychology, the relationship itself is the curative factor. Yalom strongly supports this point.

The relationship *is* the merchandise of healing; and, as I have stressed earlier, the search for insight, the task of excavating the past, are all interesting, seemingly profitable ventures that engage the attention of the patient and therapist while the real agent of change, their relationship, is germinating.<sup>104</sup>

This is a much more human, natural, and biblical approach to understanding relationships.

---

<sup>102</sup>Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, 303, 321.

<sup>103</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 12-13.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 404-5. See also Wampold, *The Basics of Psychotherapy*, chap. 5, for a similar multimodal perspective.

While existential psychology may have a technical vocabulary and an air of scientific objectivity, it merely reflects the biblical commands popularly known as the “one another’s.”<sup>105</sup> Remarkably, early proponents of existential psychology went as far as to suggest that love is also a curative factor, a far cry from the traditional detached and completely objective psychoanalytic counselor.<sup>106</sup> This is reminiscent of Romans 12:15, where the apostle Paul encourages such an affection and identification amongst believers in the churches of Rome that when one rejoices or weeps the other believers would enter into the same experience. Existential psychologists refer to *affective involvement* in which the therapist shares the same psychological experience as the counselee to the extent that the therapist no longer views the counselee as a client in terms of diagnosis or other categories but feels what the counselee feels.<sup>107</sup>

It is clear that in many ways existential psychology shares the same restorative goals as genuine Christian fellowship because being fully present with individuals, attentive to their emotional and psychological texture, and using language to help them express their innermost struggles and hopes are the key to existential psychotherapy.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, as image-bearers, men and women do not simply assign value and meaning to objects in the world (relationships being one of these objects) independently of one another. Human beings assign values and meanings corporately as well. This means that individuals will assign values and meanings that either lead to worship or idolatry and the same is true for groups, families, communities, and whole societies. Therefore, the

---

<sup>105</sup>Rom 12:10, 16, 15:7; 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 5:13; Eph 4:2, 32; Col 3:9, 13, 16; 1 Thess 4:18, 5:11, etc. While not all of the terms used in the Greek text are imperative verbs, the surrounding context and use of the expression justifies reading them with the implied force of a directive.

<sup>106</sup>Hersen and Sledge, *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapy*, 747.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Messer and Gurman, *Essential Psychotherapies*, 281-82; Hersen and Sledge, *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapy*, 746. Rom 12:10; Eph 4:15, 25; 1 Pet 1:22; 2 John 5, etc.

restorative task that only can be done through a biblical lens is to lovingly and firmly dismantle, not simply the individual idolatrous assignment of value and meaning, but the complex assignment of idolatrous values and meanings of the individual's various social groupings and bring them into alignment with God's values and meanings (Eph 4:9-15, 23-25; 2 Cor 10:4-6; Col 3:9-10).

### **Man's Teleological Ends**

It is significant that existential psychology aligns itself with Christianity in some fundamental anthropological views of human personhood. A correct understanding of man's intra- and inter-personal relationships is critical in correctly comprehending the human experience, but it is the final point of anthropological similarity with Scripture that is vitally important in addressing man's great need. As Yalom states, although investigating one's past is important insofar as it impacts an individual's current state, the primary tense of existential therapy is really the "future-becoming present."<sup>109</sup> In other words, where one has come from may be important, it is not nearly as important as where one is going, and that is what causes anxiety, concern, and angst; and, according to Yalom and existential psychology in general, the answer to that question is transpersonal.<sup>110</sup> Questions of mortality, freedom, isolation, purpose, and meaning in life—questions ignored in traditional psychology—are the domain of existentialism (and theology) and must be addressed coherently in order to ease the existential angst and anxieties that plague man.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 11.

<sup>110</sup>It is important to note that this same point is made in Jay E. Adams, "Change Them? . . . Into What?" *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 13. The whole foundation of therapeutic practice is based on the idea that the individual needs to become something other than what they presently are. However, without a clear or objective picture on what that change includes the entire endeavor is mired in subjectivity. Adams postulates that this picture of change is given in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul Tillich makes a similar theological statement in grounding the picture of ideal man in the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism*, 146.

<sup>111</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 11-12; Jones and Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies*, 332.

Man yearns for more but is bounded by death; man longs for intimacy but is ultimately condemned to isolation; man needs meaning but is confronted by meaninglessness all around; and recognizing and reconciling these paradoxes is the key to existential psychology.<sup>112</sup> When an individual learns to confront these paradoxes and respond to them, he is more present with himself and not hiding or running from the existential angst that haunts him. In that moment, he is able to stand in awe of life's paradox and can be filled with humility in regard to his position and wonder at his potential. "This capacity to stand in awe, to experience the humility and wonder—*or adventure*—of life is perhaps the apex of existential-humanistic therapy; it is perhaps the apex of spiritual renewal."<sup>113</sup> Again, this view of existential psychology aligns itself in some fundamental ways with a biblical worldview of man. Man's entire existence is telic in nature in that humanity was created with a goal or purpose; to glorify God and reflect, even share, His majesty. However, existential psychology can only offer relative meaning and subjective purpose and in that sense, like all other psychologies, fails to understand man's true telic nature. The point is that existential psychologies conceive of man's situation with more clarity than their psychological forbearers.

In concluding this section, first, it is clear why so much of existential psychology is in alignment with Scripture. Existential psychology sees individuals as holistic beings who experience life in its totality and not as compartmentalized subject/ object knowers. In addition, all individuals wrestle with the same existential angst because all individuals inhabit the same world with all the same existential realities. Similarly, biblical counselors recognize that all individuals struggle with sin and need grace, whether or not all individuals would identify them as such, because they all inhabit the same reality of life in a fallen world.

---

<sup>112</sup>Messer and Gurman, *Essential Psychotherapies*, 281.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*

Second, more than any other psychological system, existential psychology rightly emphasizes relationships and the critical role they play in mental health and growth as individuals. They are not *a* curative factor; they are *the* curative factor. Thus, many therapeutic techniques have been developed to capitalize on understanding, deepening, and utilizing the relationship during therapy—developments from which biblical counselors can benefit.

Finally, individuals seek for something ultimate. There is an inherent looking forward to an eschaton, even if it is only psychologically defined. Grappling with the ultimate concerns of life is the primary domain for existential psychology among the behavioral sciences. Existential psychologists see themselves as inheritors of the healing traditions that trace their lineage to a long line of philosophers, theologians, and soul-healers that include Jesus Christ himself. Although fatal theoretical flaws remain within their anthropology, this particular modality proves to be a helpful dialogue partner as biblical counseling and biblical counselors seek to further refine and examine their own anthropological assumptions.

### **The Failed Anthropology behind Existential Psychology**

There is no doubt that the anthropological vision that the humanistic psychologies, including that of existential psychology, has become the dominant vision of man throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.<sup>114</sup> Self-realization, man's capacity for growth and his inherent potential, have not only become goods but have morphed into ethical "norms."<sup>115</sup> Not only has the humanistic vision of man become the modern vision of man, but also to deny others the opportunity to self-actualize and

---

<sup>114</sup>Cooper, *Existential Therapies*, 20. J. A. van der Ven, *Formation of the Moral Self* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 235-82, provides an insightful critique of the "values clarification" movement within education that is a direct result of the anthropological vision of the humanistic psychologies.

<sup>115</sup>Isaac Franck, "Self-Realization as Ethical Norm: A Critique," *Philosophical Forum* 9 (Fall 1977): 9.

define their existence as they see fit has become a cardinal sin in the culture. In other words, the ruling ethic of the day is one's freedom to define one's own existence by nothing other than the individual's own personal desires, experience, and sense of authenticity.

Even some of the founders of the humanistic psychologies, however, shared these concerns. Rollo May in particular was alarmed by the “unhinged” implications of this vision and the explosive and exploitative development of “growth centers” (i.e., popular-level centers that help individuals explore their personal growth loosely based upon the premises of the humanistic and existential psychologies).<sup>116</sup> In his book *Freedom and Destiny*, May expressed shock and dismay over the apparent charlatantry of individuals who promised the benefits of this new anthropological vision without careful consideration of the necessary work of self-reflection and responsible choice. Understanding the religious values that fueled this vision, May lamented that these growth centers woefully misrepresented the underlying tenets of these religious systems. “And what a misunderstanding of the ancient religions of the East that in their name salvation is promised over the weekend!”<sup>117</sup>

In an ironic twist, the new anthropological vision of actualization and potential had the potential to actualize in ways the founders did not anticipate and could not control. They had replaced a limited and reduced view of man that eclipsed his humanity with an unlimited and radically subjective view of man that distorted his humanity. Specifically, there were three blind spots in the humanistic view of man: first, a naïve view of the inherent goodness of man's moral character. Carl Rogers believed that Freud erred in his overly pessimistic view of man. According to Rogers, Freud felt that nothing but destruction would come if man's true nature were released. Thus in Freud's system gaining

---

<sup>116</sup>Rollo May, *Freedom and Destiny* (New York: Norton, 1981), 21-22.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

control of this dark inner psychic beast—the Id—was necessary.<sup>118</sup> Yet, Rogers erred in the other direction, in his overly optimistic view of man. He believed that the human organism at its deepest level was trustworthy and nothing to be feared at all.<sup>119</sup> Browning cites other humanists who towed the same line when the question of contradictory visions of moral autonomy conflict:

Ethical egoists . . . save themselves from blatant self-contradiction by consciously or unconsciously supporting their argument with a rather gigantic assumption . . . a kind of pre-established harmony in the world that functions in such a way as to assure that “what is to one person’s advantage coincides with what is to that of all the others.”<sup>120</sup>

This naïve view leads to the second major blind spot in humanism’s anthropology—the belief that self-realization is not only good but should be an ethical norm. The argument is as follows: since all human beings are inherently good, with amazing capacity to realize their own personal potential, and since all these goods and potentials do not conflict with one another but exist in harmony, then it stands to reason that seeking the actualization of each individual ought to be the highest priority. As Browning noted, however, this is a “gigantic assumption,” and the obvious clash and corresponding stalemate of moral visions in society further disproves the humanists’ view.

The final blind spot of the humanistic-existential anthropology is one shared by both the psychoanalyst and the behaviorist—the failure to understand man as covenantal being. Surprisingly, one of the fountainheads of existential thought, theologian Paul Tillich,

---

<sup>118</sup>Carl R. Rogers, *Carl Rogers On Personal Power* (New York: Delacorte, 1977), 16. Anyone familiar with Freud’s writings would agree that this is exactly what Freud thought about man’s inner struggle. Rogers in particular was citing Freud’s *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (pp. 54-55) when he wrote about Freud’s views of man. From a Christian perspective it would seem clear that Freud had indeed wrestled with man’s sinful nature, but without a category like sin to define its parameters, Freud had to develop an anthropology to explain man devoid of any moral foundation. Thus, neurosis and psychosis, pathology and mental health, become the nomenclature he would prefer to “sin” and “righteousness,” “godly” or “ungodly,” etc.

<sup>119</sup>Rogers, *Carl Rogers On Personal Power*, 17.

<sup>120</sup>Browning and Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 69.

understood this very necessary ontological category of man's nature. Tillich believed that an understanding of man's covenantal nature was so crucial that all anxiety that man experiences was in direct proportion to the degree of disparity between an individual's existence and his ontological essence as an image-bearer of God.<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, most existentialist thinkers either did not share Tillich's insight or wandered far afield from this crucial understanding. If held as a core tenet in existentialism, this singular insight by Tillich would have corrected many of the imbalances found within the movement today. This is exactly why a biblical anthropology, particularly the doctrine of the *imago Dei* combined with the subjective experience of each individual, creates a wonderful blend of unique individuality and common humanity under covenant authority, thus creating a balance between essence and existence, objective truth (or ontology) with subjective reality (personality). Unfortunately, because existential psychology rejects Scripture or any ultimate authority, this is also the exact reason existential theory becomes unhinged and breeds all manner of error.

Ironically, the new vision of anthropology proposed by the third force in psychology was not subject to the reductionism of its psychological predecessors, but it was equally flawed by a reductionism of a different kind. Renowned psychologist William James foresaw this error in all the psychologies—a reductionism that makes man nothing but constituent parts and objectifies him entirely or a reductionism that makes man nothing but mysterious potentialities and mystical subjectivity. Both variants of reductionism, James believed, were “but spiritual chloroform.”<sup>122</sup>

Therefore, all the modern psychologies fail to provide an anthropology robust enough to answer the opening question posed so long ago by King David and many others:

---

<sup>121</sup>Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism*, 140-42; Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 2:46-49.

<sup>122</sup>Rogers, “Some Questions and Challenges,” 2.

“What is man?” To be fair, the psychoanalyst and the behaviorist see things that are true about human personhood. They see the fallenness and shallowness of humanity’s sinful nature, the dark, interior conflicts, the simplistic and passive response to environment and external situations. These they see clearly but not fully. The humanists also see things that are true about human personhood. They see the potential and greatness within man. They perceive those “echoes of Eden” and the “glorified ruins,” as Francis Schaeffer referred to God’s image-bearers in a fallen condition. These they see clearly but not fully. Each sees something true but neither sees it in full because none of the theories include the most important variable of anthropology—that man is a covenantal being (i.e., the *imago Dei*). As a result, neither side has the conceptual framework to understand the human condition fully.

In conclusion, it is not surprising that the modern psychologies cannot furnish the answer to the ontological question of human personhood. Only Scripture can answer that question in its entirety. The purpose of this inquiry was not to answer the ontological question of human personhood but rather to address a more practical question of how to best minister to an individual human person. Existential psychology seems to offer some helpful perspective as biblical counselors seek to answer that question. The emphasis on existence in existential psychology as a means of understanding and connecting with an individual holds great potential for biblical counseling methodology. The reader should now understand why the humanistic vision of anthropology came into being and what it looks like in the context of existential psychology.

The next chapter will investigate the practical theories of existential psychology that guide the counselor in working with and understanding a counselee. Specifically these theories have to do with the roles of anxiety, authenticity, and authority (meaning) in the life of an individual.

## CHAPTER 3

### QUESTIONS OF BEING

#### **Authenticity, Anxiety, and Authority**

Being, or ontology, has historically been the domain of philosophers and theologians, not psychologists or counselors. Nevertheless, as seen so far, the concept of being, or existence, is the exact emphasis of existential psychology. What does it mean to exist, live, relate, and how does one do that in this world? The myriad volumes devoted to this subject in the aforementioned disciplines are evidence of the massive and far-reaching implications of this topic. Much of this material, however, is considered too obtuse or irrelevant or is simply unknown to counselors and counselees in existential psychology. How then does existential psychology emphasize the individual's experience? In more practical terms: How does the existential psychologist make the experience of existence, with all of its dynamics, fluidity, ambiguities, and challenges, a therapeutic focus? How does a therapeutic modality bring into focus what so often exists at the periphery of mental-psychological-emotional-cultural-spiritual experiences?<sup>1</sup> In short, with so much to consider, where does one begin?

According to the existential psychologists and philosophers, one begins with the meta-categories of authenticity, anxiety, and authority. Although these meta-

---

<sup>1</sup>Eric L Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 329-87. Johnson has made an excellent case for recognizing the differences between wholeness (emotional maturity, relational strength, etc.) and holiness (dependence upon God, conscious awareness and distaste for sin, etc.). Generally from a biblical counseling perspective, anthropology is a very simple dichotomous view of man as an embodied soul. So the description would simply be that man is a physical-spiritual being. Johnson's work is helpful to recognize the constituent dynamics that make up this simple anthropology so that care is nuanced enough to accommodate the ways in which an individual is impacted in this world.

categories may not familiarize individuals with the vast array of ontological and theological issues that lay in the background of existential thought, they do place the focus on an individual's experience of existence. For example, James Bugental states that the search for authenticity is

the central concern of psychotherapy. . . . The main undertaking of psychotherapy is that of aiding the patient in his efforts, (a) to discard the distortions of awareness which arose to forestall existential anxiety, and (b) to accept the responsibilities and opportunities of authentic being in the world. The central concern in both phases is with authenticity.<sup>2</sup>

Authenticity is the proverbial “north star” in working with counselees. Bugental notes that the enemy of authenticity is anxiety—an equal and powerful influence that causes people to hide themselves. Irvin Yalom writes that anxiety is such a central and obvious problem in psychotherapy that to discuss the matter is simply to belabor the point.<sup>3</sup> John Finch, a seminal figure in launching Fuller Seminary's school of psychology, emphasizes the point of connection between these two meta-categories for existential psychology: “At this point it is highly significant to note that Existential psychology construes man's chief dilemma . . . becoming a self. And, man's chief symptom is the anxiety which dangles before one.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the last meta-category of existential psychology is authority or meaning.<sup>5</sup> Existentialist philosopher Albert Camus claimed that the only really significant

---

<sup>2</sup>James F. T. Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity: An Existential-Analytic Approach to Psychotherapy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 31.

<sup>3</sup>Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic, 1980), 41.

<sup>4</sup>John G. Finch, *A Christian Existential Psychology: The Contributions of John G. Finch*, ed. H. Newton Malony (Washington: University Press of America, 1980), 178. Finch goes on to cite the work of Soren Kierkegaard, who assigned the synthesizing power between these two meta-categories to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>5</sup>Recall n42 in chap. 1, on the relationship between meaning and authority in existential psychology.

question philosophy must answer is that of suicide.<sup>6</sup> By that, Camus meant that since individuals live in a world stripped of all meaning, the crucial question to be answered is should one continue to live? So powerful is meaning that without it, life does not seem worth living. In the forward to Viktor Frankl's, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner affirms that "life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power, as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning. The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life."<sup>7</sup> Explaining the existential significance of meaning, Frankl later writes, "Man's search for meaning is *the primary motivation* in his life and not a 'secondary rationalization' of instinctual drives."<sup>8</sup>

Thus the point of existential psychology is to find meaning for existence and thus develop authentic selfhood by resolving the problem of anxiety, which is really the emotional-psychological barometer that indicates the degree of discrepancy between one's sense of authentic self and the values and ideals rooted in one's sense of meaning. In the schema of existential psychology, people become *functionally mentally ill* when they attempt to reason themselves into believing something that is not in keeping with the facts of reality. In essence, existential psychology agrees with Hobart Mowrer's assessment that mental illness is not a break with reality but rather a break with sincerity and responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Albert Camus," accessed April 8, 2016, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/camus/#SuiResAbs>.

<sup>7</sup>Viktor Emil Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Mini book ed. (Boston: Beacon, 2006), x.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 99, emphasis added.

<sup>9</sup>Hobart Mowrer, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand, 1961), 86. It is interesting to note that some of the most ardent critics of the medical model in psychiatry and psychology came from the existentialist perspective. Works such as Thomas Stephen Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*, 1<sup>st</sup> Perennial Library ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974) and Albert Ellis and Robert Harper, *A New Guide to Rational Living* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975), shared the basic theme that individuals need to face up to their responsibilities and honestly look at themselves. While the message may be a bit simplistic, it certainly rings with practical truth.

A unique therapeutic environment is created when a counselor allows himself or herself to be led by the three meta-categories of authenticity, anxiety, and authority. The individual, not a theory, becomes the focus, and the individual's experience, not a static binder of generalized diagnosed data, becomes the dashboard into understanding this individual.<sup>10</sup> Phenomenological study and method is thus more important for the counseling endeavor than theory-driven research. In other words, theory-driven research reverses the order<sup>11</sup> and often seeks to fit individuals into stunted and limited theories of anthropology. It has already been shown that none of the modern psychologies have anthropologies robust enough to account for all individuals, which creates a significant theoretical problem. Existential psychology based in a broader humanistic psychology allows phenomenological observations to guide their work with individuals, rather than the other way around as in theory based research and then deduces larger concerns and psychological issues only if necessary and appropriate. Unfortunately, because humanism and existential psychology are captive to the same *kind* of anthropological blindness as the other modern psychologies, they may see the human person more clearly and conceive of methods of care more correctly, but still not completely.

For the biblical counselor, the important point here is that, like good personal ministry, the counselor ought to begin with individual's understanding of his particular experience of life. This reveals to the counselor the individual's functional hermeneutic and can help pinpoint the areas (cognitively, affectively or volitionally) that require specific biblical change. It is in this sense that a focus on growth and becoming something

---

<sup>10</sup>Ernest Keen, "Emotional Narratives: Depression as Sadness—Anxiety as Fear," *The Humanistic Psychologist* 39, no. 1 (2011): 67. Keen makes the same argument that biblical counseling has made for decades—the medical model of understanding human beings so prevalent in psychology misconstrues the evidence that is often obvious to the counselor in the very behavior of the individual in the counseling session.

<sup>11</sup>D. A. Rahilly, "A Phenomenological Analysis of Authentic Experience," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 33, no. 2 (April 1993): 55-56.

more than merely overcoming pathology and dysfunction that Millard Erickson states, “There is room, then, in our theology for humanism . . . a Christian and biblical humanism that is concerned to bring others into a proper relationship with God.”<sup>12</sup> Humanists agree that there is a human *telos*, they just do not realize it is a covenantal, Christ-centered *telos*.

This chapter focuses on the therapeutic use of the three meta-categories (authenticity, anxiety, and authority) to interpret the individual’s understanding of his own existence. Although the meta-categories are presented in a particular order—authenticity, anxiety and authority—for pedagogical clarity this should not be interpreted as suggesting a clean psychological process, hierarchy of emphasis, or linear therapeutic method.

### **What Does It Mean to Be Authentic?**

Authenticity is the buzzword of culture. To be genuine, the real-deal, to be authentic, is a highly prized value both for commercial goods such as the coffee consumers buy and for individual character traits men and women look for in the people with whom they associate personally and professionally. In psychological and humanistic literature, the pursuit of understanding this concept of the real, genuine self and how to achieve it generated a wealth of literature. Rollo May’s *Man’s Search for Himself* (1953), Libuse Miller’s *In Search of Self* (1961), Carl Rogers’ *On Becoming a Person* (1970), Carl Jung’s *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933), and Esther Harding’s *Journey into Self* (1956) are just a few notable works on this subject. Nevertheless, despite all this work (or perhaps because of it), the concept of authenticity seems to suffer from a lack of clear definition.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 535.

<sup>13</sup>Alex M. Wood et al., “The Authentic Personality: A Theoretical and Empirical Conceptualization and the Development of the Authenticity Scale,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 55, no. 3 (July 2008): 385; Rahilly, “A Phenomenological Analysis,” 51.

A result of this ambiguity is that there seems to be two very broad understandings of what it means for an individual to be authentic in society. The popular concept of authenticity can include anything from loft living, ecotourism, and involvement in the slow-food movement, as well as “finding oneself,” sustainable living, and the rejection of anything that resembles institutional forms of life, religion, culture, or corporate America. Although there is a lot of dialogue on the subject amongst members of these groups the concept remains ambiguous at best.<sup>14</sup> In this understanding, beliefs regarding the nature of authenticity remain highly subjective because authenticity is a personally constructed narrative that results in the congruence between actual experience and an individual’s self-representation and values.<sup>15</sup>

A second group, comprised of psychologists, and sociologists is attempting to understand authenticity and genuine personhood in ways that are therapeutically helpful and responsible.<sup>16</sup>

These two broad understandings of authenticity are in fact very different from one another. If the existentialist concern regarding authenticity is to be taken seriously as a therapeutic pursuit in ministry, especially by those in the biblical counseling movement, then it is necessary to distinguish the helpful anthropological concerns of authenticity from its popular definition and trivialities before moving to a discussion of its therapeutic role and place in counseling.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Andrew Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Got Lost Finding Ourselves* (New York: Harper/HarperCollins, 2010), 5-6.

<sup>15</sup>Gordon Medlock, “The Evolving Ethic of Authenticity: From Humanistic to Positive Psychology,” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 40, no. 1 (2012): 43.

<sup>16</sup>Güler Boyraz, J. Brandon Waits, and Victoria A. Felix, “Authenticity, Life Satisfaction, and Distress: A Longitudinal Analysis,” *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 61, no. 3 (2014): 498-505; Wood et al., “The Authentic Personality,” 385-99.

<sup>17</sup>Although there is a legitimacy for the pursuit of authenticity in a personal ministry and discipleship context, the current errors surrounding authenticity must be laid squarely at the feet of those who traffic in humanistic-existential studies. Their disregard for an absolute ontology, i.e., an objective understanding of man’s nature or essence, is the cause of the massive anthropological drift in society today.

## **Authenticity as a Credible Therapeutic Pursuit**

The first important step at this point is to clearly define what is meant by authenticity. For the purposes of counseling practice, the best high-level understanding of this term comes from Irvin Yalom’s reflection on philosopher Martin Heidegger’s work *Being and Time*. According to Heidegger, people exist in one of two modes in life—a state of “forgetfulness of being” or a state of “mindfulness of being.”<sup>18</sup> In the first state, people live in the world of things, caught up and immersed in tasks, duties, and the everyday diversions of life. These are “leveled down” and caught up in the “they,”<sup>19</sup> going about life but not aware of life at all. In the second state, an individual is aware of the life he is living and this awareness heightens every other understanding of his life. The individual is aware *that* life is happening.<sup>20</sup> This second state allows for one’s authorship of life since the person is now aware of its fragility and has a corresponding responsibility to construct it correctly. Hence, people are unable to change their life until they are made authentic, that is to say that they are aware of their lives in-the-moment, that they are living in life and not lost in passing the time, caught up in the diversions of life. Heidegger calls the first state of existence inauthentic, while the second state is when someone is alive authentically.<sup>21</sup> This is a very helpful distinction to realize. Most people exist in a state of life that is *not* truly alive to their living.

---

As I argue in chap. 4, properly understood from a Christian worldview, the pursuit of authenticity is a necessary implication of the doctrines of the *imago Dei* and sanctification.

<sup>18</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 30-31, emphasis original; Martin Heidegger, Joan Stambaugh, and Dennis J. Schmidt, *Being and Time* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 210-24.

<sup>19</sup>The use of the term “they” is representative of the loss of the individual’s individuality in the world around them. The individual is no longer a unique “I” who experiences life in the first person, but a member of the collective “they,” no longer a first person unique individual but a third person indistinct grouping.

<sup>20</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 31, emphasis original.

<sup>21</sup>Heidegger, Stambaugh, and Schmidt, *Being and Time*, 313-14.

A helpful physical analogy that can further illuminate Heidegger's psychological and metaphysical point is the experience of taking into one's field of view the actions of a child while having one's attention consumed by something else. The child asks, "did you see that?" and, snapping out of this mental diversion, the parent apologizes and admits that he was not paying attention. In reality, the child's actions took place and the parent "saw" it (in that the images did register in the parent's field of view) but did not truly "see" it (in that the images were not interpreted into any coherent collection of meanings). So, to be authentic in Heidegger's scheme is to be aware of one's life in a way that individuals are able to interpret their lives and life events into a coherent meaning, this in part is what is meant by being in the world.<sup>22</sup> This high-level definition is in keeping with many of the current definitions of authenticity in existential psychology.

Heidegger's distinctions have been therapeutically helpful and harmful in the humanistic psychology. Much of the radical and overtly subjective personal narratives common today are also part of Heidegger's legacy. To Heidegger, human beings are ultimately self-referential.<sup>23</sup> Interpreting Heidegger's work, *Being and Time*, Dreyfus plainly states, "Human beings do not already have some specific nature. . . . Human being is essentially simply self-interpreting."<sup>24</sup> Therefore it is easy to understand how Heidegger's work was co-opted by the psychological humanists and helped lay the foundation of much of the narcissism in culture and, through the behavioral sciences,

---

<sup>22</sup>Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 322; Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 344; John Macquarrie, *Martin Heidegger, Makers of Contemporary Theology* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969), 14-18. Heidegger also uses the more common words "inhabit" or "dwelling" to further capture the richness of one's presence in the course of everyday affairs.

<sup>23</sup>Macquarrie, *Martin Heidegger*, 6.

<sup>24</sup>Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 23; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32-33.

tragically sanctioned personal subjectivity and personal wants as ethical norms.<sup>25</sup>

This co-opting has led to the erroneous popular level view of authenticity that is rightly to be avoided, as it is little more than a narcissistic pursuit of individualism. It is this particular form of authenticity that Charles Taylor critiqued *The Ethics of Authenticity*:

It seems true that the culture of self-fulfillment has led many people to lose sight of concerns that transcend them. And it seems obvious that it has taken trivialized and self-indulgent forms. This can even result in a sort of absurdity, as new modes of conformity arise among people who are striving to be themselves, and beyond this, new forms of dependence, as people insecure in their identities turn to all sorts of self-appointed experts and guides, shrouded with the prestige of science or some exotic spirituality.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, what began as a pursuit to be aware of the lives that individuals live and thus grow into more productive, responsible, and deliberate human beings has become a license for self-centered individualism that has yielded a harvest of loneliness and isolation, leaving people confused, bewildered, and wondering what happened to the promises of self-fulfillment?<sup>27</sup>

The more responsible advocates of authenticity, however, soundly reject this popular view in favor of a well-rounded and holistic definition of authenticity.<sup>28</sup> Although much of the early work in authenticity was naïve or unrealistic in its understanding of human nature,<sup>29</sup> current work on the topic may represent a more responsible

---

<sup>25</sup>Isaac Franck, "Self-Realization as Ethical Norm: A Critique," *Philosophical Forum* 9 (Fall 1977): 9. Franck article is an in-depth analysis of transformation of self-actualization as an ethical good to be encouraged into a moral imperative that must not be hindered at any cost.

<sup>26</sup>Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 15.

<sup>27</sup>Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 69, 109-10, 115. As stated, many of the erroneous views of authenticity grew from the subjectivity inherent in humanism and existential psychology. Statements such as "reality is multifaceted and is a constant construction of the individual in his relationship with the world" (Bugental, *Search for Authenticity*, 32) obviously clear the way for the rank individualism mentioned previously.

<sup>28</sup>Medlock, "The Evolving Ethic," 43-44, 48.

<sup>29</sup>Carl R. Rogers, *Carl Rogers on Personal Power* (New York: Delacorte, 1977), 16-17; Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*. Although Bugental's work is an exceptional text in many ways, the fundamental blindness toward human nature caused Bugental to make assumptions that have proved

understanding of authenticity. This broad definition of Heidegger's view of authenticity is helpful in capturing the essence of what it means, but further definition is required if authenticity is to be used in a practical manner in working with people in counseling situations. Gordon Medlock offers a much tighter definition of authenticity that merits attention, yet for practical purposes it is the person-centered conception of authenticity as presented by Wood, Linley, Maltby, et al (2008) that provides a working paradigm that can be used with an individual. Finally, James Bugental's *The Search for Authenticity* supplies the greatest therapeutic grist for the existential perspective. The intersection of these three provides a clear understanding of how existential psychology leverages authenticity in the counseling relationship. With some correction, this current understanding of authenticity holds promise for being a helpful tool for biblical counselors who seek to understand a counselee's experience of life.

### **Authenticity Defined and Applied**

In his helpful article "The Evolving Ethic of Authenticity," Gordon Medlock offers an extended definition of authenticity:

Authenticity describes a way of being that includes (a) an orientation toward an ideal *higher self*<sup>30</sup> based on a defined set of values (b) freely chosen by the individual through self-defining *existential decisions* and commitments (c) grounded in here-and-now awareness of the inner flow of experience (d) an expression of personal autonomy vis-à-vis external/societal incentives and constraints (e) negotiated through a dialogical process within cultural contexts with significant others resulting in (f) a coherent integrative, and congruent self-narrative constructed from the perspective of self and others.<sup>31</sup>

While this definition falls short of one that is congruent with a biblical worldview in its entirety, it objectively grounds the concept of authenticity in a way that

---

disastrous and opened the way for the popular view of self-constructed realities with little or no accountability beyond the individual self.

<sup>30</sup>By *higher self* Medlock is referring not to what a person happens to desire or need but to what they *ought* to desire.

<sup>31</sup>Medlock, "The Evolving Ethic," 43.

was absent before. The person-centered concept of authenticity involves a tripartite construct whereas authenticity is measured by the level of consistency between the three levels of (a) a person's primary experience, (b) his or her symbolized awareness (to those experiences in a), and (c) his or her outward behavior and communication.<sup>32</sup> To put it more simply, there are states (of being), emotions, and cognitions that are actual in an individual, then there are states, emotions and cognitions that an individual is aware of; and then there are the states, emotions, and cognitions that an individual acts out of. To the degree that there is congruence among these three, there is authenticity. Likewise, to the degree that there is a lack of congruence, an individual is being inauthentic.

The therapeutic touch points in this model, however, are the relationships between these various states and not necessarily the states themselves.<sup>33</sup> So, for example, to the degree to which (a) and (b) are incongruent, individuals experience "self-alienation" in that what they are truly experiencing and what they are aware that they are experiencing are not in sync and thus such individuals are alienated from being their actual "self." The second therapeutic touch point exists between what individuals are aware of, and the actions and behaviors they exhibit. To the degree that (b) and (c) are congruent, i.e., the actions and behaviors manifested are consistent based upon the emotions and cognitions the individual is aware of, the person can be said to be exhibiting "authentic living."<sup>34</sup>

Finally, in between these two sets of states, (a) and (b), and (b) and (c), a third aspect of authenticity exists that involves the level and the extent to which the individual

---

<sup>32</sup>Wood et al., "The Authentic Personality," 386.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

accepts and submits to external influences.<sup>35</sup>

The therapeutic task then is to understand the states of being, emotions, and cognitions at the three levels of existence—the actual, the aware, and the acted upon—as well as the three connection points between them—self-alienation, authentic living, and external influence. These six factors create a rubric that a counselor can use in helping individuals understand their experience of authenticity with more clarity and understanding. In his early work on authenticity Bugental apprehended this model, although he conflated all the various elements:

A person is authentic in that degree to which his being in the world is unqualifiedly in accord with the givenness of his own nature and of the world . . . when we are in the world but in conflict with the world, we are in that measure alienated from our living.<sup>36</sup>

Bugental's *The Search for Authenticity* was foundational in providing an existential understanding of the incongruities between the various aforementioned states, emotions, and cognitions of authenticity. In Bugental's work, the actual states that an individual experiences would fall into one of four broad categories known as existential givens.<sup>37</sup> Those givens, which have become commonplace in humanistic-existential psychological literature<sup>38</sup> are finiteness,<sup>39</sup> the potential to be,<sup>40</sup> choice,<sup>41</sup> and

---

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. It should be noted that this third aspect of authenticity is a much needed correction of the earlier person-centered approach in that it acknowledges within the model itself the role of external factors that mediate an individual's states, emotions, and behaviors (or cognitions).

<sup>36</sup>Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 31-32.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 285.

<sup>38</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*.

<sup>39</sup>For the purposes of this dissertation it is important to briefly define each of these terms because each of them carries a tremendous amount of conceptual weight that may not be readily apparent from the word alone. For example, the concept of one's finiteness is the realization that individuals are limited by their life situations and circumstances and such limitations are most fully understood by an individual's ultimate death. Thus, finiteness is the realization that life is limited and curtailed by circumstances that one has no control over but yet is ultimately subject to those circumstances.

<sup>40</sup>Individuals are also existentially aware that they are responsible for developing, growing, and using their lives to their maximum potential even though they are simultaneously aware of their

separateness.<sup>42</sup> In other words, the actual states of being, emotions, and cognitions an individual experiences will fall into these four broad categories.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, for authentic personhood to develop, it is crucial to understand the degree to which an individual is aware of these actualities and even more importantly to answer the question of how they are responding to them in the way they are choosing to live.<sup>44</sup> In Bugental's schema, the question to answer is: Are individuals confronting these actualities in an authentic manner (i.e., accepting the contingencies life places upon them, being responsible individuals, directing their lives, and being able to live as a part of the greater whole while always being a part as a single member)? Alternatively, are they responding to these actualities in an inauthentic manner in an attempt to shield themselves from the realities of life?<sup>45</sup> The task then is to help people become aware of the existential need that the aforementioned givens are activating within them and to respond to them correctly, which according to Bugental is a response of faith, commitment, creativity, and love.<sup>46</sup>

---

finiteness. This awareness of growth to be and finiteness heightens the fact that one cannot do everything and thus must choose. This choice means fulfillment (of what he chooses to do) and failure (of what he chooses not to do).

<sup>41</sup>The existential given of choice is the choice to live in light of the fact that there is no significant meaning or ultimate purpose in life. An individual must choose meaning over meaninglessness. An individual must decide what will fill his life with meaning and pursue this meaning with his full potential to be, given the finiteness of life.

<sup>42</sup>At the end of the day, every individual knows that he ultimately lives this life alone. Human beings are simultaneously apart of life with each other but also apart from each other in the most significant way. Man feels alone because he is alone and must decide to bring community into the solitary experience of his life.

<sup>43</sup>More recent works, such as Wood et al., "The Authentic Personality," and Rahilly, "A Phenomenological Analysis," have been developing literature that expresses these four broader categories into more nuanced emotions, expression of states of being, and cognitive understanding so that the study of authenticity can be more objectively understood as well as subjectively experienced.

<sup>44</sup>In keeping with the tripartite model, the states would be referred to as (a) the actual, (b) the aware, and (c) the acted out.

<sup>45</sup>Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 291-315.

<sup>46</sup>While these authentic responses that Bugental lists sound admirable and resemble a Christian worldview (in the case of faith and love), the meanings he attaches to them are nothing of the sort and thus

The combination of Bugental's work and the tripartite model presented above provides the existential counselor with a precise methodology to explore an individual's experience of authenticity—being themselves, which is a critical component of the individual human experience.<sup>47</sup> Bugental's work on authenticity has been so influential within the existential discipline that Irvin Yalom's magnum opus, *Existential Psychotherapies*, uses the same existential frame to build his theories of psychotherapy. Although the two works are very similar in that they deal with the same existential givens, Yalom develops and expands the focus on the anxiety and defense mechanisms that develop as a result of the inability to deal with the incongruity between the actual, the aware, and the acted upon inherent in the pursuit of authenticity. Therefore, it is not surprising that the pursuit of authenticity and anxiety are closely related. According to Rollo May, Kierkegaard posited that an individual's ability to process anxiety was in direct proportion with his ability to pursue authenticity:

Kierkegaard believed that when we try to avoid confronting a "real" fear or an experience involving "normal anxiety," we engage in a blocking off of awareness and experience. . . . Thus Kierkegaard's apt term for neurosis was "shut-upness." The shut-up person is not shut up *with* himself, but *from* himself, as well as from others.<sup>48</sup>

Thus examining the experience of anxiety and its effects is directly related to becoming authentic. It is the second therapeutic endeavor in understanding an individual's existence.

---

should not be confused. Although existential psychology's recognition of such concepts of authenticity is admirable, it is unfortunate that the discipline has nothing of substance to offer when it comes to defining them.

<sup>47</sup>The clear lack of objective guiding values, however, as indicated in Medlock's extended definition of authenticity that began this section, seriously undermines the potential of this methodology. In fact, this shortcoming allows for the kind of abuse so common in the popular understanding of authenticity discussed.

<sup>48</sup>Rollo May, "Historical Roots of Modern Anxiety Theories," in *Anxiety*, ed. Paul H. Hoch et al. (New York City: Grune & Stratton, 1950), 14, emphasis original.

## The Purpose and Meaning of Anxiety

As meaning-makers, humans continually seek to understand not simply themselves but the moment in time that they occupy. Thus, humans divide history into ages or times that help them to better understand their place. This parsing of history into ages can be technological, for example, the Late Bronze period, the Dark Ages, or the Information Age. The parsing can be psychological as well, as in the Age of Confidence<sup>49</sup> and, of particular interest to the present discussion, the Age of Anxiety. According to Rollo May, from 1945 and the birth of the atomic bomb, anxiety moved from a covert problem that permeated all of society into an overt problem that everyone was consciously aware of: “The emergence of the Atomic Age brought the previously inchoate and ‘free-floating’ anxiety of many people into sharp focus.”<sup>50</sup> Sociologically, psychologically, and politically, anxiety, as a condition, came into its own as never before. This is not to say that anxiety is anything new or unique to the twentieth century. Humans have always dealt with anxiety. Jesus himself warned against being unnecessarily anxious (Matt 6:25), and centuries before him the wise Solomon did the same (Ps 127:2). During the era of the Puritans, men such as Thomas Brooks and Richard Baxter wrote extensive case studies detailing various kinds of problems in living, including anxiety.<sup>51</sup> Jeremiah Burrows wrestles with being content amidst an anxious heart and life, even though he does not use the word “anxiety” in *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.<sup>52</sup>

Philosophically and psychologically, men such as Freud, Kierkegaard, Spinoza and Pascal talked and theorized about anxiety,<sup>53</sup> but it was not until the twentieth century

---

<sup>49</sup>Continental Europe from 1815-1915

<sup>50</sup>Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 12.

<sup>51</sup>Timothy J. Keller, “Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (January 1988): 13.

<sup>52</sup>Mark Deckard, *Helpful Truth in Past Places: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Counseling* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2010), 47-71.

<sup>53</sup>May, “Historical Roots.”

that anxiety had become *the defining* condition of the age. Statistically, the numbers bear this out as well. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), 18 percent of the US adult population will experience some kind of anxiety disorder.<sup>54</sup> Of those, 22.8 percent (or 4.1 percent of the total US adult population) are classified as having severe anxiety. Currently, 25 percent of psychiatric office visits result in a diagnosis of some form of anxiety and a prescription for some form of anti-anxiety psychotropic drug.<sup>55</sup> Numerous journal articles report the adverse impact of anxiety, whether it is anxieties that effect on cognitive processes,<sup>56</sup> preconscious bias toward negativity,<sup>57</sup> or a host of other ill effects, the general consensus of the modern psychologies is clear: anxiety is always detrimental to an individual and it is on the rise. Clearly, more and more people seem to be struggling with greater amounts of anxiety. What is not as clear, however, is what all this anxiety means. In this regard, existential psychology stands out quite remarkably.

One of the defining characteristics of the humanistic-existential perspective is that anxiety is not necessarily a negative aspect of an individual's personhood. In fact, May disputes the axiom that "mental health is living without anxiety" and holds that this idea can be delusive and even dangerous.<sup>58</sup> Anxiety can serve as a psychological barometer to authenticity, or as May puts it, anxiety can be said to have the "prognostic value of a

---

<sup>54</sup>National Institute of Mental Health, "Any Anxiety Disorder among Adults," accessed April 26, 2016, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-anxiety-disorder-among-adults.shtml>.

<sup>55</sup>"Increasing Off-Label Use of Antipsychotics for Treating Anxiety Disorders," *Brown University Psychopharmacology Update* 23, no. 1 (2012): 5.

<sup>56</sup>Grant S. Shields et al., "The Effect of Negative Affect on Cognition: Anxiety, Not Anger, Impairs Executive Function," *Emotion* 16, no. 6 (September 2016): 792-97.

<sup>57</sup>Brendan P. Bradley et al., "Selective Processing of Negative Information: Effects of Clinical Anxiety, Concurrent Depression, and Awareness," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 104, no. 3 (August 1995): 532-36.

<sup>58</sup>May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 355.

fever: it is a sign of struggle going on within the personality.”<sup>59</sup> Clearly then, the existentialist conceives of anxiety differently from most other schools of psychological thought.

This section examines the different types of anxiety that existential psychology recognizes and explore what message or messages anxiety is attempting to communicate or, to express it in May’s metaphor, if anxiety is a psychological fever, what is the infection it is attempting to fight? Finally, consideration is given to those within existential psychology use anxiety as a therapeutic means to help individuals understand their experience.

### **The Definition of Anxiety**

In *The Meaning of Anxiety*, May defines anxiety as “the apprehension cued off by a threat to some value that the individual holds essential to his existence as a personality.”<sup>60</sup> To be useful, this definition needs clarification. Unlike fear, anxiety is a diffused apprehension of unknowns. Fears have a definite object—the dentist’s pulling a tooth, a doctor’s needle, having an accident during rush-hour traffic, cockroaches, bats, and thunderstorms. The number of fears is as endless as the individuals who have them. However, anxieties are objectless in that there is no definite external object to focus the fear. Thus, anxieties are a kind of diffused fear or diffused apprehension.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, not all individuals struggle with the same anxieties because anxiety, as May states, is cued off by a threat to some value the individual holds.<sup>62</sup> This means that what causes anxiety for an individual is governed by a matrix of cultural, personal, and religious

---

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 354.

<sup>60</sup>May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 189.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 207-10; Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 34-38.

<sup>62</sup>May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 189.

values. Therefore, since different people have different values, not everyone experiences anxiety in the same way or in the same circumstances.

Although the experience of anxiety can be triggered by vastly different situations, all involve the same core concern: based upon the individual's values matrix, he or she senses that his or her existence as a personality is at stake.<sup>63</sup> In other words, the very core of who the individual is, based upon his values, is being threatened and so it causes anxiety. The level of anxiety is directly proportional to the essentiality of the particular value that is threatened.

To illustrate: fear is what an individual experiences when he must have a tooth pulled. Anxiety is what he experiences when the dentist ignores him during the procedure. Fear is tied to specifics and events whereas anxiety is tied to significance and meaning. Fear can be more intense, for example, when the dental instrument takes hold of the tooth, though anxiety is much deeper, for example, when the individual wonders why the dentist ignored him and what that indicates about his value as a person. The fear is gone the moment the dentist appointment is over; the anxiety of the relational interaction can remain throughout the day. Thus, one *has* a fear but *is* anxious.

Returning then to May's definition, anxiety is the diffused apprehension an individual experiences when a value closely tied to his identity is challenged. The closer to one's identity and the bigger the challenge, the more the individual will experience anxiety. In summary, May's definition is useful because it furthers understanding about

---

<sup>63</sup>Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 59. While not attempting to analyze anxiety from a therapeutic perspective, he notes that all the thoughtful theories on anxiety share one common denominator: anxiety is the awareness of unsolved conflict between structural elements of the personality. Tillich then lists the many and varied possible conflicts prevalent in the psychological literature as evidence of his insight. This insight is also fundamentally correct from a biblical counseling perspective in that the unresolved conflict between the structured elements of the personality are evidence of the fragmentation and war that sin has brought into human nature. To the degree that man is conformed into the image and likeness of Christ, the one who is the true fulfillment of the *imago Dei*, the conflict subsides. Likewise, to the degree that conformity does not exist, the conflict continues. Thus, biblical counselors do not need to argue necessarily over the existential view of anxiety; rather, it is their anthropology that lacks the concept of man as the *imago Dei* that is problematic.

anxiety in two critical ways. First, because the anxious feelings depend on the individual's values matrix, anxieties are as unique as the individuals who struggle with them. Second, since the core issue is always the individual's existence, the anxieties are addressed in the same way during the counseling process: identify *why* the particular value holds its place of priority and discern if that value is legitimate or not. Before addressing the counseling care that proceeds from this process, it is important first to understand the nuances and broader categories of anxiety.

### **The Different Types of Anxiety**

Theologian Paul Tillich has been very influential in shaping much of the thought on anxiety in current existential psychology. His work in *Courage to Be* was seminal for James Bugental's understanding of the relationship between authenticity and anxiety in his foundational work *The Search for Authenticity*.<sup>64</sup> Later, Irvin Yalom adopted the categories (as Bugental articulated them) in his work *Existential Psychotherapy*, which is one of the premier texts in the humanistic-existential movement.

Tillich proposed that anxiety is a state in which a being is aware of its possible "nonbeing."<sup>65</sup> In essence, the concept of nonbeing does not simply refer to total or ultimate nonexistence, as in the case of death, but a state wherein an individual feels that his existence does not matter, that he is not valid, recognized, safe, known, or acknowledged as another individual. Nonbeing in this sense is often described by someone in statements such as "I feel invisible," "I feel alone even when I am with others," "I feel like I don't exist," and "nothing I do matters." Such statements express the fear of nonbeing. This state of nonbeing is *the threat* anxiety causes to someone's existence in May's definition. Tillich further proposed that this fear of nonbeing is felt in three unique ways, which

---

<sup>64</sup>Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 40.

<sup>65</sup>Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 34.

Bugental and Yalom's therapeutic schemas account for. First, an individual experiences an ontic anxiety. Ontic anxiety, as the word implies, is the most essential or core element of one's very being itself. Therefore, this is the fundamental concern about total nonexistence or death. In relative terms, an individual experiences ontic anxiety in what may be called "fate"—a sense that one's life is at the behest of contingencies beyond their control.<sup>66</sup> Second, Tillich recognized that individuals experience a spiritual anxiety.<sup>67</sup> An individual experiences spiritual anxiety the moment he is no longer able to derive enough meaning from the activities, symbols, relationships, or pursuits of his life to justify himself or any other endeavor. The ultimate threat to existence in spiritual anxiety is the reality of meaninglessness and its related existential experience—a feeling of emptiness.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, Tillich recognized a third nuance of anxiety as a moral anxiety.<sup>69</sup> According to Tillich, a person's being is not simply given to him but demanded of him as well. In other words, the person is responsible for the stewardship of this gift of being. Tillich holds that it is the task of either philosophical or theological ethics to describe the nature of this being and that each individual will either conform or contradict this design and thus create a moral anxiety.<sup>70</sup> An individual experiences moral anxiety in absolute

---

<sup>66</sup>Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 40-43; Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 36-37; Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 29-74.

<sup>67</sup>It is important to understand that what Tillich means by "spiritual" is very different from the way the term is commonly used. Tillich and subsequent writers in the humanistic-existential tradition use the word "spiritual" to refer to those characteristics and traits commonly associated with creativity, imagination, and cultural appreciation and development. An individual is "spiritual" when he is engaged and involved in the cultural symbols, activities, and pursuits of meaning that one's society provides. Thus, for Tillich, "spiritual" does not necessarily mean attention to religious concepts of truth, the afterlife, heavenly beings, rituals of worship, or other otherworldly activities and concerns.

<sup>68</sup>Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 44; Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 38-39; Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 419-60.

<sup>69</sup>Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 48.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 49; Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 37-38; Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 218-85. Tillich's elusive stance on theoretical and theological conclusions explains why many evangelicals

terms as condemnation or judgment; in existential realities it is experienced as a sense of guilt.

With these three nuanced understandings of anxiety in mind, it is crucial to understand that within the existential framework none of these forms of anxiety is considered pathological or neurotic but rather normal and common to every man or woman. In fact, as Bugental makes clear, the presence of ontic, spiritual, or moral anxiety is not a sign of pathology, neurosis, or any mental health concern at all. In fact, all these forms of anxiety are a normal and expected part of the human experience of their existence. Thus Bugental concludes, “Anxiety is our birthright, our condition, our natural accompaniment to being.”<sup>71</sup>

This nuanced view of anxiety is the first significant distinction existential psychology provides for counseling practice. It can help counselors focus on working through a counselee’s anxiety as a therapeutic means to understand the individual’s existence. The relevant question is thus: what does an individual’s anxieties say about his values concerning life’s contingencies, death, personal responsibility, choices, meaning systems/symbols, and relationships.<sup>72</sup>

The second distinction existential psychology provides in its understanding of anxiety is a direct corollary of the first—the broad distinction between normal and

---

are ambivalent toward him. On the one hand he seems to grasp the existential and theological concerns clearly as his reference to theology as the determiner of the nature of being shows in relation to man’s moral anxiety. Yet, Tillich does not regard alignment to the theological understanding of one’s being as essential, but rather another legitimate, option among others. Here he falls prey to the fatal shortcoming of existential thinking—the belief that no ultimate source of authority exists and thus the individual is forced to mature or develop without any knowledge of precisely what full human maturity or development looks like.

<sup>71</sup>Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 42.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 40. While Tillich did not specify relationships within his theory of anxiety, Bugental notes that Tillich’s aims were not therapeutic but philosophical-theological. Therefore, when Tillich’s work was advanced by men such as Bugental and Yalom, this fourth dimension was added not as an improvement but as a refinement to what was implicit in all of Tillich’s work, i.e., the relational element of human existence.

neurotic anxiety. It is more accurate to say that the determining factor for whether anxiety is normal or neurotic is not the *kind* of anxiety, but rather one's response to anxiety. All anxieties can be the fuel either for pathology or for authenticity.<sup>73</sup> Normal responses to anxiety reveal a self-corrective course in facing an individual's areas of immaturity, inconsistency, and ways of being inauthentic, and push him to face these harsh realities and become better because of them. This is what John Finch means when he identifies anxiety as the ultimate "creative director" of one's personhood: "Anxiety is the creative director to be oneself in truth, relentlessly."<sup>74</sup> Neurotic responses to anxiety, on the other hand, reveal a "self"-protective<sup>75</sup> course in denying an individual's areas of immaturity, inconsistency, and ways of being inauthentic, and lead them further into states of denial and excuse.<sup>76</sup> What determines a "normal" response to anxiety is that the individual's response is not disproportionate to the perceived (or objective) threat, does not involve a repressive or other denial mechanism<sup>77</sup> of the situation or its management, and can be confronted on the level of conscious awareness.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, what determines a neurotic response is the inverse of a normal response: An individual's response is disproportionate to the perceived or real threat, involves a repressive or denial mechanism for its avoidance,

---

<sup>73</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 10; May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 13-14; Ernst Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism: From Kierkegaard to Sartre: A Complete, Authoritative Guide to a Major Philosophy of Our Time* (New York: Grove, 1962), 140-42; Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 185.

<sup>74</sup>Finch, *A Christian Existential Psychology*, 157.

<sup>75</sup>"Self" is in quotation marks to signal the fact that in reality when individuals respond to anxiety in a neurotic fashion they are in actuality not becoming their true selves but are protecting a limited, i.e., immature, version of themselves.

<sup>76</sup>Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 61.

<sup>77</sup>A repressive or denial mechanism is any narrative an individual creates to shift the perception or simply deny the situation that is causing the anxiety to begin with.

<sup>78</sup>May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 193-98.

and will not be confronted at a conscious level.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, as stated, in existential psychology, anxiety is not the problem but acts only as the psychological and emotional barometer of internal discrepancies, or as a fever indicating an internal struggle within one's self-understanding, or a messenger attempting to communicate that something is amiss and needs to be addressed. Next is a look at what that message might be.

### **The Messages of Anxiety**

In *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Reinhold Niebuhr describes anxiety as that experience of a sailor, as he climbs the mast with the abyss of the waves beneath him and the safety of the crow's nest above him. He is anxious both about the end goal toward which he strives and the threat of falling into the nothingness should he fail.<sup>80</sup> At root, anxiety sends the message that individuals are "needy," "fundamentally unfinished," and "incomplete,"<sup>81</sup> and thus exposes individuals to the frightening reality that human life requires more than any one person has to successfully navigate through it. To travel from point A to point B promises great reward but comes at great risk; hence, any situation that threatens this sense of being will make one anxious. Furthermore, individuals constitute and realize who they are through a series of life projects and relationships, and anxiety results because these projects or relationships are met with varying degrees of success and failure. So the very objects that can bring fulfillment to an individual's life are the very ones that cause a sense of anxiety.<sup>82</sup> May puts it in most direct terms when he says that anxiety is the message that something is wrong in one's personality and human

---

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 198-200.

<sup>80</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 185.

<sup>81</sup>William F. Fischer, "The Psychology of Anxiety: A Phenomenological Description," *The Humanistic Psychologist* 28, nos. 1-3 (2000): 157-58.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 157.

relationships and is the response or “inward cry” to resolve what is wrong.<sup>83</sup> In its connection with the first concern of existential psychology, anxiety can be seen as the monitor (i.e., a kind of internal psychological police) when one is not being true to his or her sense of values concerning what it means to be authentic. To the degree that there is a discrepancy between what individuals believe an authentic being is and how they are in fact living, they will experience anxiety.

### **The Treatment of Anxiety**

In bringing together the disparate strands of thought on anxiety, it is important to consider how existential psychology focuses on anxiety as a means of therapy. As has been shown, anxiety is any situation, circumstance, project, or relationship that threatens a cherished value an individual has that allows him or her to attain a sense of being complete, finished, or settled. Therefore, if an individual’s value is illegitimate (either in its essence as a value on its own or in place of priority in an individual’s values matrix), the person will experience a greater sense of anxiety when that value is threatened. The purpose of the anxiety then is to push an individual to further authenticity by exposing distortions between what an individual theoretically believes and how he or she functionally behaves.<sup>84</sup> Finch holds that this is a somewhat obvious reality: “When the patient is ill,<sup>85</sup> the most important preoccupation of the therapist must be a concern to discover in what way and for what reason the patient is avoiding authenticity.”<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup>May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 344.

<sup>84</sup>As chap. 4 indicates, a central problem within humanistic-existential psychology is that there is no standard or objective agreement on what determines a legitimate or illegitimate value. Therefore, while their ability to conceive of the struggle that anxiety produces seems correct, those who prescribe to a humanistic or existential outlook lack any framework to actually make sense of why an individual should struggle in the first place if all values are ultimately relative.

<sup>85</sup>I do not agree with Finch’s nomenclature in using this term, and neither would others of an existential persuasion. By using the term “ill” Finch intends to convey what Bugental and May would consider neurotic, which has milder connotations than Finch’s use of the term (mentally) ill.

<sup>86</sup>Finch, *A Christian Existential Psychology*, 169.

Thus, a counselor needs to realize that individuals will do one of two things when confronted with their anxiety. Either they will face the anxiety and heed its message by examining the value that is threatened, or they will retrench themselves by finding ways to assuage the anxiety without having to examine the legitimacy of the value that is threatened.<sup>87</sup> The counselor needs to encourage the former and challenge the later. In order for individuals to face their anxieties, they must believe that the value in facing their anxieties is far greater than the value they maintain by fleeing from the anxieties. If the message of anxiety as described by existential psychology is correct, that anxiety has the prognostic value of a fever indicating a struggle going on within the personality, then it has tremendous constructive value for an individual's growth and maturity. Having such a foundational system of values provides the catalyst that enables an individual to face any anxiety by accepting its diagnosis as a stimulus to clarify and resolve the underlying distortion between beliefs and behavior. Only if such a system of values is in place will an individual push *through* the anxious situation and not attempt to go *around or retrench before it*.<sup>88</sup> Thus, it is critical for the counselor to help the counselee establish or discover such a foundational system of values.

Breisach points out that Tillich believed that the foundational system of values necessary for individuals to adequately reconcile their anxieties are found in the doctrine of man as created in the image of God.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of those in the humanistic-existential community have departed from this aspect of Tillich's thought.<sup>90</sup> Instead, more broadly defined concepts of faith, commitment, creativity, and love are

---

<sup>87</sup>Fischer, "The Psychology of Anxiety," 157.

<sup>88</sup>May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 356-59, emphasis original.

<sup>89</sup>Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism*, 140-42; Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 2:44-46.

<sup>90</sup>The relationship between this doctrine, the image of God in man, and the three major existential questions regarding existence—authenticity, anxiety and meaning—are discussed in detail in chap. 4.

espoused as the necessary ingredients for individuals to construct their own personal system of value sufficient to sustain an honest examination of one's anxieties.<sup>91</sup>

While some will opt for the courageous route of facing their anxieties and growing through them (which is the premise of Tillich's *The Courage to Be*), most will not take this route. Fischer notes that it is far more likely that individuals will retrench into some narrative or self-protective and often self-deceptive understanding of the way they see themselves or their situations: "People will work to sustain some variant of the narratives in which they are already invested, i.e., the narratives that they are already telling others, as well as themselves, as characterizations of the truth of their respective situations."<sup>92</sup> According to Tillich, the threat of total nonbeing that the anxiety presents is so powerful and overwhelming that individuals will negotiate a lesser form of nonbeing to preserve their sense of being.<sup>93</sup> For example, an individual may have built up a self-narrative which holds, for instance, that being uneducated is preferable since education and intelligence only promote arrogance and foolish pride, as a means of assuaging his anxiety when confronted with a peer who is formally educated and has a developed intellect. Instead of facing the insecurity that the anxiety has highlighted (since it is generally better to develop your intellect to whatever ability you are able than not to), the individual "settles" for being less than he could be and to live with what he actually is. The individual would respond to any interaction involving the topic of education or their differences with either a defensive or an aggressive posture, both of which are aimed at sustaining the self-protective narrative. Unchecked, this belief-behavior narrative could lead to unhealthy relational patterns and extremes, i.e., what is often labeled neurotic

---

<sup>91</sup>Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 285.

<sup>92</sup>Fischer, "The Psychology of Anxiety," 157.

<sup>93</sup>Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 60-61.

behavior. Individuals must choose to face their anxieties with the “courage to be”<sup>94</sup> or face despair. An individual can resist the despair by facing the anxiety head on. This is one of Tillich’s key insights.

This analysis gives the key to understanding pathological anxiety. He who does not succeed in taking his anxiety courageously upon himself can succeed in avoiding the extreme situation of despair by escaping into neurosis. He still affirms himself but on a limited scale. *Neurosis is the way of avoiding nonbeing by avoiding being.*<sup>95</sup>

Bugental compares this dynamic to a kind of psychological blackmail similar to “a person who pays blackmail to keep a feared reality from becoming manifest. So paying, we maintain a semblance of peace at increasingly heavy cost to our resources.”<sup>96</sup> Instead of facing the internal discrepancy between what they know to be true and correct and how they are living—and therefore moving toward authenticity and true being, self-protective (or psychologically blackmailed)—individuals opt for limited nonbeing to maintain their sense of self, however contradictory.

In working with individuals who opt for this strategy to deal with their anxieties, counselors face the difficult task of confronting them with their self-protective and self-deceptive narratives. To do this, the counselor first must assess the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the values being threatened. Once the counselor understands the legitimacy of the values, he has laid the foundation for discussing whether or not the value in question is in the counselee’s best interest. It is important to note that without a sure system of values to serve as a foundation, any discussion about relative values the individual holds is precarious at best. Ultimately, this is why the humanistic-existential approach can do little to correct someone and is often co-opted as a rational sanction for untethered

---

<sup>94</sup>Tillich’s point is that when individuals faces anxiety with courage and takes that anxiety into themselves, i.e., listens to its message and faces the contradictory reality within, they become what they are intended to be.

<sup>95</sup>Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, 61, emphasis original.

<sup>96</sup>Bugental, *The Search for Authenticity*, 43.

individualism and subjectivity. This lack of an objective standard is the “Achilles’ heel” for existential psychology. Without some standard of human personhood, there is nothing to tell an individual what it means to be human or what kind of person he ought to be. Without such objectivity, an individual will be lost in the infinite vortex of subjective self-perception and shifting cultural values.

Nevertheless, the humanistic-existential perspective on anxiety offers the biblical counselor insight when dealing with an anxious heart. Though it ultimately fails to provide a sufficient foundation for adequate treatment, its helpful analysis of the differing types of anxiety and the fundamental psychological purpose of anxiety are insightful when subsumed under the theological truth of Scripture. Paul Tillich himself acknowledges the direct connection between anxiety and man’s estrangement from God due to sin,<sup>97</sup> but his theological analysis was lost amidst the growing naturalism and secularization that overshadowed existential psychological thought.

In existential psychology, the primary focus is an individual’s existence. What does it mean to be an individual? What does it mean to be? To that end, authenticity is the goal and anxiety is the problem. The question of authority, however, is the foundation for the former two to have any coherence, for if individuals have no authority to construct themselves, then to what are they attempting to be authentic toward and why do they experience any anxiety in the first place? The question of meaning in existential psychology thus needs to be addressed.

### **Questions of Authority and Meaning in Life**

In his short book *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor links the two concepts of authority and meaning together:

Once society no longer has a sacred structure, once social arrangements and modes of action are no longer grounded in the order of things or the will of God, they are in

---

<sup>97</sup>Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:45.

a sense up for grabs. They can be redesigned with their consequences for the happiness and well-being of individuals as our goal.<sup>98</sup>

Today, individuals enjoy a tremendous amount of autonomy to direct their lives and to choose their vocation, spouse, habitation, reproductive desires, and even gender. According to Taylor, all this freedom was won by breaking free of older “moral horizons” which, although they were more restrictive, also gave a sense of place and purpose to individuals.<sup>99</sup> As noted in chapter 2, the true dismantling of the authoritative structures that guided society (at least in the West) began with Copernicus’ discovery of the heliocentric solar system. Ultimately, meaning is no longer determined by some authoritative being who ordered creation according to some divine plan. Rather, meaning was determined by other, more relative, sources until recently. Meaning today is determined by the autonomous desire of the individual. Therefore, the concepts authority, autonomy, and meaning are linked.

Although the creation of meaning is the last therapeutic focus of existential psychology, in many ways it is foundational to the prior two—anxiety and authenticity. After all, meaning is the reason individuals aim to be authentic and experience anxiety in the process. Andrew Potter writes, “The quest for authenticity is about searching for meaning when all the traditional sources no longer have any sound, rational justification.”<sup>100</sup> While Potter conflates the concepts of authenticity and meaning more than necessary, the link between the two cannot be missed. Furthermore, Taylor’s opening comments about meaning in a book about authenticity further establishes this connection. In short, meaning is what links an individual’s existence with authenticity and anxiety.

---

<sup>98</sup>Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 5.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>100</sup>Potter, *The Authenticity Hoax*, 264.

Therefore, the existential problem of meaning in a meaningless world must be examined before discussing how existential psychology encourages the creation of a meaningful life.

### **The Problem of Meaning**

Existentialism as a philosophy has garnered a reputation as depressing and oftentimes hopeless—as a philosophy of despair. Representative quotes from its leading thinkers such as Jean Paul Sartre only prove the reputation is well deserved: “All existing things are born for no reason, continue through weakness and die by accident . . . it is meaningless that we are born; it is meaningless that we die.”<sup>101</sup> This kind of nihilism, however, is clearly not an acceptable position for existential psychologists, who perceive themselves as healers, guides, and stewards of people’s lives. Although existential psychologists might share the same conclusion as Sartre, functionally speaking they clearly need another response.

The problem of meaning, however, is a real and difficult question for existential psychology to fully answer or completely ignore. Yalom states the crux of the issue well in saying that people do in fact feel that meaning is a necessary part of their lives, an experience that cannot be denied in any sense, yet there is no objectively satisfactory answer to this deep human yearning.<sup>102</sup> In other words, thinkers such as Sartre and Camus understood that meaninglessness is the only logical conclusion in answering existential questions without an ultimate point of reference such as God. As a result, some within existential psychology suggest that attempting to understand this paradox is a waste of time. Furthermore, as Bergner states, the fact that for centuries scores of individuals have asked the question and produced no satisfactory answer is

---

<sup>101</sup>R. W. Hepburn, “Questions about the Meaning of Life,” *Religious Studies* 1, no. 2 (1966): 140.

<sup>102</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 422-23.

ample evidence that the question is flawed.<sup>103</sup> Yalom himself is forced to admit that probing too far into this particular question is not helpful, but rather harmful and even lethal.<sup>104</sup> Yalom suggests that the question of meaning in life may be more of a cultural construct than an inherent human reality. In other words, it may be that the felt human experience or need for meaning comes from a cultural mindset that values rationality over mystery.

Therefore, while meaning feels necessary it is only because culturally, in the West, order and sense are values that are prized and the need for meaning is a necessary corollary of those values. In Eastern cultures where mystery and paradox are embraced more readily, the question of meaning is not as pressing.<sup>105</sup> Yet, culturally derived or not, the lack of meaning in people's lives is palpable in terms of clinical statistics and impact on individual psychological health.<sup>106</sup> Carl Jung, admittedly not a humanistic-existential psychologist, reported that a full one-third of his patients were not suffering from any definable neurosis but from meaninglessness and the aimlessness of their lives. Viktor Frankl reported that the percentage of individuals seeking help because of a sense of

---

<sup>103</sup>Raymond M. Bergner, "Therapeutic Approaches to Problems of Meaninglessness," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 74. From a biblical counseling perspective this is a remarkably ignorant statement. While the question of meaning reveals one of the glaring weak spots for the psychologies, it is clearly a bright spot from a Christian worldview. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, believed by millions of individuals worldwide since its publication, states very clearly man's purpose and hence meaning in life. Question 1: What is the chief end of man? Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. Eccl 12:13 states it clearly as well: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Finally, the Puritan collection of prayers in the book *The Valley of Vision* includes a prayer *Man's Great End* that recounts man's purpose and meaning in life.

<sup>104</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 479.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 470.

<sup>106</sup>Nebraska Symposium on Motivation and William J. Arnold, eds., *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation 1970*, Current Theory and Research in Motivation (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 18:139-40.

meaninglessness was 20 to 50 percent.<sup>107</sup> In contrast to other existentialists, Frankl posits that individuals could not create their own meanings but instead had to discover it as part of the world in which they inhabited: “Ultimately man can actualize himself *only* by fulfilling a meaning *out there* in the world rather than within himself . . . being human means relating and being directed to something or someone other than oneself.”<sup>108</sup> Interestingly enough, Yalom believes that Frankl held this unique perspective amongst existential psychologists because of his religious inclinations.<sup>109</sup> Whether meaning is a true psychological anomaly that is experienced but not real, merely a felt cultural construct, or a religious impulse not so easily ignored, the existential psychologist must address this central concern of every individual. In admitting this paradox, existential psychology resigns itself to provide relative rather than ultimate meaning.<sup>110</sup>

### **The Creation of a Meaningful Life**

For existential psychologists the answer to the question of meaning in life is to be found within the individual.<sup>111</sup> Although absolute and universal meaning may be impossible, relative and subjective meaning is something that is completely attainable and able to bring fulfillment into an individual’s life.<sup>112</sup> Finding such meaning can and

---

<sup>107</sup>Viktor Frankl, “The Feeling of Meaninglessness,” *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 32, no. 1 (1972): 85.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 86, emphasis added.

<sup>109</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 463.

<sup>110</sup>Bergner, “Therapeutic Approaches,” 74; Hepburn, “Questions,” 125; Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 478-81. This resignation is seen clearly in the title of Bergner’s article, “Therapeutic Approaches to Problems of Meaninglessness.” It is important to note that he does not title the article *Therapeutic Answers*, but *Therapeutic Approaches*. In his view, there are no real answers to the objective problem of meaninglessness, but instead only approaches to the subjective experience of meaninglessness.

<sup>111</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 230, 427.

<sup>112</sup>Chap. 4 provides a fuller critique of this view. Obviously biblical counselors strongly disagree with existential psychology at this point, but for the purposes of this chapter the goal is to understand how existentialists understand life’s meaning.

must be accomplished to justify the individual's existence, for what good does it do to work through an individual's anxiety and become authentic if that existence is ultimately bereft of *any* meaning? Furthermore, since the feeling of meaninglessness is so pervasive (particularly in secularized individuals), existential psychologists must understand this existential reality before they can lay a foundation for relative meaning and building upon it. Finally, Yalom's "key" to the issue of meaninglessness—engagement—will summarize the therapeutic technique used by existentially oriented counselors.

### **Understanding Meaninglessness**

According to Raymond Bergner, a professor of clinical psychology at Illinois State University, three challenges mitigate against the development of a meaningful life for an individual: worldview, culturally assumed "laws," and certain characteristic traits. As Frankl says, "some worlds are worth living in and some are not."<sup>113</sup> Thus, some worldviews perpetuate meaninglessness more than others.

Bergner claims that three particular worldviews preclude a sense of meaning in an individual's life: existential absurdity, naturalism, and cynicism.<sup>114</sup> First, as to absurdity, it is ironic that Bergner lists the very discipline that has brought the issue of meaning into mainstream psychology as one of the worldviews that actually preclude meaning.<sup>115</sup> Yet, he is correct in his assessment and acknowledgment that the wing of existentialist thought that rejects the concept of God can only conclude that it is "absurd" that one should feel that life genuinely ought to have meaning even if it is ultimately meaningless. Those who

---

<sup>113</sup>Bergner, "Therapeutic Approaches," 82.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 82-82.

<sup>115</sup>Bergner is a self-described descriptive psychologist and not within the humanistic-existential fold. Illinois State University, "Raymond M. Bergner, Ph.D., Vita," accessed May 12, 2016, <http://psychology.illinoisstate.edu/rmbergn/vita05.htm>.

live too long in this worldview will succumb to despair. Second, those who espouse a reductionist worldview, such as naturalism, are also in danger of precluding meaning. When a human being can be reduced to some form of bio-mechanical processes that are predetermined by some genetic or environmental pre-conditions, any discussion of the metaphysical or epiphenomenal nature of man is rendered moot.<sup>116</sup> Lastly, finding significant altruistic meaning is often beyond the grasp of those who live in a cynical state of disbelief, doubt, and Darwinian survivalist ethics.

Furthermore, in varying degrees, two assumed cultural “laws” undergird and undermine an individual’s ability to form a significant sense of meaning—the laws of ceaseless productivity and eternity.<sup>117</sup> In essence, the law of ceaseless productivity states that unless the action an individual engages in serves some kind of higher utilitarian end (i.e., self-improvement, altruistic accomplishment, charitable or civic contribution) then the activity itself is futile and a waste of time.<sup>118</sup> Individuals who labor under this law find it difficult to generate meaning from anything less than grand accomplishments and outstanding feats because activities can never be enjoyed for their own sake but only as they serve as instrumental means toward higher ends. Second, the law of eternity assumes that only those things that have eternal significance are worth doing.<sup>119</sup> Thus, since most individuals’ lives are consumed with the rather mundane requirements necessary to

---

<sup>116</sup>Bergner, “Therapeutic Approaches,” 82-83. Needless to say, most individuals in Western society adhere to this view, whether they acknowledge it or not. More often, individuals seeking personal freedoms appeal to their biology as grounds for their behavior, i.e., sexual orientation. They do so in an attempt to free themselves from moral constraints only to shackle themselves with the existential constraints of meaninglessness.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>118</sup>Raymond M. Bergner, *Pathological Self-Criticism: Assessment and Treatment*, The Plenum Series in Social/Clinical Psychology (New York: Plenum, 1995), 27f.

<sup>119</sup>Bergner, “Therapeutic Approaches,” 85. By “eternal” it is not intended to acknowledge any sense of Judeo-Christian view of an eternal life. Rather, “eternal” refers to any work, or achievement of permanent value within human societies.

navigate through life, it follows, under this law, that most of an individual's life is not worth doing and hence meaningless.

Finally, certain personality traits succumb to feelings of meaninglessness differently from others: introspection, preoccupation, and value depreciation.<sup>120</sup> Introspective individuals seek meaning by going inward, often through intellectual pursuits and speculation, but find that these kinds of solutions do little to avail their sense of meaninglessness. Preoccupied individuals cannot derive meaning from life or its activities simply because they are too pre-occupied with their own performance. Rather, their concern about others opinions' regarding their performance sabotages any ability to be completely engrossed (i.e., engaged) in the activity in question. Finally, other individuals cannot find meaning in life simply because they cannot see meaning beyond the most basic and concrete activities in life. Thus, work is nothing more than "shuffling paper," spending time with their children is "babysitting," and creating time with their wives is "being with the ball and chain."

Obviously not every individual struggles with all the contributing factors that fuel a sense of meaninglessness. Enough factors are involved that span a wide array of dynamics, worldviews, culturally assumed axioms, and personality traits to explain the almost ubiquitous nature of this phenomenon. Yet understanding *why* individuals feel meaninglessness in their lives is not nearly as important as understanding *what* to do about it from a therapeutic perspective.

This being said, however, the issue of *why* individuals feel meaninglessness is just as important, and therapeutically the key, to *what* to do about it. But unfortunately,

---

<sup>120</sup>Bergner, "Therapeutic Approaches," 79-82.

existential psychology cannot provide satisfactory answers to the first question<sup>121</sup> and thus must move on toward providing a way to “create” meaning for their counselees.

### **The Foundation and Key to a Meaningful Life in Existential Psychology**

As noted, although neither existential psychology nor any other form of psychology can provide ultimate meaning, existentialists understand that meaning systems cannot be relinquished entirely without some substitution.<sup>122</sup> The goal then is to create a meaning system for an individual that is sturdy enough to support his or her own life. To do this, it is important to understand what constituent elements make up a sense of meaning: self-esteem, closure and certainty, affiliation, and symbolic immortality.<sup>123</sup>

Van Tongeren and Green provide helpful and succinct definitions of these four elements:

Individuals find meaning in positive conceptualizations of the self, resolving personal uncertainty and situational ambiguity, nurturing close relationships, and linking themselves to larger, longer lasting entities (e.g., a nation or religion) or striving for personal significance (e.g., publishing a groundbreaking manuscript) that may “live on” after they die.<sup>124</sup>

While the broader literature on meaning-making vary in what elements are necessary for the creation of meaning,<sup>125</sup> one thing they share in varying degrees is an

---

<sup>121</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 483. According to Yalom, the Buddha was right in concluding that the question of the meaning of life is simply not edifying. In typical quixotic form, the answer is to ignore the question.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 427.

<sup>123</sup>Daryl R. Van Tongeren and Jeffrey D. Green, “Combating Meaninglessness: On the Automatic Defense of Meaning,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 36, no. 10 (2010): 1372-73.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 1373.

<sup>125</sup>Bergner, “Therapeutic Approaches.” Bergner focuses on the different types of values in creating a schema of relative meaning. For example, instrumental and intrinsic values compared to spiritual values; Frankl, “The Feeling of Meaninglessness,” is much closer to a biblical counseling perspective than an existentialist perspective because meaning is not something to create as some sort of personal construct, but rather something to discover as a feature of the world; C. Daniel Batson and E. L. Stocks, “Religion: Its Core Psychological Functions,” in *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, ed. J. Greenberg, S. Koole, and T. Pyszczynski (New York: Guilford, 2004), 141-55; Israela Silberman, “Religion as a Meaning System: Implications for the New Millennium,” *Journal of Social Issues* 61, no. 4 (December 2005): 641-63.; Hepburn, “Questions”; Nebraska Symposium on Motivation and Arnold, *Nebraska Symposium on*

emphasis on meaning as being directly associated to factors outside of the individual self. This similarity should not be confused with Frankl's perspective that meaning is something to be discovered, and therefore objective, as a feature in the world. Existentialists still believe that meaning is a personal construct, albeit one that is built on activities outside of the individual self. Yalom calls this "engagement," and refers to it as the major therapeutic answer to meaninglessness.<sup>126</sup> Interestingly enough, however, throwing oneself (i.e., to be fully immersed and engaged) into the stream of life is one point where both the Western theological and atheistic streams of existentialism do find some agreement.<sup>127</sup> Referring to Bergner's analysis of worldviews, cultural laws, and characteristic traits that preclude meaning, in each instance, there is either a distinct inability to look toward the external world with a sense of value (relative or otherwise) or an overemphasis on the individual, which clearly could not provide the necessary value for meaning. Even Sartre saw certain activities, such as altruism, dedication to a cause, and self-transcendence,<sup>128</sup> as intrinsically satisfying and good—thus not requiring any justification or further basis for motivation.<sup>129</sup>

In existential psychology, the answer to the question of meaning in life is not to focus too much on the question to begin with. After all, in the ultimate sense, meaning is a by-product of either cultural emphasis or an unanswerable paradox of the human

---

*Motivation 1970*; Michael F. Steger and Patricia Frazier, "Meaning in Life: One Link in the Chain from Religiousness to Well-Being," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52, no. 4 (October 2005): 574-82; Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 431-41.

<sup>126</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 478.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>128</sup>It is important to realize that the phrase "self-transcendence," which is often used in existential literature, does not refer to any spiritual or mystical concepts but simply means that an individual's concerns, energies, and time are directed toward goals and objectives that transcend a focus on the self. In this sense, Christians can readily support this view of "self-transcendence" as an inherently Christian virtue that is supported by numerous passages of Scripture, Matt 6:33 being preeminent among them.

<sup>129</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 431.

condition. In either situation, it is not productive to ponder the question too long or too hard. Therefore, the emphasis should not be placed on this “galactic” or “cosmic” sense of meaning, but on the relative meaning that can be derived from being fully engaged in the meaningful activities of an individual’s life. Yalom writes, “When it comes to meaninglessness, the effective therapist must help patients to look *away* from the question: to embrace the solution of engagement rather than to plunge in and through the problem of meaninglessness.”<sup>130</sup> Therefore counselors’ therapeutic task is to ask themselves what obstacles exist in the counselees’ lives that prohibit them from having the ability to derive meaning and significance from their life experiences?<sup>131</sup> Removing those obstacles and putting in their place a sense of meaning through engagement in life’s activities is of paramount importance. According to Yalom, the concept of engagement was also key for both Sartre and Camus to make any sense of the absurdity of this life.<sup>132</sup> Philosopher David Hume addressed this similar dynamic in a famous passage in the *Treatise*:

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours’ amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further.<sup>133</sup>

Although one could say that Hume’s cure for his melancholy over the question of meaning is quite shallow given that what he writes about seems quite a lot like mere frivolity and what might be called, in Neil Postman’s terms, “amusing himself to death,” existentialists disagree. Existential psychologists would say Hume is rightly engaging in the world around him such that his enjoyment of the here-and-now and relationships

---

<sup>130</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 483, emphasis original.

<sup>131</sup>Bergner, “Therapeutic Approaches,” 78.

<sup>132</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 431.

<sup>133</sup>Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 20.

creates the right perspective for him to see his quest for meaning relative to what matters at the moment. In other words, Yalom says, when something matters, it does not require meaning; indeed by virtue of the fact that it matters imbues it with meaning.<sup>134</sup> The only thing left for the individual to do is to fully be engaged.

### **Authenticity, Anxiety, and Authority: The Therapeutic Triad**

By definition, coming to understand an individual's existence is a highly subjective endeavor. The experience of existence is unique to every individual existent, yet that does not mean there are no common threads that bind them. Although everyone experiences anxieties differently and in different measure, everyone experiences anxiety nonetheless. Everyone yearns for meaning even if meaning is not found in the same things and in the same way. Everyone wants to be true, even if the understanding of Truth differs. Existential psychology attempts to understand these broad dynamics and meta-categories in such a way that the individual is always at the center of care and not a theory or technique.

In part, this has led to some of the criticisms of existential psychology, such as the charge that it is too subjective and does not have enough therapeutic controls. This elasticity, however, has also allowed its theories to be adopted into almost every therapeutic modality of care. As Yalom puts it, existential psychology is more a way to *think about* people than it is a set of techniques and well-defined practices. The point of this brief concluding section is to demonstrate how these three broad categories—authenticity, anxiety and authority—relate to one another.

Authenticity, anxiety, and authority are a useful heuristic device to conceptualize the goal, problem, and ultimate question from an existentialist perspective.

---

<sup>134</sup>Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy*, 480.

For instance, if the question of meaning<sup>135</sup> is answered by a desire to be a good parent, then the problems an individual will face have direct bearing on both these concerns.

Thus it can be conceived of in this way:

Question in life (authority/meaning): What am I about?

Goal (authenticity): Being a good parent.

Problems (anxiety): Providing the basics for the family, providing the extras in life for the family, being thought of as a capable parent, *actually* being a capable parent, well behaved children, etc.

At each point in this process, certain questions must be answered. For example, the basic question of meaning is the question of authority. Is the answer to the question a legitimate answer to begin with, and who determines whether it is or not? In existential psychology, the individual supplies the answers to questions of meaning. Second, is the standard for the desired goal correct, and is it coherent with the individual's meaning? In other words, what factors determine the standard of being a good parent? Finally, the problems or anxieties an individual will face are in direct proportion to both the meaning and the goal. Some of the anxieties will be legitimate, others illegitimate; some of the threats that the anxieties warn of will be real and others unreal; and how will the individual respond to these anxieties—face them or preserve their being by some form of distorted non-being (i.e., denial of the threat or value or the anxiety itself)?

Existentially-oriented counselors would apply this schematic to a myriad of concerns an individual faces. Furthermore, because the categories are all interrelated, the entry point could be any one of the categories. The counselor would then eventually address the other two. In chapter 5, the one therapeutic technique that is ubiquitous amongst existentially-oriented counselors (and is used to activate the counselee regarding any one of these categories directly in the counseling session) will be examined. Before

---

<sup>135</sup>Relative, not ultimate meaning.

examining the further applicability of these insights from existential psychology, however, it is important to understand and address how biblical counseling deals with these same meta-categories and the individual's experience of his or her existence. Chapter 4 will address these issues from a distinctly biblical worldview.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ESSENCE OF BEING

Rollo May was undoubtedly one of the more influential existential psychologists and the man responsible for introducing existential psychology into the American mainstream in 1958 with his book *Existence*.<sup>1</sup> He believed that the image of man would be the dividing line for all psychology: “The critical battles between approaches to psychology and psychoanalysis in our culture in the next decades, as always, will be on the battleground of the image of man, or the conception of man which underlies the empirical research.”<sup>2</sup> May’s comment is significant because anthropology is not only the “battleground” between psychologists but *the* battleground between existentialists/psychologists and theologians. In the final analysis, however, psychologists and existentialists cannot provide adequate answers because they can only reflect upon human experience in its present state.

Since experience is relative at best, these fields can offer only an approximation of what normal human experience should consist of; they cannot make any judgment concerning what man ought to be by nature, i.e., his anthropology. Furthermore, as modern existentialism has followed the nihilistic path of Nietzsche and Sartre and concluded that “God is dead,” existentialists do not have the critical variable to make sense of the equation. That variable, which is the subject of this chapter, is God’s revelation concerning man. Francis Schaeffer observed that humanity cannot make sense

---

<sup>1</sup>Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F Ellenberger, *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology* (New York: Touchstone, 1958).

<sup>2</sup>Rolly May, “Existentialism and Psychotherapy,” in *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Maurice S. Friedman (Amherst, NY: Humanity, 1999), 442-43.

of itself if the only point of reference humanity has is itself: “Finite man in the external universe, being finite, has no sufficient reference point if he begins absolutely and autonomously from himself; thus, he needs *certain knowledge*. God gives us this in the Scriptures.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, existentialism alone cannot conceive of man correctly. Liberal existential theologians, such as Paul Tillich, may push the conversation toward some kind of faith in answering the question of man’s nature, but since liberalism rejects the final authority of Scripture, he succeeds only in taking the conversation one step further into a broader, desperate uncertainty. Thus, liberalism, like existentialism, cannot conceive of man with any confidence either since it rejects the necessary source that supplies the required information about man’s nature: God’s Word.

Existential psychology combines, in some ways, the best of both existential philosophy and liberal theology. However, it also suffers from the same shortcomings as these disciplines. Existential psychology rightly perceives humanity’s angst and feelings of despair, aloneness, and sense of “thrownness” into the universe combined with a unique sense of optimistic faith, self-constructed destiny, and connection in the here-and-now. Yet, ultimately, there are no substantive answers or objective hope, only a stoic acceptance of a limited reality. Thus, existential psychology fails for the same reason that existentialism and liberalism fail.

Only an objective understanding of man that can account for his nature or essence, as well as his experience, can adequately provide the necessary answers. This understanding is the province of only the theologian who accepts Scripture’s authority and begins not with man’s experience of his world but with God’s revelation regarding the world and man’s place in it. Only Scripture rightly reveals man’s desperate situation in all its complexities and nuances, and only in the Scriptures is the gospel, which

---

<sup>3</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy: The Three Essential Books in One Volume* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), 100-101.

articulates man's true means of deliverance and salvation, revealed. In denying spiritual realities, all other modes of understanding man must redefine what man's true problem is. In denying sin, every system must supply a substitute for it; for although the spiritual concept may be denied, the evidences of it cannot. In humanistic and psychological terms, sin has been transformed into various pathologies and redemption recast as self-actualization. By extracting spiritual realities from the equation, current secular anthropologies have become intractable and increasingly unable to satisfactorily answer man's great existential questions. Roger Bretherton makes a similar lucid point:

The theological concept of sin therefore appears to have been replaced by a cultural concept but, to my mind, the latter is infinitely more pernicious than the former. When we strayed in sin before God, we could at least look to heaven for salvation, but when we feel ourselves falling short of the expectations of a globalized economy, there are no saviors, only other consumers like ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, man has a sense of falling short in every way but with no sense of what, exactly, he is falling short of, or in Nietzsche's words, what he is falling to.<sup>5</sup> Because existential psychology, like most psychologies, has jettisoned absolute standards, there is no point of reference, not even a grand unifying theory to guide practitioners in helping people understand their true needs. The best they can do is to posit some form of humanistic hope without reference, ironically enough, to the greatest, most "actualized" Human who ever lived.<sup>6</sup> The Scriptures, however, can address exactly how man has fallen short and why he feels this existential reality so keenly. The sense of guilt man feels is not a result of failing to actualize his full potential (as humanists proclaim)—man feels guilt because he is actually guilty (Rom 5:12 ESV). Man does not

---

<sup>4</sup>Roger Bretherton, "Can Existential Psychotherapy Be Good News? Reflections on Existential Psychotherapy from a Christian Perspective," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 9, no. 3 (June 2006): 268.

<sup>5</sup>Karl Lowith, *Nature, History, and Existentialism*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 104.

<sup>6</sup>John G. Finch, *A Christian Existential Psychology: The Contributions of John G. Finch*, ed. H. Newton Malony (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980), 278.

feel “homeless” because he is thrown into a universe without meaning—man feels homeless because one of the consequences of sin is enmity with God and His creation (Gen 2:17; 3:17-19; Eph 2:1-2). Consequently, man rightly feels out of place in God’s world. In short, man’s existential angst is the result of his separation from God and God’s plan for humanity (Rom 1:18-25). Therefore, the only solution for humanity’s angst is to be reconciled to its true purpose and design. As this chapter will make clear, this reconciliation is possible only in the person of Jesus Christ and restoration, not of the image of man in man as May suggested, but the restoration of the image of God in man—the *imago Dei*—that thereby answers the existential issues of authenticity, anxiety, and authority. The *imago Dei* establishes human authenticity as fixed, not endlessly fluid. The problem of anxiety is properly understood as the chasm (psychological, emotional, functional) that exists between who an individual is and who the individual ought to be in Christ. Finally, the authority resident in the Scriptures that point to Christ answers the question of meaning for each individual.

Until the psychologies, including existential psychology, have a category for the aforementioned doctrines, “the battleground for the image of man” will continue to be fought in the “fog of war.” The psychologies will always fall short of any coherent answers to their questions because they simply do not account for the most important variable: “man is a theological being.”<sup>7</sup>

The thesis in this chapter is that the biblical doctrines of the *imago Dei*, its necessary corollary the *imago Christi*, and union with Christ sufficiently address the shortcomings found in the anthropological views of existential psychology. This chapter will conclude with a brief section describing how these doctrines recast the primary issues of authenticity, anxiety, and authority discussed in chapter 3, in a distinctly

---

<sup>7</sup>Donald Moss, “The Roots and Genealogy of Humanistic Psychology,” in *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kirk H. Schneider, James F. T. Bugenthal, and J. Fraser Pierson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 14.

Christocentric way.

### **The Image of God in Man**

The importance of this theological doctrine to any study of human nature cannot be overestimated. In fact, Mark Mangano organizes an entire systematic presentation of Old Testament theology with the doctrine of the *imago Dei* at the center.<sup>8</sup> James Orr and Stanley Grenz go further by saying the *imago Dei* can be the organizing theme of God's entire redemptive activity toward man<sup>9</sup> and hence serve as an informing locus of all theological reflection.<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising then that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* should hold such a place of importance because it is the point at which anthropology and theology fuse.<sup>11</sup> What is surprising is that it does not hold a higher place in terms of explicit investigation and practical application within the broader field of evangelical scholarship in general and biblical counseling in particular. In spite of this lack, there is little debate about how important this theological category is for a complete anthropology.

The need to develop this theological category further has become even more relevant as the behavioral sciences exert more influence within the culture at large and particularly within the church. Every psychological modality has a "maturity ideal" and every therapy has an "ideal man" to which they want their counselees to aspire and those notions guide them, either explicitly or implicitly. To the degree this ideal conforms to what Scripture teaches, counselees will receive hope and help. Likewise to the degree this

---

<sup>8</sup>Mark Mangano, *The Image of God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008).

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>10</sup>Stanley Grenz, "Jesus as the *Imago Dei*: Image of God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (December 2004): 617-28.

<sup>11</sup>John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, Theological Resources (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 215-18.

ideal does not align with Scripture, counselees will be confused and deceived even more. Decades ago, Jay Adams made this very issue a driving point in his address to the faculty and students at the University Psychiatric Clinic in Vienna, Austria.<sup>12</sup> The need for an ideal is as relevant today as ever. Anthony Hoekema holds that the question regarding the nature of man is even more important today because of the rise, dominance, and influence of existential thought.<sup>13</sup> As noted, anthropology is the battleground that determines whether one's "ideal" brings hope and help or more confusion and deception. It has been an argument of this dissertation that existential psychology can and does do both. To the degree existential psychology aligns itself with biblical truth, its unique perspective can be a helpful adjunct to the task of biblical counseling. Likewise, to the degree that existential psychology is blinded by its own theoretical prejudice against objectivity, it only furthers confusion and deception in the life of the counselee. John Macquarrie rhetorically asks, what is existentialism if not a philosophical pursuit of the biblical understanding of man? Whether existentialists admit this is beside the point; it is a matter of fact.<sup>14</sup>

So then, Jones and Butman's assertion that "the *imago Dei* is utterly foundational to a *Christian* understanding of persons"<sup>15</sup> is not entirely accurate. The *imago Dei* is utterly foundational to *any* understanding of persons because the image of God in man is an essential characteristic of what it is to be human.<sup>16</sup> In essence this

---

<sup>12</sup>Jay Adams, "Change Them? . . . Into What?" *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 13-17.

<sup>13</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 1.

<sup>14</sup>John Macquarrie, *An Existentialist Theology: A Comparison of Heidegger and Bultmann* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979), 240.

<sup>15</sup>Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Approach*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 65, emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup>Philip Edgecumbe Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 4; Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 18, 66; Heath Lambert, *A*

captures my primary critique against a humanistic-existential anthropology. The complete lack of objective understanding of human personhood renders any of the therapeutic developments they have regarding authenticity, anxiety, and authority as relative at best and self-deceptive at worst. Reinhold Niebuhr is correct when he writes that man cannot make sense of himself or his world, either its essence or existence, without some outside standard of comprehension:

The only principle for the comprehension of the whole (the whole which includes both himself and his world) is therefore inevitably beyond his comprehension. Man is thus in the position of being unable to comprehend himself in his full stature of freedom without a principle of comprehension which is beyond his comprehension.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the only way a full and accurate anthropology can be achieved is if one includes the theological doctrine of the *imago Dei* and its necessary Christological corollaries. This essential doctrine establishes an objective understanding of the nature of man while simultaneously allowing for individual existence and diversity.

### **The Scriptural Significance of the *Imago Dei***

The most significant doctrines in Scripture are not always the most textually dominant. Few doctrines are as important and yet occupy so few words, at least explicitly, as the doctrine of the image of God in man. Perhaps only the biblical teachings on the trinity and the millennial reign of Christ eclipse the *imago Dei* in such a way. In both cases, however, the word that carries the conceptual weight of the construct does not even appear once in all of Scripture. The point is, lack of copy (words) does not translate to lack of concept. Thus, while the *imago Dei* is not textually prominent, it is nevertheless conceptually dominant. In fact, according to Anthony Hoekema there are only three

---

*Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 191.

<sup>17</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, Library of Theological Ethics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 125.

explicit references to the *imago Dei* in the entire Old Testament, all of which are found in the book of Genesis (1:26-28; 5:1-3, 9:6).<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1:26-28 is of foundational importance as it sets up the significance of this doctrine that all the other passages develop. For example, in the Genesis account, the significance of the creation of man is evident in the grammatical construction used to signify this event. Mangano notes that the transition in the verbal forms alone, from the jussive to the cohortative, give evidence of emphasis regarding man's special creation.<sup>19</sup> In each instance of God's creative work in Genesis 1, the verbs conjugate in the jussive form ("let there be"), which expresses a type of mild command or strong wish. However, when the creation of man is recorded, the verb conjugation changes to the strong cohortative ("let us make"), which is used much like the imperative to express a command and to express purpose.<sup>20</sup> Jay Adams notes that the further distinction of God's breathing life into Adam marks humanity as special. Unlike the rest of creation, which was simply brought forth *ex nihilo*, man was formed and then God breathed into him the breath of life. Adams explains,

This personal direct, unique in-breathing constituted a separate act on God's part that distinguished human creation (and human life) from other animate life. There is an earthy side of man, but there is a heavenly or spiritual side as well. Man belongs to both worlds.<sup>21</sup>

The remaining two texts in Genesis that discuss the image of God in man assume the unique importance of man's creation in God's image recorded in Genesis 1:26-28. When the material in the New Testament is taken into consideration at the

---

<sup>18</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 11. While Ps 8 also deals conceptually with the *imago Dei*, the phrase itself does not appear in the text.

<sup>19</sup>Mangano, *The Image of God*, 1; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 416.

<sup>20</sup>Gary Davis Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 130.

<sup>21</sup>Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More than Redemption*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resource Library, 1986), 109.

broadest conceptual level, the textual count can reach up to nine references,<sup>22</sup> but the actual phrase appears only once in 2 Corinthians 4:4.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, in developing this important theological construct the reader is presented with a unique challenge: understanding a profound concept with very few texts to develop the doctrine. Furthermore, as Berkouwer noted, while the significance is clear, some of the texts (such as the Gen 1 passage mentioned) do not give any further details to help illumine what is meant by the profound concept that man is in God's image.<sup>24</sup> This means then that every instance where the concept of the *imago Dei* appears in Scripture is potentially loaded with rich insights that, if understood correctly, can do much to clarify the doctrine.<sup>25</sup> However, for the purposes of this study, the position made prominent by

---

<sup>22</sup>Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 11:7, 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18, 4:4; Eph 4:24; Col 1:15, 3:10; Jas 3:9.

<sup>23</sup>Jas 3:9 is certainly a prominent text in studying the *imago Dei* in the New Testament, but instead of using the phrase "image of God," James employs "the likeness of God."

<sup>24</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 87.

<sup>25</sup>Likewise, since the textual material is limited, many misunderstandings about this doctrine have abounded over the years. A clear example of such confusion is that which has surrounded the terms "image" and "likeness." According to James Barr, "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis: A Study of Terminology," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 51, no.1 (1968): 24-25, it was very likely that the writer of Gen 1 used the terms image (*selem*) and likeness (*demut*) to avoid the kind of confusion that has actually arisen. The term "image" (*selem*) is actually the more prominent concept, yet it is also more ambiguous. Therefore, the author added (*demut*) to further define and limit the meaning of the concept of image to be within the semantic overlap shared by both terms. Thus by using the two terms to define the semantic boundaries of the one concept, the author could then use either term when discussing the same concept later, as he does so in Gen 5:1 and 9:6. The author of the Genesis account does similar semantic work with the terms "create" (*bara*) and "make" (*asah*) in the same chapter. Unfortunately, the loss of this lexical and semantic sense is what led to the exact kind of confusion that he was seeking to avoid. Instead of seeing likeness as further defining image, the two terms were thought to mean two entirely different concepts. *Ibid.*, 24. Early church father Irenaeus (c.130-200) was the first exegete to begin to mistakenly promote the erroneous distinction in his classic and important *Against Heresies*, written in 185, in which he taught that at the fall man lost the image of God but retained His likeness. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, ed. Alexander Roberts et al., Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:532, 544. For Irenaeus, the image of God in man was his rationality—his capacity to reason. Likely his view was shaped by the Greek philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics who taught that man's reason was his greatest attribute and what set him apart as unique from all else. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 34. The likeness of God then was something special that was added to man and not necessarily something essential to his nature. Irenaeus saw this as a special "robe of sanctity" that was given to Adam Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1:457. According to Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 35, Irenaeus believed man has three components: body,

the Reformed tradition regarding the broad and narrow views of the *imago Dei* offers the most satisfying perspective when it comes to answering the question about the nature of man in a counseling context.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is vital to examine this position next to

---

soul, spirit. The unregenerate have only a body and a soul whereas the believer has a spirit as given by the Holy Spirit Himself, the part of man that receives divine truth and communes with God. The popular integrationist view of man as a tripartite being consisting of body, soul, and spirit in part is located in this erroneous understanding that Irenaeus developed so long ago. The mistaken notion that the body is for the physician, the soul for the psychologist, and the spirit for the pastor is not only semantically unsound but also exegetically incorrect. Semantically, the term “soul” in the Bible refers to the combination of body and spirit in unity—the complete being of man. The terms body and spirit refer to each component separate from one another. Exegetically, as Barr’s linguistic analysis has shown, there is no substantial distinction between image and likeness, and thus it is not necessary to parse the immaterial aspect of human beings further to begin with. Thus, Irenaeus’s attempt to understand the consequences of the fall and regeneration on man’s nature are commendable. Nevertheless, his efforts to locate this distinction in the two terms “image” and “likeness” and parsing them out as essential and non-essential components of man’s nature led to more error than he could have perceived at the time. Centuries later, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) perpetuated Irenaeus’s error. Like Irenaeus, Aquinas located the image of God in man’s intellect and reason. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcon, trans. Laurence Shapcote, Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 14:426, 429. While Aquinas departed from locating the distinctions of man’s nature in the terms “image” and “likeness,” as Irenaeus and most medieval theologians following Irenaeus had, he was nonetheless influenced by the misguided interpretive schema that Irenaeus began. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 36-37. Whatever man had lost was accidental and not essential to his humanity as his reason and intellect were. This simultaneously set up reason and intellect as the primary good within man and laid the foundation for a semi-pelagian view within Catholic theology. In other words, Aquinas believed that because man still retains his reason and intellect as the image of God, man retains a natural love for God and thus no sovereign act of God is necessary in regeneration, but rather, more of a cooperative act from God to give man a moral-mental boost in thinking about holy things. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 14:426. Fortunately, by the time of the Reformation, the distinction between the terms “image” and “likeness” had lost its exegetical influence, and the Reformers began to see the fall’s impact on all of man, such that Calvin could say, because of the fall, man is totally depraved and not merely deprived. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 42. Today, Protestant evangelical scholars primarily agree that there is no distinction between the terms “image” and “likeness” and whatever Scripture might mean about the image of God in man it is not found in parsing these two words. Raymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 427; Wayne A Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity; Zondervan, 1994), 443; G. L. Bray, “Image of God,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2000), 575..

<sup>26</sup>The Reformed position on the *imago Dei* does not receive the attention it deserves in the broader evangelical literature. Normally when asking, in what way is man made in God’s image, scholars tend to focus on three possibilities. The first answer has been that man images God in a substantial sense. The second answer is that man images God in a relational sense, and third that man images God in a functional sense. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 518; Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 184-88. For the purposes of this study, it is important only for the reader to be familiar with the broad contours of each view. For further research, see the bibliography. The substantive view, which historically has been the majority view of Christendom, holds to the belief that the image of God resides in some characteristic or attribute that man shares with God. This character or attribute could be spiritual, mental, or psychological. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 520-21; J. E. Colwell, “Image of God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer, The

understand how it is that Christ is the key to restoring humanity to its true anthropology and thus recasts all of the existential concerns discussed in chapter 3 in light of His redemptive work.

### **The *Imago Dei*: the Broad and Narrow View**

If the goal of counseling is the restoration of the image of God to its proper functioning in an individual's life, as Lambert asserts,<sup>27</sup> then it is vitally important to have a functional understanding of what this means. The question is, how ought a counselor think about this critical doctrine in establishing therapeutic and ministry goals in working with a counselee? How does a counselor understand this doctrine practically in establishing a grounded anthropology in such a way that overcomes the shortcomings of the humanistic-existential views of human personhood? To answer this question correctly, the reader must go beyond the veil of the behavioral sciences. The modern

---

Master Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 328. Thus in some substantial way, man images God. The second view, held by men such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Charles Hodge, places the imaging of God in man's ability to have meaningful interpersonal relationships that are complex and complementary to one another. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 49-52; Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 429; Colwell, "Image of God," 328. While both Barth and Hodges would disagree strongly over many of the important details of the Genesis account, for example Barth did not hold to the historicity of it, while Hodges did, they agree that the emphasis of the *imago Dei* ought to focus more on the relational rather than "religio/ethical abstractions". This second view is grounded in the Trinitarian relationships within the Godhead and is consistent with the relational nature of human beings that is so important to the counseling task upon which this study focuses. Brunner indicates that individuals cannot be humans by themselves and thus an individual's intellect, reasoning, or love cannot fulfill what it means to image God if there is none to share it with. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1953), 106. The third and final view believes that man images God functionally by exercising dominion over the earth. Some proponents of this view believe the text itself answers the questions of how man images God. Berkouwer, *Man*, 70-71. According to Gen 1:26, God's cohortative statement to make man is immediately followed by a description of what man should *do*. He (man) is to exercise dominion over the earth. Man's imaging of God is not described in the text by his substance or his relationships but in his function. Nevertheless, similar to the debate over the terms image and likeness, theologians and other scholars have come to realize that attempting to pin the image of God in man into just any one of these three options is too narrow and misses the general point that man was intended to represent God in his entire being. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 66; Mark R. McMinn and Clark D. Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 34. Though, this is not to say that the three views are meaningless—they are helpful in providing a taxonomy of the various ways human beings are constituted.

<sup>27</sup>Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 190.

psychologies can only say what is “normal” human behavior by statistics, because statistics are all it has to work with—empirical observations and studies, survey results, opinion polls, and the analysis and synthesis of all this data. Behavioral science can never say what is normal human behavior by design because it rejects the very premise of such a design. Berkouwer is correct when he says of this problem of the modern sciences (i.e., psychology) that if man is necessarily in relation to God, any view that abstracts that relationship can never truly penetrate the mystery of man.<sup>28</sup> Only the Christian guided by Scripture can proclaim what is normal human behavior by design because only he accepts what Niebuhr referred to as the “principle of comprehension,”<sup>29</sup> the means by which he understands not only himself but the world around him.

The primary text on the *imago Dei* examined to this point is Genesis 1:26-28, which describes man in his pre-fallen state. The phrase or concept of man being fashioned in God’s image (or likeness) appears in other passages of Scripture after the fall recorded in Genesis 3 (e.g., Gen 5:1; 9:6; Eph 4:24; Jas 3:9). The principal questions that have motivated theologians and biblical counselors to think more carefully about this doctrine are: In what sense does man retain the image of God after the fall and what did he lose? Furthermore, how does salvation in Christ affect that image, and what implications does this have for counseling? A well-known distinction in Reformed theology between the image of God in the broader and narrow sense seems adequate to answer these questions. Berkouwer explains the distinction in this manner:

The broader sense of the image is used to stress the idea that man, despite his fall into sin and corruption, was not bestialized or demonized, but remained man. The narrow sense of the image is used to stress the idea that man lost his communion with God—his (*conformitas*) to God’s will.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup>Berkouwer, *Man*, 29.

<sup>29</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 125.

<sup>30</sup>Berkouwer, *Man*, 38.

In other words, in one very real sense at the fall man remained totally intact *as* man. His God-given faculties and abilities remained as they were before the fall. Man did not lose anything that in any sense demoted him to some lower species or disqualified him from being a man and not an animal. Hoekema explains further that in the broadest sense man maintains all the “endowment of gifts and capacities that enable man to function as he should in his various relationships and callings.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, in another sense, man lost everything meaningful about what it meant to be a man in the first place—his communion with God and conformity to His will. In this regard, man as man is totally devastated, or as Calvin writes, “Whatever remains is frightful deformity.”<sup>32</sup> To put it positively, the image of God in man in the narrow senses consists in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). Thus, the image of God in the narrower sense refers to the proper functioning of the human individual in relation toward God. Furthermore, Reformed theologians have traditionally understood those two texts as key in understanding what it means to be renewed in the image of God.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, at creation, man was created upright and good, pure, moral, and in alignment with God’s purposes and will, able to obey, commune, and have rich, unbroken fellowship with God. All that wealth and advantage vanished at the fall. In *Created in God’s Image*, Anthony Hoekema uses the terms “structure” and “function” to communicate the same concepts as “broader” and “narrower.” His reasoning is helpful:

This distinction [between the broad and narrow sense] concerns the question of the relation between what could be called the structural and the functional aspects of man. The problem is this: Must we think of the image of God in man as involving only what man is and not what man does, or only what he does and not what he is, or both what he is and what he does? Is “image of God” only a description of the way in which the human being functions, or is it also a description of the kind of

---

<sup>31</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 70-71.

<sup>32</sup>Johannes Calvin, John Thomas MacNeill, and Ford Lewis Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster; London: SCM, 1960), 189.

<sup>33</sup>Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 428-29.

being he or she is?...It is my conviction that we need to maintain both aspects. Since the image of God includes the whole person, it must include both man's structure and man's functioning. One cannot function without a certain structure.<sup>34</sup>

In other words, there is the broader sense in which individuals image God, which is found in the structure of human beings (reason and intellect, memory, will, emotions, sensations, etc.), and there is a narrow sense in which individuals image God, which is found in the function as human beings (love, obey, serve, and worship our Creator). The great tragedy and irony of the current human condition is that individuals use the very *structures* that God has given for the exact opposite *function* of humanity's purpose. So, to see humanity as the image of God is to see both the structure and the function of human personhood. The gifts of the structure are given to accomplish the task of the function.<sup>35</sup> It would seem then that the mandates of the functional give the proper ordering, priorities, and definition to what a "normal" human being ought to be, even in terms of how the structural aspect of the person is understood.

If restoring the image of God in the individual is the goal of counseling—if in fact this is the "maturity ideal" spoken of earlier—and the practical focus of that restoration is ensuring correction of the functional aspect of human personhood, then the crucial questions are: how does that happen? Is there a picture of that "maturity ideal," and if so how do individuals achieve it? Those questions are all answered Christologically.

### **The Image of God in Christ**

It seems almost a universal fact that those who ponder deity and humanity intuitively posit the two on either ends of a spectrum. Perhaps the only difference between the various religious or philosophical views would be how far apart the two ends

---

<sup>34</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 69.

<sup>35</sup>Johnson, "Resurrection Dialogues," chap. 3, provides a much more robust application of the distinctions made. Johnson's two categories of biopsychosocial wholeness and ethicospiritual holiness are in general agreement with the traditional categories of broader/structural and narrower/functional. From a counseling perspective then, the narrow/functional is primary and the broader/structural is secondary.

are from each other. God is on one side while man is on the other. It has been argued that if not for the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, Christianity would do the same, perhaps with simply more distance between the two points. Theoretically speaking, theology would be on one side and anthropology on the other. The doctrine of *imago Dei*, however, rests between those two points, connecting one side with the other. The distance still exists, but there also exists a connection that exceeds the two polar points. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* connects theology and anthropology, albeit in a somewhat ambiguous manner. Therefore, it is important for the doctrine of Christology to clarify this connection.

The objective of this section is not an exhaustive Christological study, but rather to look at two points of Christology that demonstrate how Christ connects man and God: Christ as the fulfillment of the *imago Dei*, and union with Christ in restoring the narrow/functional sense of the *imago Dei* in man. Before doing so, however, it is critical to establish the foundational importance the person of Christ plays in God's redemptive plan for mankind.

### **Christ: The Theological Center**

The point of laying the groundwork regarding the image of God in man was to establish that a Christian understanding of the image of God in man is necessarily a Christ-centered understanding.<sup>36</sup> So important is the person of Christ in His relation to the image of God and its fulfillment that Stanley Grenz claims that such a Christology, as is being argued here, ought to stand at the center of all systematic theological reflection: "Indeed in a similar manner the NT affirmations of Jesus as the *imago Dei* must be extended to the other three theological loci [theology proper, pneumatology, ecclesiology, eschatology]<sup>37</sup> and hence to all of systematic theology from beginning to

---

<sup>36</sup>Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 189.

<sup>37</sup>Grenz mentions three theological loci, but earlier in his article he lists the four I have included here. It is possible that Grenz views theology proper as the overarching context for these other doctrines.

end.”<sup>38</sup> While neither Grudem nor Hoekema indicate one way or the other concerning Grenz’s overall claim, both agree that at least the goal of redemption in Christ is to be transformed into the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29).<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, several NT passages show Christ as central to the concept of the *imago Dei*. For example, in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul indicates that individuals are to be transformed into the image of Christ from one degree of glory into another. Just four verses later, Paul says that Christ is the image of God Himself or links Christ’s image with the creation account (i.e., 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; and 1 Cor 15:49). With respect to 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Colossians 1:15, these two texts are rich with creation imagery such that Ridderbos says that in Col 1:15 there is a Christological interpretation of Genesis 1.<sup>40</sup> In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Genesis 1:3 is cited just two verses later along with the repeated emphasis on “glory” (3:18, 4:4,6), which later Judaism and Paul himself linked with Genesis 1:26 (1 Cor 11:7; Rom 1:23; 3:23).<sup>41</sup> Regarding Colossians 1:15, the entirety of this hymn surrounds the context of creation itself. Eric Johnson, citing Grenz, makes the connection that the word “first-born” (*prototokos*) in Colossians 1:15 and 18 signifies both Christ’s preeminence in the creation and recreation (i.e., redemption).<sup>42</sup>

Up to this point, the *imago Dei* has been an OT construct, but as it has become clear, the NT reveals that the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is not complete until the person of

---

<sup>38</sup>Grenz, “Jesus as the *Imago Dei*,” 627.

<sup>39</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 445; Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 23. Hoekema makes the claim that since the Son is the perfect image of God the Father (Col 1:15), no violence is done to the text if the expression “image of his Son” is equated with “image of God.”

<sup>40</sup>Herman Ridderbos and John Richard de Witt, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 71.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Johnson, “Resurrection Dialogues,” 6. This point is particularly significant as it links Christ to both the original creation of man and the new recreation of man.

Christ is considered. Understanding Christ as the fulfillment of the *imago Dei* is the critical point in a thoroughly biblical anthropology. This reality must be examined next.

### **Christ: The Fulfillment of the *Imago Dei***

Being both perfect God and man (Heb 1:3, 4:14), being both Son of God and Son of man (Rom 1:3-4; Matt 16:13), Jesus uniquely images each perfectly. Herman Ridderbos says that in light of the NT passages (i.e., 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4; Col 1:15) and repeated themes (glory, image, firstborn) the reader must interpret Christ as the connection between Genesis 1 and the fulfillment of the *imago Dei*: “On the basis of all these materials it is difficult to deny that the absolute use of the Image of God as a qualification of Christ must be connected with what is said in Genesis 1ff.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Ridderbos gives an extensive exegesis interpreting Philippians 2:6 in a way that shows Christ bridges the gap between man and God. For example, the phrase “equality with God” is equated with the serpent’s temptation to man that “you will be like God.” The phrase “a thing to be grasped” reveals the fact that Christ did not have to achieve something that He was not already.<sup>44</sup> In other words, the first Adam wanted to appropriate to himself a being on equal terms with God in an unlawful manner; Christ, however, did not regard this equality, which was already His privilege, as a thing to be grasped.<sup>45</sup> The point of these amazing Christological passages is that Jesus is the fulfillment of what the ideal man ought to be because He uniquely is the image of God in man. Eric Johnson clearly states this same conclusion: “Christ defines the *imago dei*. . . . As the image of God, the human Jesus was like a magnifying glass which concentrated the light of the glory of God into a blazingly intense, finite ‘point,’ a density that culminated in the cross and

---

<sup>43</sup>Ridderbos and Witt, *Paul*, 73.

<sup>44</sup>The NKJV renders this phrase “did not consider it robbery,” which hints toward the illegality of the original Genesis account.

<sup>45</sup>Ridderbos and Witt, *Paul*, 74.

resurrection.”<sup>46</sup> By logical inference then, as individuals conform themselves to Christ, they are conforming to the original ideal of what God intended for humanity in the *imago Dei* (Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:21-24).<sup>47</sup> In *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience*, Macaulay and Barrs state that the Christological importance of the *imago Dei* is the organizing principle of human experience. In the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, the OT reveals humanity’s origin story (Gen 1) and the NT reveals humanity’s purpose and direction (as seen in the summary passages referenced previously). As a result, the purpose of the Christian life, like the purpose of creation, is that humanity should be like God (Eph 5:1).<sup>48</sup> To sharpen the point, the authentic identity of man, of which so much of existential psychology is concerned, can only be understood Christologically.<sup>49</sup>

The counseling implications of this fact are enormous. The humanistic-existential perspective fails at this exact point. They cannot offer any definitive understanding of what a human being ought to be, but instead can offer only what an individual<sup>50</sup> should be based upon personal experience, desires, and values. Beyond this, however, the humanistic-existential perspective cannot give any norms to begin to help counselees have a baseline understanding of what desires and values are normal (by design) because they have no baseline understanding of what is normal human nature. Having such a baseline understanding of human nature is essential for proper human development and flourishing. Reinhold Niebuhr writes,

---

<sup>46</sup>Johnson, “Resurrection Dialogues,” 8.

<sup>47</sup>Mangano, *The Image of God*, 11-12; Calvin, MacNeill, and Battles, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 189; Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 120-21.

<sup>48</sup>Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), 15.

<sup>49</sup>Hughes, *The True Image*, 3; J. E. Colwell, “Anthropology,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 30.

<sup>50</sup>The intentional change in nouns should not be missed. All human beings are individuals, but according to Scripture, in some real sense, not all individuals are human beings, because human beings are essentially image-bearers of God. To the degree an individual chooses not to reflect that image, he is denying an essential feature of his humanity.

Man is a creature who cannot find a true norm short of the nature of ultimate reality. This is the significance of the historic doctrine of Christ as the “second Adam.” The same Christ who is accepted by faith as the revelation of the character of God is also regarded as the revelation of the true character of man.<sup>51</sup>

The *imago Dei*, as it finds its fulfillment in Christ, offers all individuals a direction (i.e., meaning) for life. Contrary to the humanistic-existential vision, individuals are not free to do whatever they so choose. Man is made in the image and likeness of another, and Scripture unfolds what that likeness entails.<sup>52</sup> Because the humanists cannot define life, they cannot direct life either. Christianity, on the other hand, does both.<sup>53</sup> Yet, those within the humanistic-existential perspective would reject such an essential and objective reality to define human personhood as stifling to individual development and freedom. Conforming individuals to some template and demanding a kind of obedience runs counter to the humanistic impulse. To this objection, the biblical counselor may respond that true freedom is not seen in being able to do what one wants (which is the popular understanding of personal freedom).<sup>54</sup> Rather, true freedom is the ability to do what one ought to do. When individuals conform themselves to the standards of Scripture, far from losing their personal identities as the humanists insist, they gain the freedom to become their true selves (Matt 10:39; John 10:3; Rev 2:17). Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one, yet each has a distinct personality, so too do believers become more of who they are when they find themselves in Christ.<sup>55</sup> The “commands” and “rules” that the humanists object to become the very means that individuals are steered away from the

---

<sup>51</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 146.

<sup>52</sup>John 13:34; Rom 12:10, 16; 14:13, 15:5,14; 1 Cor 12:25, 16:7; 2 Cor 13:11; Gal 5:13, 26; Eph 4:2, 32, 5:21; Col 3:13, 16; 1 Thess 4:18, 5:11, 15; Heb 3:13, 10:24-25; 1 Pet 1:22, 4:9-10, 5:5.

<sup>53</sup>Macaulay and Barrs, *Being Human*, 19.

<sup>54</sup>Spending ten minutes in any twelve-step recovery program will dispel any illusion that freedom is the ability to pursue “wants and desires.” See Ed Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001).

<sup>55</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 846.

path of deception and slavery (as all sin leads to a vicious cycle of both) and progressively to become more of what God uniquely intends for each individual. Similarly, the myriad of “commands” and “rules” that govern how one ought to drive in no way diminish an individual’s own driving style. Rather, these very “commands” and “rules” free millions of individuals to move about with safety and confidence as others submit to these common ideals. It is *because* of these “commands” and “rules,” not in spite of them, that individuals can grow and flourish and yet all remain human.

For the purpose of this chapter the remaining question to answer is: How does this conformity happen? If Christ is the fulfillment of the *imago Dei* and being conformed to Christ is the key to being restored to the original intention of humanity, then how does this conformity to Christ take place? The answer to that question is in the theological concept of union with Christ.

### **Union with Christ: The Key to Regaining Humanity**

Union with Christ is a vast topic. Reformed theology has often used the concept of union with Christ to refer to a comprehensive sense of one’s entire salvation.<sup>56</sup> John Murray goes so far as to say that union with Christ is the “central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation.”<sup>57</sup> The purpose of this section is much more modest. The logical flow of this chapter has argued that the image of God in man is essential to human personhood and that this image has both a structural (broader) and functional (narrower) aspect to it. At the fall, the structural aspect of man as image-bearer remained intact but the functional aspect of his image-bearing was completely lost. Thus, fallen man remains the image of God but in a malfunctioning way. Hoekema states it succinctly and precisely:

---

<sup>56</sup>Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 102; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 840.

<sup>57</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015), 171.

“Man sins with God imaging gifts.”<sup>58</sup> Jesus Christ Himself is the fulfillment of the image of God in man in both the broad and narrow sense. Ephesians 4:21-24 and Colossians 3:9-10 are cited in the Reformed tradition as key texts that state the goal of the renewed image and both texts are Christological in focus.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, to the degree that individuals are being renewed after this image they are recapturing human personhood. Thus, the key to regaining humanity is to be united with Christ. Colwell writes, “The person of Jesus Christ is alone the determinative source of a valid theological anthropology; the authentic goal and nature of human life is to be discerned primarily in him and only secondarily in us.”<sup>60</sup> Tillich himself made this exact point, that Jesus was the only true man, the essence of humanity, and as such He (Jesus) is the template for humanity.<sup>61</sup> So then, individuals need look to nothing other than Jesus Christ Himself to inform the ideal of what he or she ought to be like. According to Hoekema, individuals image-bearers, i.e., individual persons can learn what ought to occupy the center of their lives by looking at what occupied the center of Jesus’ life. When an individual does this he or she will find the center of the *imago Dei* is not reason, function, volition, etc., but love for God and love for God’s creation. Love then is at the center of the *imago Dei*.<sup>62</sup> Christ was wholly directed toward His heavenly father (John 4:34, 17:4), His neighbor (Luke 19:1; Mark 10:45; John 15, 13), and creation as its rightful ruler (Mark 4:41; Luke 5:4-9). In like manner, humanity as God’s image-bearers is to image Christ in the same way.

---

<sup>58</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 85.

<sup>59</sup>Other texts, such as 1 Cor 15:49 and 2 Cor 3:18, 4:4, are also used to establish this theological-practical framework.

<sup>60</sup>Colwell, “Anthropology,” 30.

<sup>61</sup>Ernst Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism: From Kierkegaard to Sartre: A Complete, Authoritative Guide to a Major Philosophy of Our Time* (New York: Grove, 1962), 141-42.

<sup>62</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 22.

Being united with Christ, positionally, renews and restores all individuals who are in Him to the perfect fulfillment of the *imago Dei* (i.e., justification by faith). Being united with Christ practically enables individuals to grow in more and more conformity to this renewed image (i.e., sanctification). The very essence of the Christian's life is bound up with this unity with Christ (Rom 6:1-14), and to deny or ignore this fundamental truth is to open the way to "soul blight and a stunting of the Christian's growth."<sup>63</sup> Thus, an individual grows into conformity with the very character of Christ as he or she is being united with Him by faith. Thus, many of the NT exhortations (many of which have been referenced earlier) find their grounding in the character of Christ, since to be united with Him is not merely to attain the benefits of His active obedience but to actually take on the form of His character. Thus, those united to Christ are to love as Christ has loved them (John 13:34). The Colossian believers were to forgive one another as the Lord had forgiven them (Col 3:16). Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Believers were exhorted to run the race, looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of their faith (Heb 12:2). Conformity to Christ is the natural by-product of being united with Christ (John 15:1-8). Likewise, nonconformity to Christ and His words are evidence that one is not united to Him (Luke 6:46ff; 1 John 2:3-4).

### **Christocentric Recasting of Existential Issues**

Sufficient groundwork has been laid to revisit and answer a question asked previously: what is man? Man is a covenant image-bearer of God who finds his supreme example in the person of Jesus Christ. To the degree that an individual conforms to the character of Jesus Christ, and thus fulfills covenant obligations, to that degree will he fulfill his created design with all its antecedent blessings, fulfillment, purpose, and delight. Likewise, to the degree that an individual does not conform his life to the character of

---

<sup>63</sup>Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 739.

Jesus Christ, and thus fails in his covenant obligations, he will fail in his created design and thus miss the aforementioned benefits.

A primary shortcoming of existential psychology has been its attempt to understand the human experience (existence) without consideration of man's covenantal, image-bearing nature or the Christological fulfillment of that nature. As a result, while observations regarding human experience and the means of accessing that experience have been profound, because they lack the proper context, conclusions have been profoundly mistaken. This important point bears some elaboration. The success of existential psychology (and there have been many) does not necessarily speak to the truthfulness of its theories. Rather, it affirms only that existential psychology is competent at helping people find other idols to function more fruitfully for them. As David Powlison is fond of stating, any system that does not have repentance and faith at its core can only replace failing idols with more successful idolatry.<sup>64</sup> Chapter 3 demonstrated that the therapeutic means used in existential psychology to access human experience have been primarily through three foci: authenticity, anxiety, and authority.

The practical meaning of authenticity was defined as the level of coherence between an individual's self-identity and actual experience of himself. Anxiety<sup>65</sup> is the emotional barometer of discontinuity between an individual's self-identity and experience, and authority is the ground that determines how an individual chooses his self-identity to begin with. Thus, in the existential psychology schema, authenticity is the goal, anxiety is the problem, and authority is the main question. Who or what am I? Why do I feel this

---

<sup>64</sup>David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 37.

<sup>65</sup>The many facets of anxiety are a much larger theoretical concept than can be fully addressed in this study. There are legitimate and illegitimate forms of anxiety. Rollo May makes the very insightful observation that what distinguishes one from the other is its level of intensity directly correspondent to actual threat as opposed to perceived threat. In this context, the anxiety discussed has to do with the generalized feelings of being unsettled, ill prepared, nervous, and fearful as opposed to, but not necessarily exclusive of, the anxiety that accompanies a particular event, situation, or individual.

way? And what or who determines that I can answer these questions? In each instance, the individual is the center of concern. On the one hand, this feels completely natural in today's highly individualistic, post-modern culture, while on the other hand the psychological-emotional fall out of this mindset is staggering in modern society. It is clear then that the individual "I" is not sufficient to bear the weight of such monumental concerns as is being raised by questions of human existence. In light of this chapter, the three foci of existential psychology must be recast into their proper context—a Christological context.

### **Authenticity**

One of the great reassurances of the Christian worldview is that the age-old question about man has a rock-solid answer. "People *are* made in the image of God," Lambert asserts,

This fact is the *most* important reality about what it means to be a human being. We do not get to choose whether we represent God in the world. That is already true of us. The only issue that remains is whether we will acknowledge this fact and respond to it in a way that honors God.<sup>66</sup>

Years earlier, Adams came to a similar conclusion when he said that it was Jesus Christ, not sociological polls or anything else, that sets the *norms* [emphasis mine] for human life.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, Nietzsche is incorrect; man is not falling toward an *x*. Sartre is incorrect; man is not an accident. Heidegger is incorrect; man is not in a state of thrownness. The existentialists are incorrect; man is essence before he is existence. That essence is the *imago Dei*. His existence is as a member of the body of Christ, predestined to be conformed to the image and likeness of Jesus Himself (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; Phil 3:21; Col 3:10; 1 John 3:2), which is authentic humanity. Nothing less. In essence, the Genesis account about the *imago Dei* establishes man's covenant identity and the NT passages

---

<sup>66</sup>Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 189, emphasis added.

<sup>67</sup>Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling*, 98.

further describe the trajectory and fulfillment of that covenantal identity in Jesus Christ. Thus what defines whether or not a man or woman is truly authentic has very little to do with his or her own self-assigned identity—be it a political, social, sexual, cultural, intellectual, or any combination or variation of dozens of other current identities—but everything to do with his or her covenant obligations to the Creator.

When a man or woman is regenerated, one fundamental reality is made clear—they are placed in touch with ultimate reality, perhaps for the first time (Isa 29:14, 44:25; Jer 8:9; Matt 11:25; 1 Cor 1:18-25; 2 Cor 4:6; 1 John 2:8). It is only when a man or woman is in touch with reality as it actually exists that they can truly experience the “mindfulness of being” that Heidegger says is the definition of authentic experience.<sup>68</sup> This is not to say that a non-Christian cannot be aware of their existence in a manner similar to what Heidegger and the existential literature espouses. Yet, those individuals can only do so relative to their limited understanding of reality, which is always perspectival and fluid, thus their reality is not reality itself. The man or woman, reconciled to God through Christ, is in touch with ultimate reality (2 Cor 4:18; Rev 21:6, 22:13), however tenuous their grip on subjective realities might be. Heidegger’s point that this “mindfulness of being” is critical to one’s authorship of life is also correct. Once one is in touch with reality, a responsibility to conform oneself to that reality is implied.<sup>69</sup> If true authenticity is to be found in the renewal of the *imago Dei* within the individual and that renewal is made possible through union with Christ, then it follows that all men and women have a responsibility to conform themselves to *that* reality, which is the covenant obligations of

---

<sup>68</sup>Martin Heidegger, Joan Stambaugh, and Dennis J. Schmidt, *Being and Time* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 210-14, 313-14.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.* Of course, the dilemma within most existential thought is that there is no ultimate reality, since God is dead, thus all reality is merely self-constructed realities. Therefore, the impulse is to be true to oneself since the self is the sole arbiter of reality. At this point, the existential issue of authority and meaning come into play, which is discussed later. The fact is that the rampant subjectivity of existentialism undermines it at every point.

being an image-bearer. Two of these covenant obligations have been discussed previously (love God, love others), but it is appropriate to discuss the final obligation that image-bearers have toward their Creator. This is the covenant obligation known as the “cultural mandate” as given in Genesis 1:28.<sup>70</sup> Man is assigned the task of bringing about a God-glorifying culture, to develop agriculture, Nano-technology, animal husbandry, art, music, civil engineering, cinema, and all the other manifestations of creative endeavor to reveal the glories and goodness of God’s character. As Jesus, the perfect image-bearer, ruled over nature and thus showed His dominance over the creation, humanity is to do likewise. Individuals are to fulfill these covenant obligations (love God, love others, rule over creation) in conformity to God’s character, which humanity is to image. True authenticity then is not embracing individual, subjective, and fluid perspectives of reality, but embracing and obeying the covenant obligations of human personhood as *imago Dei*.<sup>71</sup> In other words, authenticity is more like an objective stewardship than a subjective creation. However, it does not follow, as the humanistic-existentialist would argue, that individuals lose their individuality any more than all homes that share a similar concrete foundation are architecturally identical. In fact, individual uniqueness is not lost; rather, covenant identity in Christ offers individuals something solid, sure, and eternal to build their own unique personalities upon. Identities are built either upon Christ—the solid rock—or upon the constant shifting sands of culture and personal subjectivity (Matt 7:24-27).<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 14, 79-80, 94.

<sup>71</sup>It should be noted that the more responsible work in the field of authenticity is making the case for objective standards as well as external accountability to those standards. See Gordon Medlock, “The Evolving Ethic of Authenticity: From Humanistic to Positive Psychology,” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 40, no. 1 (2012): 38-57. This push for objectivity and accountability is a welcome sign, yet Medlock seems to only push back the subjectivity one step when he says that those standards and accountability are determined by the surrounding culture or community rather than a true objective and external source.

<sup>72</sup>Pierce Taylor Hibbs, “A House Built upon the Rock: Finding Our Identity in Christ,” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 28, no. 2 (2014): 56; Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 93-94.

A biblical counseling view, because it is first informed by Scripture and secondly by human experience, can provide both a robust view of man's essence as well as account for individual existence, *within* the parameters of that essence. Therefore, to say that Jesus Christ is the standard of authentic humanity is not to say that all humanity will be exactly alike. Not at all. Johnson discusses varying "orders of meaning"<sup>73</sup> that all humans share differently, and yet all these orders are subject to conformity to Christ. Thus, in each order, given the complexity of each individual's situation,<sup>74</sup> although there is a shared standard, individuals will manifest unique traits, skills, talents, strengths, and weakness as they strive toward authentic personhood in their various personal contexts and personalities. Thus, a shared essence manifested in unique existence leads to authentic (i.e., objective image-bearers) human existence (i.e., subjective image-bearing).

### **Anxiety**

A Christocentric understanding of authenticity helps to understand anxiety better. Perhaps a logical syllogism will make this last sentence clearer. If authenticity is being in touch with reality and Christ is the paragon of reality, and if anxiety is the felt disparity between the authentic and the actual than to the degree an individual is not aligned with Christ (as the fulfillment of the *imago Dei*), to that degree an individual will experience anxiety.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, there is no way to truly understand authenticity or anxiety apart from Jesus Christ because they are inexorably linked. When Christology informs anthropology, the shortcomings of the humanistic-existential system become

---

<sup>73</sup>Eric Johnson, "Orders of Meaning: A Multilevel Analysis of Human Life," in *Foundations for Soul Care* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007). Johnson lays out the levels of human meaning and existence as being the biological, psycho-social, ethical, and spiritual orders.

<sup>74</sup>James MacDonald, Robert W. Kellemen, and Stephen Viars, *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 2013), 107-16. Humans are relational, rational, volitional, emotional, embodied, embedded, and eternal beings.

<sup>75</sup>This is true in varying degrees to all three types of anxiety—ontic, spiritual, and moral—since Christ is the essence of being, meaning, and morality

even clearer than before. In the existential schema, when someone is being who he or she authentically is, there is no felt anxiety. When someone acts or behaves in a manner that is not consistent with his authentic self, however, he experiences this disparity as anxiety. It is at this point that the humanistic-existential perspective has trouble, however, with anxiety since it holds that no true essence exists, and therefore there is no standard of authenticity. It is no wonder then that there is no way to truly overcome or understand anxiety since it is as ever-changing as an individual's self or cultural perception.

Understanding anxiety Christocentrically, however, changes this dynamic. If the standard of authentic human personhood is Christ, the experience of anxiety is a signal of a disparity between one's individual experiencing of a situation<sup>76</sup> and the character of Christ in the very same situation. Rollo May points out that the feeling of anxiety is the experience of a diffused sense of threat to a value that is critical to an individual's sense of self.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, as an image-bearer, an individual's sense of self is his identity in Christ; the image-bearer par excellence. When there is a sense of anxiety, something is being threatened that a Christian is looking toward for a sense of value that is not Christ Himself. For example, a difficult conversation brings anxiety because it is more important (to an individual's sense of self) to live conflict free and with the approval of others than it is to speak the truth in love as God commands. An important project can bring forth anxiety because the benefits and consequences that result from success or failure in that project can be more tangible to the individual's sense of personal value than God's love for him or her. A child's unmet educational goals bring anxiety to a parent because there is more trust in what a good education promises than what the Heavenly Father can do to ensure the child's future. The list and examples are endless. The point is that anxieties are no longer an overwhelming army of faceless

---

<sup>76</sup>That experience can be cognitive, affective, or volitional.

<sup>77</sup>Rollo May, *The Meaning of Anxiety* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2015), 207-10.

specters as numerous and diverse as the thousands of self-identities an individual can choose for him or herself. Anxieties are linked to an individual's created purpose to image God, and in the varying ways that individuals conform to Christ in that process or not, anxiety will develop or diminish. Therefore, Jesus Christ is not simply the "Archimedean point" for authenticity but also, and in fact because of this, He serves as the "Archimedean point" for dealing with anxiety.

While Rollo May's understanding of anxiety can be methodologically helpful, it misses the true problem at hand. May's mentor, Paul Tillich, had a better grasp on this dynamic as he recognized that man's anxiety is the result of his estrangement from God due to sin.<sup>78</sup> Tillich recognizes man as he exists is not in alignment with his essence, which is the *imago Dei*.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the anxieties that plague him are constant reminders that he is not what he was intended to be, he is estranged from God, himself, and others. According to Tillich, estrangement from God describes man's predicament.

It is implied in the symbols of the expulsion from paradise,<sup>80</sup> in the hostility between man and nature, in the deadly hostility of brother against brother, in the estrangement of nation from nation through the confusion of language, and in the continuous complaints of the prophets against their kings and people who turn to alien gods. Estrangement is implied in Paul's statement that man perverted the image of God into that of idols . . . in all these interpretations of man's predicament, estrangement is implicitly asserted.<sup>81</sup>

To his credit, Tillich goes even further by writing that the concept of "sin" must be kept because it explicitly states what is only implied by estrangement, namely, the personal act of turning away from man's essence in the *imago Dei*.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, sin is not

---

<sup>78</sup>Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 2:45-46; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 606.

<sup>79</sup>Tillich, *Systematic Theology. Volume II*, 2:45-46. See also Breisach, *Introduction to Modern Existentialism*, 140-42.

<sup>80</sup>Tillich denied the historicity of the Genesis account and viewed them merely as myth.

<sup>81</sup>Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:45-46.

<sup>82</sup>Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:46.

being in essence what an individual is in his or her existence and this is often felt through the existential angst of estrangement or anxiety. Yet it is not correct to say that anxiety itself is sin; rather, it can serve very helpfully to understand or pinpoint where the spiritual battle exists within the individual. Reinhold Niebuhr helps make this point clear:

“Anxiety is the internal description of the state of temptation. It must not be identified with sin because there is always the ideal possibility that faith would purge anxiety of the tendency toward sinful self-assertion.”<sup>83</sup> Scripturally, one sees that believers are called away from a form of anxiety (Matt 6:25-28; Luke 10:41; 1 Cor 7:32; Phil 4:6), but some anxieties are right and good (1 Cor 7:34, 12:25; Phil 2:20).<sup>84</sup> What determines one from the other is whether these anxieties are appropriate emotional responses and what actions and behaviors they prompt for an image-bearer.

May states that anxiety can have the prognostic value of a fever, indicating that something is wrong,<sup>85</sup> and the same concept holds true in a Christocentric recasting of anxiety. So then, negatively speaking, the presence of anxiety is fundamentally pointing to the felt estrangement an individual experiences of his or her disparity from their identity in or the character of Christ. Positively speaking, the presence of anxiety points to the discontinuity that an image-bearer experiences when they image something other than God himself (i.e., they image/draw their identity from their popularity, social-economic standing, professional competency, youth, talents, and any host of other false images the world is willing to provide). Thus, the presence of anxiety in the life of a believer can cause an awareness of their spiritual need for grace and Christ’s presence in their lives. This does not mean, however, that working through anxiety is a cookie-cutter

---

<sup>83</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 182.

<sup>84</sup>In 1 Cor 12:25 and Phil 2:20, the English word used to translate the Greek is “care” or “concern” but it is the same Greek word translated as “anxious” in other texts.

<sup>85</sup>May, *The Meaning of Anxiety*, 354.

process as if there were only one thing called “anxiety.” The reality is that life is filled with “anxieties” because, as noted, the essence of the *imago Dei* is being manifested in every existent of humanity in all their “orders of meaning” and individual situations. In other words, the one “Archimedean point” is being expressed in 10,000 different contexts, each unique in its challenges, which is where the wise counselor goes deep to understand the experience and how it ties back to its essence (Pro 20:5). When dealing with essence and existence of anxiety, biblical counselors are uniquely qualified to help an individual because the essence of humanity is a fixed point in Christ (Heb 12:1-2) and the individual existent of each person is bounded and accountable to Christ (Rom 14:7-8; 2 Cor 5:15; Gal 2:20; Phil 2:4-5).

### **Authority**

Although discussed last, the issue of authority is logically first. It is at this point that existential psychology and the humanistic movement in general stumbles out of the gate. Humanism’s denial of man’s covenantal nature and its casting off any authority other than the self-actualized “I” is a fundamental error that leads to mistaken notions that an individual’s self-identity, values, priorities, and desires can be chosen arbitrarily simply because no other authority dictates otherwise. Because man is a covenant being whose essence is to image his creator, humanity is *not* free to choose its values, priorities, ethics, and desires. Instead, humanity is obligated, by covenant, to recognize, affirm, and obey the values, priorities, ethics, and desires of the One in whose image he was made. Perhaps the biggest error the humanist movement promotes is that human freedom necessarily entails autonomy. Paradoxically, humans are only free when they are bound to the image they were created to glorify.

The very first chapters of the book of Genesis reveal two important truths that every counselor should remember. First, the humanist error that freedom equals autonomy, and second, human beings were created to need information from outside themselves to make sense of reality.

Satan's words to Eve as recorded in Genesis 3:4-5 are not simply to place doubt in Eve's heart about the goodness of God's character, but to suggest that equality to God is preferred to subordination to God.<sup>86</sup> Thus, they no longer needed God's words to guide them—they could be autonomous because they would know good and evil for themselves. Having succumbed to this deception, Adam and Eve find themselves ejected from God's presence (Gen 3:23), His bountiful creation (Gen 3:17) and estranged from one another (Gen 3:7). The point is clear; autonomy did not bring the freedom that was promised, the freedom they would have continued to experience through obedience to God's commands. The second vital truth that these early chapters of Genesis reveal is that humanity requires information from outside themselves to make sense of their world. God *speaks* to Adam and Eve and instructs them about who they are, what they are to do and what they should not do. In other words, the very first chapter of the Bible reveals that man is dependent upon God's revelation to understand his world.<sup>87</sup> As stated Niebuhr, Schaeffer, and even Tillich rightly point out that man cannot correctly conceive of himself, by himself, but requires an outside authority, certain knowledge, or principle of comprehension to instruct and hold him accountable to his own humanity.<sup>88</sup> The early existential vision of man, put forth by Rogers and the early humanists was tragically flawed, incredibly naïve and harkens back to the Serpents deception of man. The naivety is found in the “gigantic assumption” that all these autonomous, self-actualizing individuals would somehow

---

<sup>86</sup>The tragic irony of this passage is that Adam and Eve were *already like* God (Gen 1:26-27) because they were created in His image. Sin's deceit is always to distort God's truth, Adam and Eve had no further need to be like God as the serpent suggested, the suggestion was in fact to make them more like him.

<sup>87</sup>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, 2002), 40.

<sup>88</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 125; Schaeffer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, 100-101.

realize their differing visions of self in a way that was complimentary and harmonious.<sup>89</sup> The echoes of the Serpent's deceit is that the humanist belief that somehow simply knowing good from evil is enough to reconcile competing and contradictory visions of the authoritative self. Yet, in truth, the humanist vision of the authoritative self has no mechanism whatsoever to reconcile such moral conflicts and the current cultural debates today testify to the bankruptcy of this vision. Thus, the necessity of God's revelation to proper human flourishing is a foundational premise throughout all of Scripture (Deut 8:3; 32:47; 1 Kgs 3:9; Ps 119; Matt 4:4; 2 Tim 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:2); furthermore, the Old Testament Scriptures all point to the person of Jesus Christ (John 5:39,12:41; Luke 24:27; Gal 3:24; 1 Cor 10:4) who, as has been established, is the fulfillment of the *imago Dei*.

Therefore, even as individuals fulfill their covenant obligations as renewed image-bearers in Christ, they do not do so autonomously. Love for God and others must be expressed in ways that God deems appropriate (1 Sam 2:29-20; Lev 10:1; Eph 5:1-5; Gal 5:16-25; 1 John 2:3-4). This includes the cultural mandate to exercise dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28).<sup>90</sup> In contrast to the existential impulse, humanity does not determine values or meanings subjectively or self-centeredly. Rather, humans both recognize and impart values and meanings as an act of worship to faithfully execute their covenantal obligations to their creator. This fact has huge implications for modern society today. The many and varied issues that society currently struggles with—from promiscuous sexual encounters to gender identity and widespread sense of personal and social unrest—are not subject merely to personal autonomy but to covenant obedience as revealed in God's Word and exemplified in Christ's person. Finally, the carrying out of these covenant

---

<sup>89</sup>Don S. Browning and Terry D. Cooper, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 69.

<sup>90</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 79. Hoekema makes the important point regarding the Hebrew words "work" and "care" found in Gen 1:15. The words mean to serve and to guard or preserve. Thus, Hoekema concludes that while man is to exercise his rightful place over the creation as God's vice-regent he does so responsibly and with wise stewardship over its resources, existence, and use.

obligations in submission to the authority of God's Word is also placed in a particular social context—the church, the body of Christ. The community of God's people exists to uphold God's authoritative decrees in how believers fulfill or not, as the case might be the obligations of being an image-bearer (Matt 18:15-20; Col 1:28-29; 1 Tim 3:15).<sup>91</sup>

Christ alone has been given all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18). Therefore, to properly understand authority, it must be understood not autonomously or subjectively as the humanists claim, but Christologically, grounded in Scripture in the context of God's people.

### **Conclusion**

Man is made in God's image. The proper fulfillment and thus understanding of that image is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Therefore, any theory about man, including all those of existential psychology, must be recast Christologically for any of their insights to have true meaning or therapeutic value. This point must be firmly understood before there can be any profitable use of the unique perspective that existential psychology brings first to the behavioral sciences and then to biblical counseling. Without this Christological recasting, any use of the wisdom found in existential psychology in biblical counseling will in effect commit the same crimes that Hoekema accuses unregenerate man of committing: "They will sin, with God imaging gifts."<sup>92</sup> In other words, biblical counselors could use these wise insights and theories about authenticity, anxiety, and authority to understand human experience only to fail to understand the context that makes human experience meaningful at all—the context of man's covenantal, image-bearing nature.

---

<sup>91</sup>See Robert K. Cheong, *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), for an excellent discussion on the practical implications and out-workings of church authority in a believer's life.

<sup>92</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 85.

With this recasting firmly in place, the techniques and methods existential psychology uses to activate an individual's experience and understanding of authenticity, anxiety, and authority can bear much fruit for the biblical counselor in the individual counseling process. Chapter 5 will examine these methods and techniques employed by existential practitioners with their therapeutic foci recast into humanity's covenantal and image-bearing context.

CHAPTER 5  
MEANING AND BEING TOGETHER: PRACTICAL  
LESSONS FOR THE BIBLICAL  
COUNSELING MOVEMENT

Theories usually result in technique, some more popular and iconic than others. Freud will always be caricatured with his couch. Pavlov will always have his dog and Rorschach, his inkblots. The more objectifying a theory, the more objects that can easily be associated with it. This is not the case, however, for the humanistic-existential psychologies with their emphasis on subjectivity. By definition, a subject is not an object so no “object” can serve to picture subjectivity. This is both the beauty and bane when relationship is both the theory *and* the technique. Furthermore, this is exactly why existential psychology is so powerfully influential in its discipline and so pedagogically elusive.

Relationships, after all, seem so natural and commonplace to the human experience that one wonders what more can be learned about them that the average individual does not already know. On the one hand, this sentiment seems correct, yet on the other hand, skyrocketing divorce rates, increasing incidence of loneliness and isolation, and fragmenting of families suggest that humans do not have relationships figured out.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps in a simpler time—in Eden—relationships came easier to the human condition, yet Genesis 4 contradicts even that nostalgic hope. Relationships in a fallen world are hard: sin blinds while feigning sight, deforms while pretending it is plumb, and distorts while

---

<sup>1</sup>W. Bradford Wilcox, “The Evolution of Divorce,” *National Affairs* 1 (Fall 2009): 83; Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren, “The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility: Childhood Exposure Effects and County-Level Estimates,” Equality of Opportunity Project, May 2015, accessed January 12, 2017, [www.equality-of-opportunity.org/images/nbhds\\_paper.pdf](http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/images/nbhds_paper.pdf).

promising clarity. In short, sin has emotionally, volitionally, and cognitively marred humanity. Again, relationships are hard. Biblical counselors know a lot *about* relationships but perhaps not enough about *the* relationship itself. In this regard, the biblical counseling movement can and must grow.

In the previous two chapters, the three principal foci of the humanistic-existential perspective and its fundamental flaw as a precursor in efforts to harmonize its insights with a theology of biblical counseling were examined. The reader is now better prepared to glean what is relevant from such a study to advance biblical counseling's own theory and technique about the counseling relationship. Fortunately, since its inception, the biblical counseling movement has had an epistemic humility toward its own theories and practice that will allow for this growth. This humility has paid rich dividends over the past 46 years as the movement has reflected, refined, and matured. This chapter seeks to build on that forward momentum in the area of the counseling relationship, specifically with a methodology aimed at developing and cultivating the kind of relationship in which the work of the gospel message might find its most fertile soil. These insights and practices will bear much fruit—not merely in individual counseling or discipling relationships but in small group counseling ministries as well. The arch of this epistemic humility will be briefly examined in both its foundation and fruition before finally taking an in-depth look at how biblical counseling theory and techniques in relationship building can be advanced via the counseling dynamic.

### **The Recognition of Needed Development within the Biblical Counseling Movement**

From the very beginning of the biblical counseling movement, Adams recognized that what he was writing about and developing was far from an exhaustive and complete system of counseling theory and practice. His was doing the job of pioneering and breaking new theoretical ground. It would fall to others to refine and build

upon his work.<sup>2</sup> David Powlison, Adams' successor as the patriarch of the biblical counseling movement, wrote two significant articles that expressed not merely the issues that required attention for the movement to mature and move forward, but also the kinds of leadership and tactics necessary to accomplish many such goals.<sup>3</sup> The six crucial issues were identified as biblical counseling's foundation, theory of motivation, relationship between human suffering and responsibility, counselor-counselee relationship, academic development, and engagement with the broader behavioral sciences.<sup>4</sup> The kind of practical leadership necessary to ensure the movement kept up with its anticipated theoretical growth would have to be instructional, institutional, and finally, intellectual.<sup>5</sup> Powlison's two articles have served as banks within which the stream of biblical counseling has flowed and matured for many years.

In "Companions on the Long March," Powlison cast the biblical counseling vision in broad and bold terms, and over the years, the movement adapted, changed, and met many of the challenges he identified. The institutional growth alone has been astounding. In the early days, only Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia promoted the biblical counseling perspective in their curriculum.<sup>6</sup> Today, more than ten seminaries, including the largest seminary in the United States, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, offer undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degrees in

---

<sup>2</sup>Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resource Library, 1986), xvii.

<sup>3</sup>David Powlison, "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 9, no. 3 (1988): 53-78; David Powlison, "Companions on the Long March," in *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch, 2005), 187-93.

<sup>4</sup>Powlison, "Crucial Issues," 53.

<sup>5</sup>Powlison, "Companions on the Long March," 191-92.

<sup>6</sup>David Powlison, *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010), 5. As a professor on the faculty of the prestigious Westminster seminary, Adams had a unique opportunity to promote and disseminate his nascent thoughts on counseling quickly and efficiently.

biblical counseling.<sup>7</sup> The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF), founded in 1968,<sup>8</sup> was the first among many organizations to actively train and promote biblical counseling throughout the church. Today, CCEF is joined by the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors in Jacksonville, Florida; the Association of Biblical Counselors in Bedford, Texas; and the Biblical Counseling Coalition in Lafayette, Indiana, among others. The intellectual leadership of the movement has grown as well, far beyond the solitary voice of Jay Adams who was so predominant in its early days. Thus, many have answered the call to fulfill the vision for the institutional, instructional, and intellectual leadership that Powlison foresaw.

Likewise, many of the issues Powlison raised in his “Crucial Issues” article have been subsequently developed by other men and women within the movement, specifically in the areas of sin and suffering and the individual’s motivation.<sup>9</sup> A particular issue Powlison addressed that has grown in importance is the counselor-counselee relationship. The biblical counseling movement has recognized that, since its inception, this issue has been one of its greatest weaknesses. Since the modern biblical counseling movement was birthed at the height of the popularity of the Rogerian non-directive, non-confrontational modality, it is understandable that a strong reaction against Rogers may have been in fact an overreaction. This appears to have been the case as early biblical counseling was perhaps too directive and too authoritarian, almost to a fault. Lambert comments, “Adams’s emphasis on pastoral authority tended to obscure the importance of

---

<sup>7</sup>Robert W. Kellemen, ed., *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God’s Care through God’s People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 415. These seminaries include Reformed Theological Seminary, The Master’s College and Seminary, Redeemer Seminary, Southeastern Theological Seminary, and Christ Bible Institute in Nagoya, Japan, among others.

<sup>8</sup>The Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, accessed October 7, 2016, [www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org).

<sup>9</sup>Heath Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 49, 57-80; Jim Brooks, “The Divine Design of Suffering: Glorification, Mortification and Sanctification” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016).

building loving relationships with counselees. In fact, some of Adams’s emphases—beyond obscuring a loving relationship—actually seem to work against such a relationship.”<sup>10</sup>

Early on, Powlison recognized that this singular approach to the counselor counselee relationship needed to change so that the authoritarian and overly directive style that Adams proposed would actually be the “back-up” mode when the primary mode of friendship and care failed. Powlison believed that the primary mode of biblical counseling should be as “non-directive and client centered as possible.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, moving toward the counselee was not seen as a failure of methodology or a compromise of some biblical principle as some early Adams doctrine might have implied.<sup>12</sup> In fact, broadening the counselor-counselee relationship away from the one primary mode of authority, teaching, coaching, etc., to account for the many other nuances the relationship can involve, opens the door for others to counsel, thus allowing for the priesthood of the believer to function more readily (1 Pet 2:5,9). Furthermore, biblical counseling thereby gains the flexibility to reach others who might not resonate with the authoritarian model, thus increasing the reach of this type of ministry to more individuals (1 Thess 5:14). Finally, by focusing on the relationship, rather than simply the problem, the relational data itself becomes useful grist for the counseling mill, giving counselors more opportunity to speak truth into someone’s life (Eph 4:15).<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 88.

<sup>11</sup>Powlison, “Crucial Issues,” 67. It must be noted that Powlison was not advocating for a “non-directive, client-centered” modality of *formal* counseling as *the* model for biblical counseling. Powlison was making the point that most counseling takes place in informal relationships within friendships and family and thus is appropriately non-directive and client centered. His is not an argument concerning technique so much as recognizing that formal counseling should not be confused with the natural counsel that happens all the time. In fact, this natural counsel ought to influence the ways in which formal counseling thinks about the relationship.

<sup>12</sup>Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 58.

<sup>13</sup>Powlison, “Crucial Issues,” 69.

Paul Tripp was one of the early writers to explore a methodology in which a biblical counselor could begin to develop the relationship by looking for “entry gates” into a counselee’s life.<sup>14</sup> Other works would follow with a focus on relationships in general and in particular the redemptive power of relational elements that would continue this helpful trajectory.<sup>15</sup> However, in spite of the gains being made to recognize the need to develop the counseling relationship, biblical counseling is still playing catch-up to its secular counterparts who have been thinking about the relationship for decades longer. Biblical counselors have as much to learn as to avoid when plumbing the depths of these secular stores of relational knowledge and research. There is nothing to fear when going to this research and insight so long as biblical counselors do not “counter-convert” to these various theories and perspectives. This task of engaging secular theories for the benefit of the church is in fact essential to the development of biblical counseling’s future.<sup>16</sup> Lambert, who represents a new era of leadership for the organization that Jay Adams founded in 1976, concurs,

In a tertiary way, biblical counselors should *consider* what there is to learn from alternative models. Because of the doctrine of common grace, unbelievers can comprehend true information, ask significant questions, and critique (explicitly or implicitly) the church’s failure. Also, even the most incorrect secular theories understand some things correctly, giving them a ring of truth. Because of this reality, biblical counselors can listen to secularists and be provoked in their effort to strengthen a biblical understanding of people.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>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, 2002), 126-31.

<sup>15</sup>Robert W. Kellemen, *Spiritual Friends: A Methodology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction* (Taneytown, MD: RPM, 2004); Edward T. Welch, *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love*, 2015; Paul David Tripp, *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000); Timothy S. Lane and Paul David Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2008); John Piper et al., *On Relationships*, JBC Must Reads (Glenside, PA: CCEF, 2013).

<sup>16</sup>Powlison, “Crucial Issues,” 74-75.

<sup>17</sup>Lambert, *The Biblical Counseling Movement*, 116.

The present study has been an effort to do just that; listen, understand and recontextualize the insights and observations of the humanistic-existential approach to people. Biblical counseling is making great strides in focusing upon the counseling relationship, and this chapter intends to build on that momentum by pushing further into the counseling dynamic between the counselor and counselee.

### **The Contribution of This Study to the Larger Biblical Counseling Movement**

The Bible describes sin's effects and results upon humanity in a myriad of ways. The metaphors and terms used to describe humanity's condition in sin range from the obvious and deliberate to the subtle and unknown. Biblical counseling has proven effective in both its theory and methodology in helping a counselee who is grappling with the more obvious and blatant forms of sin, especially when this sin is known and follows an easily recognizable pattern. Sin's nature, however, is deceptive and works in ways often unbeknownst to the sinner. The Bible vividly portrays sin's impact in ways that the victim himself is unable to see, understand, or perceive. Isaiah 59:9-10 is a clear example:

Therefore justice is far from us, and righteousness does not overtake us; we hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope for the walls like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men.

Isaiah explains the harsh reality of human existence apart from God's perspective and presence as total blindness—an inability to accurately perceive or navigate the affairs of life. If one of the goals in counseling is to restore the *imago Dei* in man, then a corollary goal of counseling technique is to help people realize their fundamental blindness. In short, one primary goal of biblical counseling is to help people see that they do not see.<sup>18</sup> This truth that Scripture so vividly describes about the human condition has

---

<sup>18</sup>Scripture consistently depicts the human inability to perceive as a result of sin, God's just judgment, or willful human rebellion. Scripture also depicts the ability to perceive as a work of God's grace and work in His people. Deut 28:28; Ps 38:13, 73:22, 146:8; Prov 18:4, 20:5; Isa 6:10, 35:5, 42:7,18, 43:8; Hag 1:4-7; Jer 13:13, 17:9; Hab 2:15; Ezek 14:2-7, 23:33; Zeph 1:17; Mark 7:37; John 9:27,32, 12:40; Rom 2:19; Heb 3:12-14; 2 Pet 1:9; 1 John 2:11; Rev 3:17, and others.

been addressed, with varying degrees and combinations of insight and inaccuracy, by the secular psychologies. One of the more helpful tools, that also serves as a practical heuristic device to grapple with the varying nuances of sin’s blinding effect, is known as the Johari window.<sup>19</sup>

The Johari window (thus named by combining the first names of its creators Joseph and Harrington, Jo-Hari) breaks down into four quadrants that describe varying levels of self-awareness.

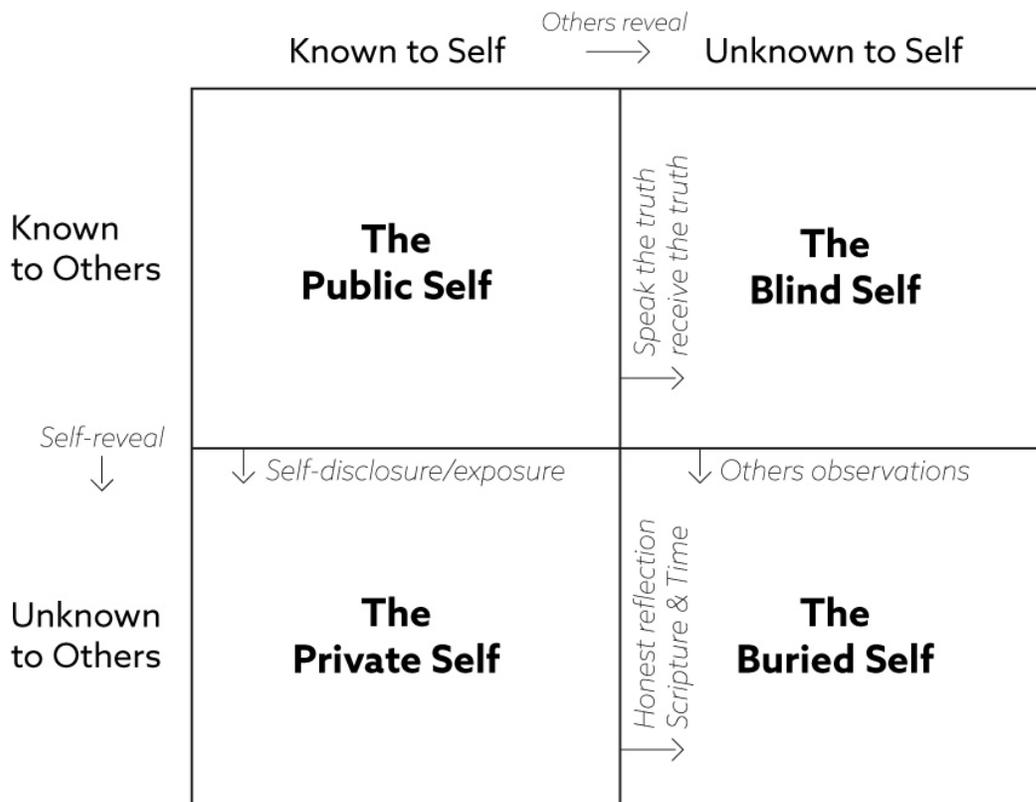


Figure 2. Self-awareness Johari window

The upper left quadrant in figure 2 represents the psychological space where most interactions take place. It is the public self in that it is open and available to the

---

<sup>19</sup>Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, *The Johari Window, A Graphic Model for Interpersonal Relations*. (Los Angeles: University of California, 1955).

individual and those around him or her. In contrast, the lower left quadrant represents the area where individuals self-consciously “hide” or keep private those attributes, behaviors, desires, and thoughts that they believe would cause embarrassment, shame, or otherwise diminish their worth in the eyes of others. In both quadrants, the individual is conscious and aware of what is being communicated, and the image they broadcast is controlled. The upper right quadrant, however, represents the psychological space where the individual in question is not aware of himself, i.e., the image he is communicating to others without realizing the communication is taking place. Here the individual in question is “blind” to what message he may be broadcasting to those around him. Bad habits such as nail biting, personal tics, and repeated verbal devices to fill conversation are benign examples. More profound and problematic examples would be constantly interrupting conversations, self-centeredness, blame shifting, lack of self-control, etc. The lower right quadrant is the psychological space where both the individual himself and others do not have regular access. It is “buried,” not in some kind of unconscious repressed manner, but rather, relegated to an area of memory, action, impulse, or desire that is so unnecessary to daily function or so emotional, volatile, or otherwise problematic that it is buried under the necessary functions in order to proceed in one’s life.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of the Johari window for counseling methodology as a heuristic device is the recognition that during anytime of personal ministry each of the four quadrants are activated. However, the counselee and counselor only have access to two of the four quadrants and, of those two, only one is accessible to both. This means for personal ministry, of the four quadrants of a person’s self, the public content (i.e., the Public Self, which is the area of an individual’s experience as made known through the words exchanged, thoughts shared, etc.) makes up only one-fourth of all the data available to understand this person. For the purposes of this research, the focus is on the

---

<sup>20</sup>Joseph Luft, *Of Human Interaction* (Palo Alto, CA: National Press, 1969), 66-68.

two quadrants on the right side of the grid, the areas that are unknown to the individual in question and the area to which *both* the individual *and* counselor are yet aware. This is the portion of an individual's life in which the blinding effects of sin are most prominent and thus the areas where a wise counselor skillfully using God's Word can serve him or her best (Prov 20:5). Both cases require another individual to help the counselee see what he cannot see on his own. From the biblical counseling perspective, this is where the common form of data gathering helps the therapeutic practice.

In the mid-1990s, Paul Tripp wrote three articles that have been seminal for the way biblical counselors conceive of the task of "data gathering."<sup>21</sup> Tripp's driving thesis was that one of the tragic effects of the fall is personal blindness of heart. Therefore, the role of data gathering serves two purposes: (1) to gather necessary information to provide wise counsel and (2) even more fundamentally, to realize "that we would be the Messiah's instruments to open eyes that have been blind for too long."<sup>22</sup> As previously noted, biblical counseling excels in the first goal where the gathered data indicates a sin that is more or less obvious and known to an individual. However, an area of needed growth remains in biblical counseling's methodological procedures regarding areas and types of sin that remain more or less unknown to both the individual generally and to others.<sup>23</sup> This stands to reason since the primary emphasis of biblical counseling has been upon the content and information.

#### Biblical counseling's emphasis on content and information as the primary

---

<sup>21</sup>Paul David Tripp, "Opening Blind Eyes: Another Look at Data Gathering," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 6-11; Paul David Tripp, "Data Gathering Part 2: What the Counselor Brings to the Process," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 8-14; Paul David Tripp, "Strategies for Opening Blind Eyes: Data Gathering Part 3," *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 42-51.

<sup>22</sup>Tripp, "Opening Blind Eyes," 6.

<sup>23</sup>Using the rubric of the Johari window, biblical counseling excels at 1 and 2, assuming the counselee is being forthright and willing to change. Biblical counseling is also quite proficient in quadrant 3. Growth is necessary in quadrant 4.

mode to understand an individual is also why practitioners may be prone to stumble when it comes to the subtler and more elusive forms of sin's deceptive nature. In addition to a focus on content and information, biblical counseling needs to develop a focus on process and relationship. In a content and information system, the developing relationship is seen as a means to get better content (i.e., insight into behavioral patterns, understanding motivations, and a host of other details) to understand and interpret the counselee's situation.<sup>24</sup> In contrast, when the focus is process oriented, the relationship itself *is* the content or "data" the counselor works with to help the counselee. When process and relationship is the focus instead of a "whodunit" search for details, facts, and information that may or may not be helpful, the actual relational dynamics that are happening in real time are often more indicative of the areas of struggle that need attention. This paradigm shift from a "then-and-there" objective discussion of details and events and situations to a "here-and-now" attention to the living moment taking place between the counselor and counselee often reveals rich grist for the counseling mill. Tripp indicates that this is something he attempts to do with counselees through the use of a video analogy:

I often use a video analogy to highlight this for people. I'll say, "We've been watching your story on video, and I've noticed something interesting: you're not in it! The camera is on other people and on the tough situations, but it never seems to be on you. I would like to go back and talk about the same relationships and the same situations, only this time I want to put the camera on you. I want to focus on what you were thinking, wanting, and doing as these things were going on."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Tripp's guidance on how to "Locate the Strongholds" is close to bringing the counselee into here-and-now mode rather than a then-and-there mentality.<sup>26</sup> Tripp does not indicate whether the humanistic-existential branch of psychology is influencing him, but what is crucial here is the fact that biblical counseling is leaning

---

<sup>24</sup>Tripp, "Opening Blind Eyes," 6.

<sup>25</sup>Tripp, "Strategies for Opening Blind Eyes," 45.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 44.

toward a more subjective understanding of individuals. Subjectivity, personal experience, and getting in touch with an individual's existence is in essence the contribution of an existentialist perspective on counseling technique.

Thus, similar to the manner in which the apostle Paul deconstructed the cultural idolatries of the Athenians and recontextualized their spiritual search in a gospel context,<sup>27</sup> so too are the techniques and theories of the humanistic-existential perspective discussed in this research being contextualized for gospel ministry within the local church. It is now appropriate to discuss the methodological techniques instrumental in developing the counseling dynamic for biblical counselors.

### **The Counseling Dynamic**

This chapter presents a challenge similar to the one presented in chapter 3. The challenge in chapter 3 was distilling the fluid and variable nature of the individual's experience of existence into some manageable heuristic schema. The answers were found in the pursuit of authenticity, the problem of anxiety, and the question of authority and autonomy. These three foci offered a therapeutic topography for understanding an individual's subjective struggle.<sup>28</sup> The challenge of the present chapter is to propose a similar heuristic schema that engages the counselee's subjectivity in a way that cultivates the most fertile soil for gospel work. In short, chapter 3 examined three foci that together located an individual's experience of their own existence. The burden of chapter 5 aims to cultivate the environment of the counseling relationship that can then leverage what was learned in chapter 3 into the broader context of biblical counseling. Thus, the counseling dynamic that is the focus of the remainder of this chapter is the cultivation of that relational environment. Attention is given to the "here-and-now" as the necessary

---

<sup>27</sup>Kellemen, *Biblical Counseling and the Church*, 140.

<sup>28</sup>Chap. 4 recast these subjective struggles objectively based upon the *imago Dei* and Christology, thus tempering the excesses so often associated with such subjectivity.

frame of mind to work with the counselee's subjective experience in real time. Levels of communication reveal the degree to which a counselee is relating authentically, struggling with anxiety, and grounding their meaning in what authority. Finally, para-verbal communication cues help the counselor know what to look for and how to proceed amidst an overwhelming amount of subjective data in the counseling relationship. Obviously this is much easier in theory than in practice and is perhaps the most difficult skill to develop in counseling,<sup>29</sup> albeit one that has the potential for the richest counseling returns. There are many ways to phrase this skill—"connecting intimately,"<sup>30</sup> "entering the person's world,"<sup>31</sup> the "therapeutic alliance"<sup>32</sup>—but they all point to the importance of the developing relationship in the living moment.

### **The Here-and-Now**

First,<sup>33</sup> the counselor must objectively get his or her mind around subjectivity, but the question is, how? Like many great ideas, simplicity often betrays significance. The concept of the here-and-now is not necessarily one of technique but rather *a frame of mind*. It is a focus on the living moment, the actual dynamism taking place in the actual relationship between the counselor and counselee. In *Psychotherapy Isn't What You Think*,<sup>34</sup> James Bugental makes the case that psychotherapy is not a matter of *what* one

---

<sup>29</sup>Robert W. Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors for Your Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011), 224.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 126.

<sup>32</sup>Stanley B. Messer and Alan S. Gurman, *Essential Psychotherapies: Theory and Practice* (New York: Guilford, 2011), 267-81.

<sup>33</sup>As mentioned in chap. 3, for pedagogical purposes, these concepts are presented in linear order, but in reality, they happen in a symbiotic, overlapping process where there is no clear line of demarcation where one begins and the other ends. It is not so much a walk from point A to point B as much as it is a dance.

<sup>34</sup>James F. T. Bugental, *Psychotherapy Isn't What You Think: Bringing the Psychotherapeutic Engagement into the Living Moment* (Phoenix: Zeig, Tucker, 1999).

thinks, but *how* one thinks. So often counseling is a matter of details, facts, and information about people and not necessarily counseling people at all. A focus on people is the goal of good counseling, and the biblical counseling literature supports this.<sup>35</sup> However, what does seem to be lacking is the elaboration of what this looks like in practice, which is where existentialists seem to excel. In his advice to a new generation of therapists, Irvin Yalom writes,

The “here-and-now refers to the immediate events of the therapeutic hour to what is happening *here* (in this office, in this relationship, in the *in-betweenness*—the space between me and you) and *now*, in this immediate hour. It is basically an ahistoric approach and *de-emphasizes* (but does *not negate the importance of*) the patient’s historical past or events of his or her outside life.<sup>36</sup>

The impact that this frame of mind can have in counseling cannot be stressed enough. A brief illustration will advance the point. The following two vignettes highlight the difference between truly understanding the here-and-now emphasis and merely acknowledging it cognitively. Both exchanges are between a counselor and counselee. The second highlights how an emphasis on the here-and-now is pressed into practice.

#### Vignette 1

Counselor: (first moments of the counseling session) “How are you doing?”

Counselee: (taking a seat in front of the counselor) “Good, good.” (without a moment’s reflection)

Counselor: “Good, let’s get started. How did you do with the homework from last week?”

#### Vignette 2

Counselor: (first moments of the counseling session) “How are you doing?”

Counselee: (taking a seat in front of the counselor) “Good, good.” (without a moment’s reflection)

Counselor: “When was the last time you weren’t doing so good?”

---

<sup>35</sup>Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands*, 126-28; Kellemen, *Equipping Counselors*, 215-16; Kellemen, *Spiritual Friends*. Kellemen’s book is entirely about the theological and scriptural foundation for friendship and relating with one another in the community of God’s people.

<sup>36</sup>Irvin D. Yalom, *The Gift of Therapy: An Open Letter to a New Generation of Therapists and Their Patients* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 46. A helpful analog to understand this dynamic would be the unusual experience of looking at an optical illusion print. On the surface, it reveals itself as any common scene, but on careful analysis, the viewer begins to recognize that an entirely different scene exists within and actually makes up the scene that is so readily apparent. In other words, within the one picture or illustration there exists two (and sometimes more) scenes, images, etc.—one which is readily apparent and the other, equally apparent but only to those able to perceive it because they are actually looking for it.

Counselee: (caught off-guard) “Oh, huh... I guess I hadn’t thought about that?”

The second vignette highlights an important reality. The fact that the counselee responds without a moment’s reflection indicates that he is not truly present in the moment but merely responding with an automated response that keeps things light and moving in a forward direction. The counselor, taking notice of this, asks a simple question that brings attention to where the counselee is in the moment. In short, the counselor recognized the counselee was not available to him subjectively by the fact that the counselee did not reflect on his internal state at all but merely reacted to a common question with a habituated response. In other words, the counselee was not here-and-now with the counselor but on autopilot. In the first vignette, the conversation stays at a safe-objective level by continuing to discuss homework, thoughts about thoughts and answers to questions. The second vignette, however, went from objective third-person reaction to subjective first-person reflection.

A second illustration should suffice. A redemption group<sup>37</sup> meets for the first time at a local church. As is common during the first meeting, participants briefly share their stories, why they are attending, and what they hope to get from their participation, etc. A group facilitator working in the here-and-now recognizes this time as helpful and important; the information being shared is good, but the participants are merely “reporting on themselves rather than revealing themselves.”<sup>38</sup> To press into the here-and-now, the facilitator makes the following statement: “This is really good that we are learning about one another and hearing each other’s stories. However, I also think something else is going on. I suspect that each of us in this room is sizing the others up. I wonder if you would be willing to share with each other some of your conclusions about

---

<sup>37</sup>Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>38</sup>James F. T. Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist* (New York: Norton, 1992), 23.

one another.”<sup>39</sup> In each illustration, the abstract was made concrete, the interaction was brought right into the living moment. The generic was made specific, the impersonal made personal, the personal made interpersonal. This is what it means to focus on the here-and-now. It is more than merely acknowledging that the relationship is important—it is learning to leverage the relationship toward ministerial ends and therapeutic goals.

What makes working in the here-and-now so effective is the notion that when a counselor is seeing a counselee, it is not merely the counselee who is before the counselor but his or her entire life is present there in the room.<sup>40</sup> The counselee’s hopes, fears, desires, pains, idolatries, dreams, lusts, loves, everything that constitutes this individual, will be present with him or her in the counseling session. If a counselor can help the counselee be attuned to the ways these realities reveal themselves, a tremendous amount of work can be done to help the counselee grapple with his or her *true* issues.<sup>41</sup> In short, the here-and-now experience pushes counselees toward their own subjectivity. This is powerful yet difficult for two reasons. First, biblical counselors are used to working in a modality that focuses on content and information and favors a more objective, third-person view of oneself and one’s problems. Information-based counseling systems give central place to data gathering, interpretations of data, and individual history.<sup>42</sup> Instead, a focus on the living moment and the actual relationship as the springboard into therapeutic health challenges the long-held belief that personal history is the causal core of human psychopathology.<sup>43</sup> While a here-and-now perspective is ahistoric, it does not deny the

---

<sup>39</sup>Irvin D. Yalom and Molyn Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 157.

<sup>40</sup>Kirk J. Schneider and Orah T. Krug, *Existential-Humanistic Therapy* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 2.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Bugental, *Psychotherapy Isn’t What You Think*, xvi.

<sup>43</sup>Bugental, *Psychotherapy Isn’t What You Think*, xvi.

role that past events or situations may have in an individual's life. Truly every conversation and interaction has historical features, which is a fact that simply cannot be escaped.<sup>44</sup> The difference lies in what the counselor and counselee do with this information. The idea is not to piece together the past as if insight and understanding into past events is the key to change, but rather simply to use the past to understand the individual's relating in the present.<sup>45</sup> Without this perspective, a counselor and counselee can easily slide into preoccupations with content, events, details, information, and speculative causality and learn much *about* the counselee without producing any real gain to help the counselee change. Bugental draws the same conclusion: "If the client is limited to detached reporting, therapy becomes an exercise in abstractions. Such therapy produces clients who know a lot about themselves but experience little lasting change in what they do or how they feel in their lives."<sup>46</sup>

A second reason a focus on the here-and-now may be difficult has to do with its emphasis on subjectivity and emotions. The modern psychologies have based their credibility on the premise that the behavioral sciences are an objective medical science like any other "hard science," and thus dealing with subjective phenomena (such as one's awareness and self-perception, emotional states, etc.) risks too much. Even within evangelical Protestant scholarship, emotions are often viewed with skepticism. Glaring evidence of this reality is seen in the tendency to define emotional words found in the New Testament not in their concrete lexicographic meanings but often in abstract theological terms.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, since emotion and rational thought are often contrasted,

---

<sup>44</sup>Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 155.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. See also Bugental, *Psychotherapy Isn't What You Think*, 49.

<sup>46</sup>Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, 26.

<sup>47</sup>Matthew Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 13, 193-94, 267.

many view emotions as much a liability as a natural part of the human experience.<sup>48</sup> Thankfully, however, within the biblical counseling movement<sup>49</sup> there has been a greater awareness and openness to the role of emotions.<sup>50</sup> Allowing for and learning to work with emotion and subjectivity (one's own personal experience and existence) is not only necessary but in fact a biblical model for ministry (Ps 119:32; 2 Cor 6:11-13, 7:3, 11:11, 12:15; 1 Thess 2:8). Even with this promising turn to reexamine emotions in counseling, the fact remains that many counselors have little practice at differentiating emotions—in their range and intensity.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, working with emotions is difficult because emotions rarely exist in isolation; instead, individuals can experience multiple emotions simultaneously (in varying degrees of intensity). The reality, however, is that developing counselors with emotional maturity and the ability to minister the objective truth of God's Word into the subjective reality of a counselee's personal experience is a worthy goal to pursue—and one which only the church can truly do. To summarize, it is vital that this frame of mind be foundational or the counselor will continue to operate with a

---

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>49</sup>Bob Burns, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie, *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013), 101-30; Brian Borgman, *Feelings and Faith: Cultivating Godly Emotions in the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009). While not strictly associated with the biblical counseling movement directly, these are excellent examples of the recognition of the role emotions play from a solidly academic and practical perspective.

<sup>50</sup>Jeff Forrey, "The Biblical Understanding and Treatment of Emotions," in *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, ed. James MacDonald, Bob Kelleman, and Steve Viars (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 393-407; Elliott, *Faithful Feelings*; David Powlison, "What Do You Feel?," in *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture*, Resources for Changing Lives (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 211–23; David Powlison, *Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016); Edward T. Welch, *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2012). These are just a few of the representative works that are coming directly from the field of biblical counseling within the last few years.

<sup>51</sup>Norm Wakefield, *Between the Words: The Art of Perceptive Listening* (Grand Rapids: F. H. Revell, 2002), 70-76. Wakefield offers some guidance in understanding both concepts. It is not enough to recognize that there is a range of emotions both positive and negative but within each point on this range, there are differing degrees of intensity. So feeling happy is not the same as being jubilant, nor is the feeling of being overlooked the same as feeling banished.

content and information perspective rather than focus on the process and relationship so important to working in the here-and-now.

While learning to work in the here-and-now is nothing less than this frame of mind, it is also so much more. In order to work effectively in the here-and-now, two interrelated and interdependent activities must take place, both of which are of such importance that to have one without the other renders the entire work ineffective.<sup>52</sup> The first tier is experience of the here-and-now, and the second tier is an illumination and reflection of the first. A careful explanation and examination of these two symbiotic tiers follows.

**Experience of the here-and-now.** The fundamental task of the counselor is having the here-and-now frame of mind, and the fundamental task in counseling is bringing the counselee's attention to the here-and-now dynamic. Most individuals move through a then-and-there existence, what Heidegger called forgetfulness of being,<sup>53</sup> they go about their days occupied with tasks, duties, fulfilling objectives, and distracted by diversions of life. They are unaware that they are generally unaware of their own being. When a counselee sits down for counsel, the counselor must bring them from that forgetfulness of being to "mindfulness of being,"<sup>54</sup> in other words moving the counselee from the third-person objective way of going through life into their first-person subjectivity: the here-and-now.

Getting counselees in touch with their own subjectivity happens through a variety of means. First, the counselor does not carry the burden of the conversation. Counselees will reveal themselves or their particular issue if they are simply given the

---

<sup>52</sup>Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 141-42.

<sup>53</sup>Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic, 1980), 30-31.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 31.

chance to do so. Neophyte counselors often feel the need to fill the silent void with conversation—conversation that the counselor thinks will draw the counselee out, which typically only serves to fill the conversational space with more unnecessary data and allows the counselee his or her way to remain unknown through a conversational smokescreen of data.<sup>55</sup> Second, the counselor makes explicit what is obvious and manifest but often is ignored or implicit.<sup>56</sup> Some examples of this dynamic can be helpful. All of these examples reveal a disconnect within the individual—often without their own knowledge that this contradiction is taking place.<sup>57</sup> For instance, when a counselee discloses a difficult truth but smiles as she does so, or follows it by a nervous laugh; or a counselee makes excessive use of qualifiers, hedges statements, and vacillates between opinions and or emotions; or a counselee angrily insists that she is fine or not mad. The point is to bring into conscious awareness those often-intangible discrepancies that reveal some kind of tension, turmoil, or confusion within the counselee. A counselor can have confidence that a counselee is getting more in touch with her subjectivity when the following six elements are present. The counselee’s language is first-person oriented, mostly present tense, focused more on what she feels rather than what she is thinking, reveals congruence between content and immediate experience, expresses fewer qualifications about feelings and what she perceives, and finally is less abstract and more

---

<sup>55</sup>Allowing the counselee to reveal themselves through a counselor’s strategic use of silence is counter intuitive for biblical counselors. More objective models of counseling work on the assumption that the problem is easy enough to understand thus the process is simply about finding the right solution to the problem and discussing it. However, the assumption being put forth here is that individuals often do not know the real problem because they are either blind to it or otherwise have no access to it. Therefore, a counselor who is working within a counseling dynamic model is looking for data other than content to help them understand where the issue (i.e., the problem) might be. This data often reveals itself in the metacommunication of the counselee, which is discussed further below.

<sup>56</sup>Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, 50.

<sup>57</sup>The point is that what is manifest in the moment is not simply the emotion on the surface, but the unawareness of the emotion or the incongruity.

concrete.<sup>58</sup> Through this process, the counselor is helping to guide the counselee to get better in touch with what is going on internally within him or herself. So there is a constant back and forth of the counselee self-revealing and the counselor helping the counselee see where she becomes disconnected or goes lights-out to her own subjectivity, to her own being-in-the-moment.

**Illumination of the here-and-now.** The first tier is critically important for working in the here-and-now. It can be a powerful experience to help counselees move into their own subjectivity this way. If a counselor can connect with someone's experience (and help a counselee do the same) there is a great chance that the counselee is inclined to trust and listen to that counselor.<sup>59</sup> However, if the second tier of working in the here-and-now, illumination or reflection, is not present, the counselee may have a powerful experience, but it will be momentary and fleeting. There will be no cognitive teaching to hang onto as a catalyst to change behavior.<sup>60</sup> Counselees will not be able to generalize from the experience in counseling to specific actions in their lives, which require a change in behavior.<sup>61</sup>

This second tier then is reflecting on the process of what just happened in the first tier. That process involves the nature of the relationship between the interacting individuals—the counselor and the counselee.<sup>62</sup> In contrast to a content and information objective style of relating that focuses on the information, the process-focused style of

---

<sup>58</sup>Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, 26-27, 58-59; Bugental, *Psychotherapy Isn't What You Think*, 160.

<sup>59</sup>Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, 131-32.

<sup>60</sup>Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 142.

<sup>61</sup>Likewise, if a counseling session only has the second tier, an examination of interactions and information, the session can degenerate into a sterile intellectual exercise.

<sup>62</sup>Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 143.

relating addresses the real question: “What do these explicit words, the style of communication, the nature of the discussion, say about the interpersonal relationship that is happening right now?”<sup>63</sup> In other words, it is not so much focused on the *what* that is being communicated as it is on the *how* things are being communicated. That latter reveals the issue or issues that need attention. Therefore, it is an ongoing two-step process where the counselor is constantly taking the situation into the here-and-now and double backs on itself in a “self-reflecting loop” and examines the here-and-now behavior that has just taken place.<sup>64</sup> This process becomes increasingly effective and revealing as the counselor notes and mentions the moments and frequency when the behavior of the counselee lapses from being present to being distant in the counseling work. These behaviors can be seen in-the-moment when counsees slip back into a third-person detached mode of reporting rather than revealing themselves. Or, when the counselee displays incongruities of affect and experience, or presents resistance,<sup>65</sup> or exhibits any other behaviors that betray the modes of self-survival, the individual has constructed to move through life without having to deal with the hurt, sin, or immaturities they have naturally developed and hidden or avoided. When this recognition happens frequently enough, reflection is the natural next step in the process. The following is a condensed conversation between a counselor and a counselee.

Counselor: “Whenever you talk about dad, your language becomes very hesitant and I seem to lose you in that moment. Where do you go?”

Counselee: “I don’t know. Do I? I never thought about it.”

Counselor: “You sound pretty unsure of yourself.”

Counselee: “I don’t know, I guess I’m wondering why he was so mean to me.”

---

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 156-57.

<sup>65</sup>Resistance here speaks of a reluctance to engage oneself subjectively and not to a complex psychological defense mechanism (although one could argue that this is itself in fact a psychological defense mechanism). Therefore, counsees may deny any feelings or concern, question the necessity of examining their internal states, and dismiss any attempts to probe deeper into the incongruities that appear in the moment.

Counselor: “There it is again. You *don’t know*. You *guess*. You sound afraid to admit to something.”

Counselee: (a bit exasperated) “Yes, I admit it, he never seemed to care about me.”

Counselor: “How does that make you feel?”

Counselee: “Like I’m not worth anything. Aren’t dads supposed to love their kids?”

Counselor: “They are. It’s hard to feel cheated, isn’t it?<sup>66</sup> Especially from someone who is supposed to love you. Is something happening in your life now that makes you feel cheated again?”

Obviously, this is a condensed version of a longer conversation, but the point is that the recognition of the hesitant language in relation to the counselee’s father created an opportunity to reflect on this pattern, which then led to an interpretation of his true feeling.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, this vignette demonstrates the self-reflecting loop of the here-and-now. It is a good chance this individual feels undervalued or cheated in his life right now, which is where he needs the comfort and conviction of God’s Word to be applied.

To summarize, working in the here-and-now is critical to a relational understanding of counseling. It is a frame of mind but also includes particular skills of bringing the counselee’s attention, being into the present living moment with the counselor, and the ability to process with the counselee what comes from that attention to the living moment. The following sections examine communication and observational skills, which are not separate concepts but are sufficiently distinct to merit their own treatment. Although previous sections have alluded to these skills, further elaboration serves to suggest how they apply to counseling in the moment.

### **Levels of Communication**

Second, communication is a key factor in any effective counseling that no one disputes, but hearing the “levels” at which people communicate and their appropriateness

---

<sup>66</sup>In this instance, the counselee’s responses reveal that he is struggling with two existential experiences: value and justice. Either one is worth pursuing in the here-and-now.

<sup>67</sup>It is important to note that in a process and relational mode of thinking, objective accuracy in the interpretation is not necessarily the point. The objective is to consistently bring the counselee from the non-relevant then-and-there (which could have easily happened by asking too many details to illustrate how this father did not care) into the here-and-now.

is equally revealing. The skillful use of words and the ability to listen to those words and discern their meaning is a fundamental skill. Yalom states, “Language is to the therapist, what the scalpel is to the surgeon.”<sup>68</sup> Language produces insight for both counselor and counselee. Words help express the inner world and give shape and form to what is often formless and vague, and through their expression the counselees’ struggle and inner world can become real and tangible for good or bad. Indeed, when communication breaks down it is not simply a matter of misunderstanding semantic domains, grammar, or vocabulary; there is a moral element as well. As the early chapters of Genesis indicate, language is a gift from God, and being able to commune and thus communicate is in part what it means to be the *imago Dei*. Communication was also the medium through which deception and sin were brought forth into God’s creation as the Serpent spoke to and deceived Eve (Gen 3:1-5). So, although the ability to communicate can bring life (Prov 10:20-21, 12:14a, 13:2a, 18:21; Eccl 10:12a; Matt 12:35-37; Eph 4:29; Col 4:6), it can also bring death (Prov 10:20, 18:4-7, 21; Eccl 10:12b-14; Matt 12:35-37; Jas 3:6-9). Thus, Scripture gives many admonitions to use words wisely. However, as important as it is to use words skillfully in communication, in a counseling setting it is perhaps more important for the counselor to know how to hear those words—to truly listen. Someone who is skilled at listening is more apt to be able to discern the true meaning of a conversation and get much more out of it.<sup>69</sup> Even if a counselee has difficulty expressing herself in words, the counselor who has developed an ability to listen can glean much. As Wakefield writes, “Know how to listen, and you will profit even from those who talk badly.”<sup>70</sup> Biblical counselors should keep in mind that learning to be an active listener is simply a way to reflect the character of God Himself (Gen 21:17-18; Ex 2:23-24; 1 Sam

---

<sup>68</sup>Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 154.

<sup>69</sup>Wakefield, *Between the Words*, 33.

<sup>70</sup>Wakefield, *Between the Words*, 23.

1:1-20; Ps 116:1-2; John 11:41-42) who hears and responds to the needs of His people.

For the purposes of this study the focus of communication in the counselor relationship is not so much on the *content* of communication (although that is important) as on the process of communication. In essence, this discussion surrounds the “meta-communication” of communication.<sup>71</sup> To be sure, the process cannot be completely isolated from the content, and that is precisely why it is important to be able to distinguish one from the other. Without such an understanding, swaths of necessary information, i.e., critical data, will be missed. Thus, Bugental uses a great metaphor of a song to understand this necessary dependency and distinction between the content and process of communication:

This is the key point of the emphasis on the living moment, and it is often misunderstood: We tend to listen to what is said rather than how and when the saying occurs. Therapists need to listen to the “music” more than to the words. . . . Most of us learn, with varying degrees of discernment, to note the speaker and not just the speech. The glib salesperson can be self-defeating when she presses too hard or too detachedly; the preoccupied reader’s vague and irrelevant responses are familiar examples of ill-matched music and words.<sup>72</sup>

It is appropriate now to discuss the varying levels which individuals communicate in the hopes that counselors can more readily recognize the degrees to which counselees are experiencing levels of authenticity, anxiety, and implicitly what authority governs their lives. It is important that the counselor keep in mind the tight relationship between the existential foci. An authority always governs a counselee, be it God’s Word, or their own desires, values, and priorities or those of another. That authority commands the counselee’s identity as an image-bearer of God or that of something else. The anxieties the counselee experiences are in direct correspondence to that identity. Furthermore, the counselee is usually not aware of these factors (i.e., level of authenticity,

---

<sup>71</sup>The “hows,” “whys,” “when,” “to whom,” and “from whom” of the conversation instead of the “what.”

<sup>72</sup>Bugental, *Psychotherapy Isn’t What You Think*, 20–21.

the degree of the anxiety and their governing authority) and their interaction. Therefore, understanding the different levels and how they relate to the three foci is helpful. The five levels as noted by James Bugental are (1) formal relating, (2) contact maintenance, (3) standard communication, (4) critical occasions, and (5) intimacy.<sup>73</sup>

Formal relating is the most awkward and superficial form of communication. Most notable is the way individuals relate between the objective aspects of who they are. Titles such as doctor, professor, and counselor are the identities of individuals. Humans are not necessarily interacting as persons as much as they are interacting as roles, positions, titles, and other cultural lines of demarcations those persons occupy. The key to understanding this level of communication is understanding that individuals draw attention to their image and away from their experience of the moment.<sup>74</sup> Bugental notes, “Image-centered communication is self-conscious but not self-disclosing.”<sup>75</sup> Not surprisingly, at this level of communication an individual is typically the least authentic and most anxious. The individual’s sense of meaning is derived, more or less, from how they perform in this setting. In other words, the governing authority in this situation is to adhere to the performance protocols of formality that dictate interaction. On the one hand, the communicative level of formal relating is not necessarily sinful, for life is filled with interactions governed by one’s station in life. However, it is a sure indication that either she cannot or will not allow a careful examination of the true heart issues when the counselee remains in this level of communication. Any talk about Christian virtues, sanctification, growth, personal sin, or any topic that requires vulnerability and self-reflection will be aloof, and with a distinctly third person objective tone, if at all.

---

<sup>73</sup>Strangely, Bugental does not connect these levels back to the existential foci himself.

<sup>74</sup>Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, 29-30.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 30

Individuals continue to cling to their image<sup>76</sup> and will sacrifice image-bearing to do so. In this situation, Christ's humility in Philippians 2<sup>77</sup> displays God's willingness to expose himself and be vulnerable. The focus is to ground the counselee's identity strongly in the fact that they are image-bearers first, and turn from being an image-seeker. There will be anxiety for the counselee to reject their self-constructed images for the image of God in Christ, since they are taking solace in the very image they are being called to turn from. This process of turning from image-seeking to image-bearing provides a springboard to discuss the many anxieties the counselee struggles with, primarily because of their impulse to find an image rather than to bear His image. As discussed in chapter 3, if the sense of self (i.e., image) is in being the "perfect parent," they will not confess to their sinful outbursts of anger to their child. Such confession would mean admitting that their image is wrong. Furthermore, they will be anxious about any situation or conversation that challenges that image. Their authority is not Ephesians 6:4 (i.e., God's Word); rather, it is the idea of being the perfect parent. Calling them to be an image-bearer means putting down the image of being perfect and finding their perfection in Christ alone. In sum, formal relating is not inherently sinful, but being able to get past this level is critical to any progress in counseling.

Contact maintenance is the level of communication typically reserved for relationships that are common but limited in purpose, i.e., the coffee barista at Starbucks, the gas station attendant, the clerk at the grocery store. These conversations do not typically transcend a news-weather-sports trio of acceptable interaction. The formal level

---

<sup>76</sup>Such images would be a self-generated identity the individual constructs that has explanatory powers to make sense of their situation in life. These images can be virtuous or destructive or they can have the appearance of genuine self-awareness or hard-heartedness, whatever the case, they are all inauthentic because they exist to shield the individual from grappling with the deeper and true issues manifested by their refusal to penetrate the formality of the situation.

<sup>77</sup>John 1:9-14 supports this theme. Furthermore, the NT teaching on weakness and strength have much therapeutic value at this level.

of concern regarding one's image does not exist; nor is there any self-disclosure to deepen the relationship.<sup>78</sup> Levels 2 and 3 occupy the majority of the communication that fills counselees' lives. Here, the opportunity for authenticity goes up and anxiety goes down correspondingly. In addition, the situation does not act as any governing authority over the individuals simply because the relationship is mostly functional and brief. The key word, however, is "opportunity." In these more neutral settings, does the counselee take the opportunity to image Christ or their self-constructed images? In neutral settings, where there is neither pretense nor expectation, does the counselee conform more to the image of Christ-like living (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17; 1 Pet 4:11), or to their own image? Are they actively seeking to conform to Christ or passively being formed into another image (John 3:30; Rom 12:2; 1 Pet 1:14-15; James 3:13). This important level of communication can reveal the spiritual trajectory of the counselee—is she actively pursuing her authentic being in Christ, or not? How readily is the authority of God's Word and her faith exerting an influence on her life as seen in these more common interactions or are they reserved for more formal, "spiritual" moments at church, Bible study, or some other Christian event? If not, the counselee is in danger of drifting (Heb 2:1-4) further away from true authenticity and into more anxiety. Likewise, is there any form of godly anxiety to pursue Christ and their sanctification? In this case, anxiety can clearly be a sign of health as the individual can feel the discontinuity between what they are and what they were created to be more keenly at this level than certainly at the level of formal relating.

Standard communication, level 3, is the balance point of the five levels. Here concern for one's image and true self-disclosure are about equal but still subordinate to the content of the communication.<sup>79</sup> Thus the communication is genuine but limited in

---

<sup>78</sup>Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, 32-33.

<sup>79</sup>The content of communication is dependent upon the nature of the relationship, co-worker in the office, class-mate at school, hair-stylist and client, parishioner and pastor, employee-employer, etc.

personal involvement. Patterns or topics are routine but not rigid or ritualistic, and there is generally very little conflict. Individuals involved in standard communication can easily talk and listen at the same time with little difficulty. The vast majority of human communication occurs at this level.<sup>80</sup> This is an important level of communication for the counselor to recognize. Standard communication being the balance point means that the counselee can tip back or move forward in the counseling relationship. The counselor's wisdom and skill become increasingly important at this level. If the counselor pushes too hard, confronts sin prematurely, disregards the counselee's genuine attempts to exercise faith, or is dismissive toward the counselee's experiences, naturally, the counseling will halt. The relationship might continue, but there will no longer be a counselee in the room with the counselor. However, if handled correctly, the counselor will have greater access to explore the counselee's identity and contrast it with her image-bearing design. The counselee will allow the counselor to connect the sin patterns to anxieties, even if at a more analytical (objective) level and be open to question the role and agents of authority in her life.

Critical occasions, where critical in this instance means *making a difference*, are occasions in conversation that make a difference. An individual will be different from he or she would have been had this particular talk not occurred. A key feature in this level of communication is that emotionality is present in the moment rather than merely recalled. The individual's concern for his or her image goes down considerably while the level of self-exposure goes up correspondingly.<sup>81</sup> At this level, fruitful conversations regarding the individual's core issues are much easier. In the prior level, the counselee is open to conversations about their identity as image-bearers, willing to engage about sinful patterns exposed through their anxieties, and examining the authority structures in

---

<sup>80</sup>Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, 35-37.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 38-41.

their life. At this level, the counselee is not merely led in those conversations but actively recognizing the patterns and seeing their interrelatedness. The counselee becomes self-consciously aware (in varying degrees and ways of expressing it) of the shifting weight of responsibility from the counselor's guidance to their own accountability. As a result, the implicit reality of God's authoritative rule over the counselee becomes an explicit realization. Anxiety is seen as revealing areas of idolatry within the counselee's heart directly related to their attempt to seek their identity in anything other than their covenant obligations to be an image-bearer. The practical commands within Scripture to conform to the image and likeness of Christ (Rom 6:4, 12:2; Eph 2:10, 4:24; Col 3:9-10) and what that looks like practically speaking take on prescriptive authority in a way that might not have before (John 13:34; Rom 12:10, 16, 15:5; 1 Cor 12:25; Gal 5:13, 26; Eph 4:2, 32; Col 3:13; 1 Thess 4:18, 5:11,15; Heb 10:24-25, etc.). In short, at the level of standard communication, the realities of the issues of one's authenticity, anxiety, and authority are engaged by the counselee, but at this level they are personally owned by the counselee.

For obvious reasons, the intimacy level of communication is the rarest, but also produces the most fruit in an individual's life. A sharing of deep and immediate experiencing in the moment has little to do with the content and more to do with the counselee's self-awareness and willingness to make that awareness known to others.<sup>82</sup> This level is the inverse of the first; authenticity is at its highest, anxiety is at its lowest and the authority is not personal or situational but fixed objectively in God's Word about the individual. The counselee is grappling with core anxieties with a high sense of self awareness, recognizing many of them as sinful responses to false images pursued in lieu of a covenant relationship toward God. The person of Christ is clearly seen as their standard of authentic humanity and the means toward these ends (repenting of sinful practices and pursuit of authentic personhood) is God's authoritative Word. It should be

---

<sup>82</sup>Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, 42-45.

noted that the counselee will not necessarily use the same words, authenticity, anxiety, or authority as conceptual terms in counseling, nor is it necessary for the counselor to do so. The important thing is to recognize the relationship between them and the corresponding roles they play in the heart and life of the counselee.

These five levels of communication, and how they intersect with the three primary therapeutic foci of chapter 3, can prove immensely helpful for the counselor as a means to understanding the broad and wide spectrum of communication that takes place in the counseling relationship.

While the focus regarding these levels of communication has been in the context of the formal counseling relationship, familiarity with the core concepts also have many applications. For example, many basic communication issues are associated with communicating at a level that is not appropriate for the context. The small group member who insists on relating on level 2 when another group member has shared a heartfelt struggle that has taken the group to a level 4 or vice-versa. A visitor who suddenly poses a pointed personal question at level 4 or 5 communication to the pastor during a visitor's class with a social norm of level 2 or 3. One common occurrence is an individual functioning at a level disproportionate to the others. The husband who never transcends level 3 with a wife who wants nothing less than level 4; a father who expects level 5 with his teenage daughter but never creates an environment to cultivate that kind of communication. The permutations are vast, but the point remains the same: people are always communicating, and very often the message is not in the words themselves. The next section briefly examines some para-verbal cues that can help identify these fluctuations in communication so the trained counselor can make the most of the counseling dynamic.

### **Para-Verbal Communication Cues**

Content, word choice, syntax, and grammar are only one part of communication. As often as not, what is not said—the pauses, the rhythm, the cadence and volume, the

eyes, the hands and feet, the slouching back or erect posture, the nervous laugh, the ill-timed chuckle—can communicate as much or more than the content that is interspersed between them. People can even stop talking but continue to communicate because they cannot stop behaving.<sup>83</sup> From its earliest days, the biblical counseling movement recognized the importance of non-verbal forms of communication.<sup>84</sup> Learning to understand these forms of communication is critical since often counselees who are vividly expressing feelings in a non-verbal manner are yet unaware of those very emotions<sup>85</sup> that need to be receiving the attention of the counseling. What appears to be lacking in the current biblical counseling literature is a classification of these forms of para-verbal communication and how to recognize them.

There appear to be three types of para-verbal communication: facial expressions, physical posture, and voice patterns.<sup>86</sup>

The first type of para-verbal communication, facial expressions, is very familiar and easily noticed. Subtle changes in expression, however, which may register significant emotional experiences, are easily missed if the counselor is not careful. A slight quiver of a lower lip or fleeting glance away, a refocusing of the pupil, nearly insignificant tearing in the eye—all these, easily missed, can reveal deep feelings about a given topic at hand.

The second type of para-verbal communication, physical posture, is perhaps as easily observed but often not taken into account. Physical posture can include dress

---

<sup>83</sup>Wakefield, *Between the Words*, 48.

<sup>84</sup>Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 210.

<sup>85</sup>Bugental, *The Art of the Psychotherapist*, 56.

<sup>86</sup>Wakefield, *Between the Words*, 51-54; James F. T. Bugental et al., “Existential-Humanistic Psychotherapy in Action: A Demonstration with James F.T. Bugental,” 2006, accessed September 12, 2016, <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?>.

patterns<sup>87</sup> as well as how the counselee occupies his physical space during the counseling session. Does the counselee lean forward or back during the conversation and at what times? Does she slouch or sit erect, and does it change and when? What about the counselee's shoulders? Are invisible weights pulling them down? What does the counselee do with her hands? Are they crossed, open, in her pockets, nervously occupied (i.e., constantly flipping a pen, tapping on their lap)? Are the counselees' legs relaxed? Is there a nervous bouncing pattern, foot tapping, or constant shifting weight in the seat? Does he seem relaxed or restless, comfortable or nervous? Do patterns emerge as the session progresses? These are just a few examples of how counselees might occupy their physical space that can reveal important information.

The final type of para-verbal communication is also the most difficult to observe because it has to do with the counselee's voice. Counselors are trained to focus on the content of words rather than on the voice itself. Thus, the para-verbal element of the voice is easily lost. Does the counselee's volume change and when? What about rate of speech—does it uncharacteristically speed up or slow down? Tone of voice? Speech pattern—does the counselee become formal and rigid or colloquial and relaxed? Does the choice of vocabulary change as well? When? Is there a dynamic range of inflection or is it monotone? Do these changes happen in regard to a specific topic or individual or line of questioning?

The unique challenge to para-verbal communication is not so much noticing it as much as discerning whether the communication is consistent with the experience and content at hand.<sup>88</sup> In other words, what is being communicated via the content must

---

<sup>87</sup>Wakefield, *Between the Words*, 53. Wakefield lists eight ways counselees can communicate through their dress.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 57-59; Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 168.

match what is being communicated via the body, face, and voice of the counselee. Any incongruence between them presents an opportunity for good work to be done.<sup>89</sup>

Learning to focus on such para-verbal communication is key to the larger counseling dynamic under examination in this chapter. To make it easier to develop this skill, counselors may consider viewing past counseling tapes and comment on only one of the three types of para-verbal communication. For example, a past counseling session may be viewed by a group of trainees and the post-discussion might focus entirely on the counselee's facial expression, then again with a focus upon physical posture, then again with only on voice patterns. Or the group of trainees could be divided into three subgroups with each responsible for commenting on one type of para-verbal communication. The counseling session could be broken into ten-minute increments pausing for each subgroup to offer their insights and commentary. Finally, an individual trainee could make it a point to focus on just one type of para-verbal communication until it becomes second nature before attempting to focus on another. Obviously, the amount of data that para-verbal communication would provide could be overwhelming. The point is not to aim for mastery but rather for recognition and interpretation.

Finally, recognizing and working with para-verbal communication is not an entirely separate skill set from the aforementioned levels of communication. Para-verbal communication is rather a subset and occurs simultaneously just as the levels of communication occur simultaneously when working in the here-and-now frame of mind. These are not distinct steps but, rather, modes of working with a counselee that often happen in an overlapping and interweaving fashion. The skill of navigating these

---

<sup>89</sup>Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 168. Yalom encourages counselors to be especially attuned to arrhythmic transactions—when a response to a stimulus statement is disproportionately intense. In these cases, there are several explanations for what is taking place. The responder is experiencing the respondent unrealistically, or responding not to the explicit content but to another level of communication or not even to the current transaction but to feelings stemming from previous transactions. These types of interaction present rich implications for counseling as deeper, more historical concerns are being activated in the present situation.

components is not one that can simply be learned by reading them; they are learned through practice, intentionality, and experience. Furthermore, this methodology is not in opposition to biblical counseling's emphasis on theology or content but instead a means of focusing more sharply on where that theology and content might be strategically emphasized in a particular individual's experience.

### **Conclusion**

The biblical counseling movement is an ever-growing and maturing movement. Its institutional, instructional, and intellectual development over the past forty-six years has been profound. Much of the material from this chapter is found within the seminal literature of the humanistic-existential psychologies because the individual experience has been at the heart of that particular theoretical orientation since its inception. Therefore, it is vital to understand that this material is not presented in lieu of traditional biblical counseling's primary modality, which must remain the same, but rather to expand our awareness of the need to focus on the experience of the person in real time by providing biblical answers for the challenges that existential psychology draws our attention to. The counseling relationship has been recognized within the biblical counseling movement as an area that requires more growth, and the aim of this chapter is to help stimulate that growth. However, relationships are too important to be left to the endless subjectivity and misconstrued autonomy that haunts the humanistic-existential perspective. Relationships are gifts from God and therefore find their fullest expression in the freedom and accountability of biblical truth not in individualism. Biblical counseling alone is robust enough to include both subjectivity (personal affections, individual experience, etc.) and objectivity (standards of morality, accountability, individual essence) without having to sacrifice either. This chapter introduced a mode of counseling; a way of understanding the relationship that can benefit the maturing biblical counseling movement. Rightfully so, content and information has been a real strength of biblical counseling; its theological tradition, rich scriptural resources, spiritual disciplines, and

well-worn paths of discipleship and accountability have proven very effective for both counselors and counselees. Not infrequently, however, the real issue an individual is struggling with has proven more elusive than perhaps the traditional means can discern. That is, a system that traffics primarily in content and information requires counselees to be cognitively attuned to what their struggle might be and able to recall the necessary or correct information that will aid the counselor in discerning their plight and prescribing the appropriate curative measures. However, if counselees are not cognitively aware of their presenting struggle (at least in large part) or able to present the right information, the counseling relationship is in danger of stalling out and, even worse, being deemed ineffective.

The Bible not only describes the elusive and deceptive nature of sin but provides rich metaphors that inform the biblical counselor that oftentimes individuals will not be aware of or able to fully describe or anticipate the ways their sinfulness will manifest in their lives. The argument of this chapter, and one of the main arguments of this research, is that individuals can be known through their *affective* experience of their existence and not merely through their cognitive understanding. Furthermore, this affective experience is made known, or manifest, in the living-moment between the counselor and counselee.

To capture this unique form of data, the counselor needs to learn what to attend to. In this way, the dynamics of the counseling relationship itself becomes the presenting data the biblical counselor uses to discern the problem. Those dynamics were generalized in a frame of mind known as the here-and-now, as well as an understanding of the types of verbal communication and para-verbal communication. These symbiotic and interdependent dynamics inform the counselor of other messages that are being communicated (the process) along with the content that serve as a means to discern incongruity or signal a disconnect within the counselee. Identifying the connections between the communication's actual impact (often in the content of the words) and the

communicator's intent (often revealed in these other factors) is at the heart of this process.<sup>90</sup> It is par for the course if some of these techniques still seem elusive to the biblical counselor, simply because the nature of individual experience is hard to distill into an exhaustive system that accounts for every situation. Some tolerance for uncertainty is necessary; some ability to work in the ambiguous tension between absolute essence and relative existence is required because that is the way God's world works, no less His image-bearers. The resources of biblical counseling and Christianity in general are large enough to accommodate.

---

<sup>90</sup>Yalom and Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*, 143.

## CHAPTER 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation, a work firmly committed to the biblical counseling perspective, has at points wandered far afield of the familiar environs and safe confines of traditional biblical counseling works. In order for the biblical counseling movement to develop and advance in its theories, techniques, and practices, theorists must be willing at times to travel to the theoretical hinterlands and engage with those who might differ radically to see one's own perspectives more clearly and appropriate concepts and constructs compatible with that perspective.

This work represents an attempt to do just that with those in the humanistic-existential schools of psychology. As a result, this dissertation has been a mixture of introduction, history, apologetic, theology, and methodology. In the end, the reader has to judge whether this work has reached sound conclusions consistent with the worldview that informs biblical counseling while faithfully addressing both the positive and negative aspects of existential psychology.

#### **Summary of Arguments**

This dissertation advanced a series of arguments regarding existential psychology that followed from and explained the thesis of this work: An anthropology that is faithful to Scripture accounts for the totality of the human experience, including the individual's personal experience. Existential psychology, although captive to its own faulty assumptions, has made the personal individual experience its primary focus and thus serves as an appropriate dialogue partner for the biblical counseling movement in this endeavor. Next is a synopsis of each chapter's findings.

Chapter 1 affirmed the important role that the resurgence in biblical counseling has played in the church today. While the modern biblical counseling movement is a needed corrective for the church, there is still much room for growth. This growth can come from unexpected sources—in this case, from adherents of existential psychology. This chapter examined the similarities and distinctions between biblical counseling and existential psychology. It was argued that although they are unlikely bedfellows these two perspectives have much more in common than practitioners of either perspective would have originally perceived. The reason for this similarity is the fact that the founders of the “third force” of psychology, known as humanism, which is the larger theoretical environment of existential psychology, were to a man strongly influenced by a Judeo-Christian worldview. This worldview shaped anthropological views in a way that was at once similar to biblical counseling and radically different from it.

The chapter further provided the personal context and history that prompted further research into these connections between biblical counseling and existential psychology as well as some theoretical introductions into existential psychology to enable the reader to see those connections as well. The chapter includes the overall thesis that grew out of my recognition of these points of connection and the methodology used to tease out the implications of these connections. The chapter concluded with a brief historic response on the part of the church and an argument explaining why existential psychology appears to round out the anthropological views more adequately than the evangelical response.

Chapter 2 demonstrated the pivotal role anthropology plays in the behavioral sciences and posited that it was the sole reason the third force of psychology came about. The chapter explained the major critique that humanist and existential psychologists had leveled against their theoretical forbears—it proffered a reductionist view of man that was scientific, rational, and objectifying and nothing more.

The existentialists argued that an anthropology that did not understand a human being as an individual, subjective, experiencing agent is no anthropology at all. Thus, the existentialists argued for an anthropology that is first-person subjective rather than third-person objective. This distinction between a third-person objective view and first-person subjective view of man is the defining feature of an existentialist anthropology. The individual existent (i.e., existing in the moments of life), not the collective essence, is held to be the anthropological focus. In presenting this argument, the chapter provided a fuller introduction to existential psychology and its relationship to and distinction from existential philosophy and what common ground it shares with a biblical view of man.

Chapter 3 refined the theoretical focus of existential psychology discussed in chapter 2. An anthropology that focuses on an individual's existence must have some anchors, or meta-categories, in order to locate a particular individual in a therapeutic context. In the existentialist perspective, the three meta-categories are issues of authenticity, anxiety, and authority. The existentialists hold that all individuals should aspire to be authentic; the problem, however, is that all individuals deal with anxiety; further, questions of authority form the foundation for both authenticity and anxiety. Taken together, these three meta-categories provide the therapeutic focus so that the individual in front of the counselor becomes the focal point of emphasis rather than a diagnosis, a personality type, or any other generalized heuristic device that obscures the personal individual who is being seen. Chapter 3 argued that authenticity, anxiety, and authority are *the* existential issues that allow a counselor to grapple with an individual's experience of his or her own existence.

Chapter 4 provided the theoretical and theological counterbalance to chapters 2 and 3, which argued that the unique anthropological perspective of existential psychology has much to offer in rounding out any view of the individual. However, existential psychology is equally held captive by the same modernistic assumptions as its psychological predecessors (from both the first force, psychodynamic psychology, and

the second force, behaviorism). The error of the existentialist is simply on the other side of the anthropological coin. If the psychoanalyst and behaviorist erred too far on the side of objectifying individuals, the existentialist errs too far on subjectifying them. In other words, in focusing exclusively on the subjective existence of a person, existential psychology fails to provide any coherent grounding, i.e., the essence of what defines a human being. Thus, the rampant subjectivity and loss of any meaningful discussion about human personhood can be placed squarely at the feet of the humanists. Chapter 4 argued further that any coherent understanding of human personhood must take into account humanity's essential nature—as a covenant being found particularly in the Christian doctrine of the *imago Dei*. The *imago Dei* finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the logical conclusion was made that if being in the image of God is essential to human nature and Jesus Christ fulfilled that image perfectly, then Jesus Christ is essential to understanding true human nature. The chapter concluded by recasting the very therapeutic concerns that define existence, authenticity, anxiety, and authority in Christological terms.

Chapter 5 brought together the theory, practice, and theology woven throughout chapters 1 to 4 into a methodological technique that may be employed in biblical counseling practice. It began by recognizing that theories inevitably lead to practice of some sort. In particular, biblical counseling recognizes the need to further develop the counseling relationship, and thus further reinforcing the important contribution that existential psychology makes in this particular regard is crucial. The case was made that this research based upon some of the theories and best practices found in existential psychology could benefit the biblical counseling movement with the aforementioned cautions detailed in chapter 4.

As chapter 1 argued, biblical counseling has a great methodology to work with cognitive problems that a counselee is aware of. These were noted as being what might be called the high-handed sins. However, biblical counseling struggles with a methodology

that helps counselees deal with struggles and sins that may elude the counselee for one reason or another. Chapter 5 fleshed this notion out in greater detail by discussing the Johari window of self-awareness and its implications to this methodological shortcoming in biblical counseling. The bulk of the chapter was thus given to explaining a methodological process of working with the counselee. In other words, what chapter 3 aimed to do in focusing on those elements that capture an individual's experience (even those they might not be aware of at a cognitive level), chapter 5 aimed to do in regard to the counseling relationship. The issue was how to bring the existential moment into the counseling relationship in a way that provides fertile opportunities for biblical truths at their deepest level. The chapter detailed the necessary frame of mind and understanding of the communication and meta-communication that transpire in the counseling relationship to get at what is truly important to the individual to achieve the end that Scripture can be applied more deeply than at a mere surface level of interaction.

To sum up, this investigation sought to make a rather modest contribution to the biblical counseling movement by advancing an understanding of the importance of the individual's subjectivity and what that might look like in the counseling dynamic between the counselor and counselee. In short, this has been a work of applied anthropology. Although much has been written on the importance of anthropology within the biblical counseling movement, little has developed the actual subjectivity of the relationship in general or in the counseling environment specifically. This work on applied anthropology is far from comprehensive, and more work on anthropology (applied and theoretical) could advance the biblical counseling movement.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The nature of this research demanded that a wide range of material be covered but not necessarily in great depth. Therefore, although many areas of research could have been pursued to good benefit for the larger biblical counseling movement, the present inquiry demanded a more restricted focus on application of certain aspects of existential

psychology (the subjective focus on the individual in relationship) to avoid distraction from the main thesis of this research. Following are three areas of research that could benefit the biblical counseling movement in the future.

First, the biblical counseling movement would benefit from further engagement with the humanistic-existential perspective on counseling in general. The excesses and theoretical irresponsibility of the humanists notwithstanding, the theory offers many valuable insights regarding anthropology (i.e., subjectivity, relationships) and man's desire for transcendence in the larger theory to continue to ignore it wholesale. For example, the humanist wave of psychology has always regarded the spiritual element of man's nature a critical aspect of understanding his being. Furthermore, nearly 43 percent of members of Division 32 (Humanistic psychology) of the American Psychological Association stated a belief in a personal God.<sup>1</sup> For biblical counselors to be entirely ignorant of this exceedingly influential movement (and by conscious choice, no less) is woefully naïve or dangerously arrogant. If the movement hopes to grow beyond its own academic and institutional borders as earlier proponents envisioned, there must be a level of theoretical interaction to sift the good, true, and beneficial from the bad, false, and destructive. The humanistic-existential movement is rife with each, thus thoughtful, committed biblical counselors must help the church and the larger culture discern one from the other. To date, the only Christians doing this kind of engagement are from the integrationist field,<sup>2</sup> and biblical counseling would benefit from a similar analysis and perspective more in alignment with its own views.

---

<sup>1</sup>David Elkins, "Beyond Religion: Toward a Humanistic Spirituality," in *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. James F. T. Bugental, J. Fraser Pierson, and Kirk J. Schneider (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001), 681-90.

<sup>2</sup>Frank De Piano et al., "Christian Humanism," in *Religious Theories of Personality and Psychotherapy: East Meets West*, ed. R. Paul Olsen (Binghamton, NY: Routledge, 2012); Stanton L. Jones and Richard E. Butman, *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Approach*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011); John G. Finch, *A Christian Existential Psychology: The Contributions of John G. Finch*, ed. H. Newton Malony (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980); Roger Bretherton, "Can Existential Psychotherapy Be Good News? Reflections on Existential Psychotherapy from a Christian Perspective," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 9, no. 3 (2006): 265-75.

Second, biblical counseling would benefit from developing a group counseling model within the local church akin to the burgeoning group therapy movement in the larger culture. Thankfully, there is positive momentum in this area particularly due to Mike Wilkerson's Redemption Group movement based on the premises set forth in his *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry* and Stephen Greggo's, *Trekking Toward Wholeness: A Resource for Care Group Leaders*.<sup>3</sup> Both Wilkerson and Greggo recognize the power of group counseling and the impact that groups of individuals meeting together can have on one another. Carefully guided groups can create what is often known as the "social microcosm," which is to say that the interpersonal dynamics that exist between men and women in the small group are a reflection of their larger world. Thus, the small group is a microcosm of the macrocosm of counselees' larger lives. This principle is foundational in the literature regarding group therapy.<sup>4</sup> There is simply no better place for such productive group therapy to occur than within the communal structures of the local church. A local church contains a shared set of beliefs (i.e., theological convictions), an agreed institutional accountability structure (i.e., Christian discipleship, formative and corrective church discipline), and routine gatherings that reinforce the group counseling ideals (i.e., weekly corporate worship and small group Bible studies). Finally, a local church also provides opportunities for counselees to serve others and socialize with individuals outside their counseling group while still being in the same community, thus helping counselees maintain an integrated life beyond their struggles. The local church would benefit tremendously if research was done to integrate such group counseling into the structures and flow of every aspect of its functioning.

---

<sup>3</sup>Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Stephen P. Greggo, *Trekking Toward Wholeness: A Resource for Care Group Leaders* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic, 1980), 180; Irvin D. Yalom and Modyn Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic, 2008), 31-44.

Third, further research should be given to developing a time-limited approach, which integrates material from this dissertation into traditional biblical counseling practices in the church. This work was dedicated to developing a methodology based upon a particular anthropological reality to help foster the kind of relationship where a counselee could work through struggles that may not be readily apparent, at least not in a cognitive sense. Biblical counseling would benefit from a similar study that focused not on counseling methodology but on a counseling structure that would inform the process by which the counseling relationship would develop over a time-limited schedule. It is clear that having six to seven months to develop the relationship is ideal, but can similar benefits be realized in six to seven weeks, and if so, how? Such research could also inform the group counseling program of a church addressed in the second issue discussed.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud appropriated the term “secular pastoral worker” for the growing army of psychoanalysts.<sup>5</sup> He did so to describe the authority and function of the psychoanalyst in the life of the counselee. In other words, from the very beginning, those in the modern psychological movement understood very well that what they were doing was simply a secular version of what the church and pastor already did. It stands to reason then, by Freud’s tacit admission, that counseling is integral to the work of the church. Freud’s compliment notwithstanding, however, this is something Scripture makes clear by the various exhortations, commands, and encouragements to do life with one another. Thomas Manton correctly observed that the corporate church is vital to the individual’s growth: “As God would establish a dependence between himself and us, so he would establish a dependence between

---

<sup>5</sup>Sigmund Freud, “The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, vol. 20 (London: Hogarth, 1926), 255.

Christians among themselves; therefore grace doth not only come from God, but we receive it in part through the means of the body.”<sup>6</sup>

First, that the church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22-23, 4:12; Col 1:18, 24, 3:15; 1 Cor 12:12-27) places each and every individual within the church under the covenantal headship of Christ. In other words, as Romans 5:12-21 explains, Christians are no longer in Adam but in Christ, which is key to understanding a biblical anthropology. Only Christians are in such a covenant relationship with Christ, and as Christ is the fulfillment of the *imago Dei* only those in such a covenant can hope to become what human beings were intended to be and become by God’s design. No institution on earth can give evidence to a man or woman’s covenantal standing with Christ aside from membership in His church.

Second, the church is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:5ff). The objective reality of being in covenantal relationship in the body of Christ will inevitably result in a subjective experience of life through the power of Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18; Gal 5:16-6:2). Being in the objective covenantal relationship with Christ and His people inevitably results in the subjective realities of this new life in the experience of the individual.<sup>7</sup> The humanistic-existential perspective sought to achieve this balance, but fails to do so because of its modernistic assumptions.

Finally, because the church has been formed by Christ Himself (Eph 4:16; Col 2:17-19) and has received the blessings of the new covenant that Christ dispenses, it is the focal point of His redemptive work on earth (Matt 16:18-19, 28:18-20).

No other institution, structure, or governing body on earth can make these claims and experience these realities. The church must continue to engage the

---

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Manton, “A Treatise of Self-Denial,” in *The Works of Thomas Manton*, ed. Thomas Smith, vol. 15 (London: Nisbet & Company, 1873), 254.

<sup>7</sup>The natural corollary of this second point is that the people of God are now the temple of God as well (Eph 2:20-22)

psychological disciplines in all of their varieties and nuances, if for no other reason than to clear the field of its competitors and counterfeits. However, when ideas are engaged that can profit the work of biblical counseling, such as those within the humanistic-existential perspective discussed in this dissertation, they need to be understood and recontextualized back into a Christ-centered context in which they will truly be profitable (2 Cor 10:3-5).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Jay E. "Change Them? . . . Into What?" *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 13-17.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *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: Ministry Resources Library, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Response to the Congress on Christian Counseling." Speech given at the Congress on Christian Counseling, Atlanta, November 10, 1988
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption*. The Jay Adams Library. Grand Rapids: Ministry Resource Library, 1986.
- Allport, Gordon. "The Psychological Nature of Personality." *The Personalist* 34, no. 4 (1953): 347-57.
- Altholz, Josef Lewis. "The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to 'Essays and Reviews,' 1860-1864." *Church History* 51, no. 2 (June 1982): 186-97.
- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae*. Edited by John Mortensen and Enrique Alarcón. Translated by Laurence Shapcote. Vol. 14. Latin/English Edition of the Works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012.
- Barr, James. "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis: A Study of Terminology." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 51, no. 1 (1968): 11-26.
- Batson, C. Daniel, and E. L. Stocks. "Religion: Its Core Psychological Functions." In *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology*, edited by J. Greenberg, S. Koole, and T. Pyszczynski, 141-55. New York: Guilford, 2004.
- Bergner, Raymond M. *Pathological Self-Criticism: Assessment and Treatment*. The Plenum Series in Social/Clinical Psychology. New York: Plenum, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Therapeutic Approaches to Problems of Meaninglessness." *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 72-87.
- Berkouwer, G. C. *Man: The Image of God*. Studies in Dogmatics. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962.
- Blackburn, Simon. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*. Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

- Borgman, Brian. *Feelings and Faith: Cultivating Godly Emotions in the Christian Life*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009.
- Boyraz, Güler, J. Brandon Waits, and Victoria A. Felix. "Authenticity, Life Satisfaction, and Distress: A Longitudinal Analysis." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 61, no. 3 (2014): 498-505.
- Bradley, Brendan P., Karin Mogg, Neil Millar, and Jim White. "Selective Processing of Negative Information: Effects of Clinical Anxiety, Concurrent Depression, and Awareness." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 104, no. 3 (August 1995): 532-36.
- Bray, G. L. "Image of God." In *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner. Leicester, England; InterVarsity, 2000.
- Breisach, Ernst. *Introduction to Modern Existentialism: From Kierkegaard to Sartre: A Complete, Authoritative Guide to a Major Philosophy of Our Time*. New York: Grove, 1962.
- Bretherton, Roger. "Can Existential Psychotherapy Be Good News? Reflections on Existential Psychotherapy from a Christian Perspective." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 9, no. 3 (June 2006): 265-75.
- Brown, Colin. *Philosophy and the Christian Faith: A Historical Sketch from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1968.
- Browning, Don S., and Terry D. Cooper. *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004.
- Brunner, Emil. *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*. Translated by Olive Wyon. London: Lutterworth, 1953.
- Bugental, James F. T. *The Art of the Psychotherapist*. New York: Norton, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Challenges of Humanistic Psychology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Humanistic Psychology and the Clinician." In *Progress in Clinical Psychology*, edited by Lawrence Edwin and Bernard Riess, 7:223-39. New York: Grune & Stratton, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Psychotherapy Isn't What You Think: Bringing the Psychotherapeutic Engagement into the Living Moment*. Phoenix: Zeig, Tucker, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Search for Authenticity: An Existential-Analytic Approach to Psychotherapy*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Third Force in Psychology." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 4, no. 1 (1964): 19-26.
- Bugental, James F. T., Victor Yalom, Michael Douglas, and Barbara Sapienza. "Existential-Humanistic Psychotherapy in Action: A Demonstration with James F.T. Bugental." 2006. Accessed September 12, 2016. <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?>
- Burns, Bob, Tasha Chapman, and Donald Guthrie. *Resilient Ministry: What Pastors Told Us about Surviving and Thriving*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2013.

- Calvin, Johannes, John Thomas MacNeill, and Ford Lewis Battles. *Institutes of the Christian Religion: In Two Volumes*. Philadelphia: Westminster; London: SCM, 1960.
- Carter, John D. "Adams' Theory of Nouthetic Counseling." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 143-55.
- Cheong, Robert K. *God Redeeming His Bride: A Handbook for Church Discipline*. Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012.
- Chetty, Raj, and Nathaniel Hendren. "The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility: Childhood Exposure Effects and County-Level Estimates." Equality of Opportunity Project, May 2015. Accessed January 12, 2017. [www.equality-of-opportunity.org/images/nbhds\\_paper.pdf](http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/images/nbhds_paper.pdf)
- Colwell, J. E. "Anthropology." In *New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer. The Master Reference Collection. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Image of God." In *New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer. The Master Reference Collection. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988.
- Cooper, Mick. *Existential Therapies*. London; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003.
- Corner, J. S., R. Mojtabai, and M. Olfson. "Increasing Off-Label Use of Antipsychotics for Treating Anxiety Disorders." *Brown University Psychopharmacology Update* 23, no. 1 (2012): 1-6.
- Cushman, Philip. *Constructing the Self, Constructing America: A Cultural History of Psychotherapy*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Psychotherapy to 1992: A Historically Situated Interpretation." In *History of Psychotherapy: A Century of Change*, edited by Donald K. Freedheim. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1992.
- DeCarvalho, Roy José. *The Founders of Humanistic Psychology*. New York: Praeger, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A History of the 'Third Force' in Psychology." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 30, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 22-44.
- Deckard, Mark. *Helpful Truth in Past Places: The Puritan Practice of Biblical Counseling*. Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2010.
- Desmond, Adrian J., and James R. Moore. *Darwin*. London: Michael Joseph; New York: Viking Penguin, 1991.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.
- Elkins, David. "Beyond Religion: Toward a Humanistic Spirituality." In *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice*, edited by James F. T. Bugental, J. Fraser Pierson, and Kirk J. Schneider, 681-90. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.

- Elliott, Matthew. *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006.
- Ellis, Albert, and Robert A. Harper. *A New Guide to Rational Living*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1975.
- Erickson, Millard J. *Christian Theology*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998.
- Evans, Richard. *Carl Rogers: The Man and His Ideas*. New York: Dutton, 1975.
- Evans, Richard. *Gordon Allport: The Man and His Ideas*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1970.
- Eyrich, Howard, Edward E. Hindson, and William L. Hines. *Curing the Heart: A Model for Biblical Counseling*. Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2002.
- Finch, John G. *A Christian Existential Psychology: The Contributions of John G. Finch*. Edited by H. Newton Malony. Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1980.
- Fischer, William F. "The Psychology of Anxiety: A Phenomenological Description." *The Humanistic Psychologist* 28, nos. 1-3 (2000): 153-66.
- Franck, Isaac. "Self-Realization as Ethical Norm: A Critique." *Philosophical Forum* 9 (Fall 1977): 1-25.
- Frankl, Viktor Emil. "The Feeling of Meaninglessness." *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* 32, no. 1 (1972): 85-89.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Mini book ed. Boston: Beacon, 2006.
- Freud, Sigmund. "The Question of Lay Analysis: Conversations with an Impartial Person." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Strachey, 10:179-270. London: Hogarth, 1926.
- Friedman, Maurice S. *The Worlds of Existentialism: A Critical Reader*. Amherst, NY: Humanity, 1999.
- Greggo, Stephen P. *Trekking toward Wholeness: A Resource for Care Group Leaders*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008.
- Grenz, Stanley. "Jesus as the Imago Dei: Image of God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology." *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (December 2004): 617-28.
- Grossmann, Reinhardt. *The Existence of the World: An Introduction to Ontology*. The Problems of Philosophy. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Hays, Christopher M., ed. *Evangelical Faith and the Challenge of Historical Criticism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

- Heidegger, Martin, and Medard Boss. *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001.
- Heidegger, Martin, John Macquarrie, and Edward S. Robinson. *Being and Time*. New York: HarperPerennial/Modern Thought, 2008.
- Henderson, John, and Association of Biblical Counselors. *Equipped to Counsel: A Training Program in Biblical Counseling, Leader Notebook*. Mustang, OK: Association of Biblical Counselors, 2008.
- Hepburn, R. W. "Questions about the Meaning of Life." *Religious Studies* 1, no. 2 (1966): 125-40.
- Hersen, Michel, and William H. Sledge, eds. *Encyclopedia of Psychotherapy*. Amsterdam: Academic Press, 2002.
- Hibbs, Pierce Taylor. "A House Built Upon the Rock: Finding Our Identity in Christ." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 28, no. 2 (2014): 53-58.
- Hoekema, Anthony A. *Created in God's Image*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986.
- Holifield, E. Brooks. *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003.
- Hughes, Philip Edgecombe. *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.
- Johnson, Eric L. *Foundations for Soul Care : A Christian Psychology Proposal*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. *Psychology & Christianity: Five Views*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010.
- Jones, Stanton L., and Richard E Butman. *Modern Psychotherapies: A Comprehensive Christian Approach*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011.
- Josselson, Ruthellen. *Irvin D. Yalom: On Psychotherapy and the Human Condition*. New York: Jorge Pinto, 2008.
- Keen, Ernest. "Emotional Narratives: Depression as Sadness—Anxiety as Fear." *The Humanistic Psychologist* 39, no. 1 (2011): 66-70.
- Kellemen, Robert W., ed. *Biblical Counseling and the Church: God's Care through God's People*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Equipping Counselors for Your Church: The 4E Ministry Training Strategy*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Spiritual Friends: A Methodology of Soul Care and Spiritual Direction*. Taneytown, MD: RPM, 2004.
- Keller, Timothy J. "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling." *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 9, no. 3 (January 1988): 11-44.

- Kemp, C. Gratton. "Existential Counseling." *The Counseling Psychologist* 2, no. 3 (1971): 2-30.
- Koch, Sigmund. "'Psychology' or 'the Psychological Studies'?" *American Psychologist* 48, no. 8 (August 1993): 902-4.
- Kraut, Richard. "Plato." In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. Edited by Robert Audi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Lambert, Heath. *The Biblical Counseling Movement after Adams*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *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, 2008.
- Lee, Michael J. *The Erosion of Biblical Certainty: Battles over Authority and Interpretation in America*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Lescoe, Francis J. *Existentialism: With or without God*. New York: Alba House, 1974.
- Letham, Robert. *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2011.
- Lowith, Karl. *Nature, History, and Existentialism*. Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology & Existential Philosophy. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1966.
- Luft, Joseph. *Of Human Interaction*. Palo Alto, CA: National Press, 1969.
- Luft, Joseph, and Harrington Ingham. *The Johari Window: A Graphic Model for Interpersonal Relations*. Los Angeles: University of California, 1955.
- Macaulay, Ranald, and Jerram Barrs. *Being Human: The Nature of Spiritual Experience*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978.
- MacDonald, James, Robert W. Kellemen, and Stephen Viars. *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013.
- Mack, Wayne A. *Family and Marital Problems*. A Homework Manual for Biblical Living, vol. 2. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Personal and Interpersonal Problems*. A Homework Manual for Biblical Living, vol. 1. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979.
- Macquarrie, John. *Existentialism*. Theological Resources. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *An Existentialist Theology*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Martin Heidegger*. Makers of Contemporary Theology. Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969.

- Magarshack, David, trans. *The Best Short Stories of Dostoevsky*. The Modern Library of The World's Best Books. New York: Random House, 1955.
- Maier, Gerhard. *Biblical Hermeneutics*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994.
- Mangano, Mark. *The Image of God*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008.
- Manton, Thomas. "A Treatise of Self-Denial." In *The Works of Thomas Manton*, edited by Thomas Smith, 15:179-294. London: Nisbet & Company, 1873.
- Maslow, Abraham H. "Existential Psychology—What's in It for Us?" In *Existential Psychology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 49-58. New York: Random House, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Motivation and Personality*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
- May, Rollo. *The Discovery of Being: Writings in Existential Psychology*. New York: Norton, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Freedom and Destiny*. New York: Norton, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Historical Roots of Modern Anxiety Theories." In *Anxiety*, edited by Paul H. Hoch, Joseph Zubin, 3-16. New York City: Grune & Stratton, 1950.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Meaning of Anxiety*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2015.
- May, Rollo, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger. *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*. New York: Touchstone, 1958.
- May, Rollo, and Irvin Yalom. "Existential Psychotherapy." In *Current Psychotherapies*, edited by Corsini, Raymond, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 354-91. Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock, 1984.
- McMinn, Mark R., and Clark D. Campbell. *Integrative Psychotherapy: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007.
- Medlock, Gordon. "The Evolving Ethic of Authenticity: From Humanistic to Positive Psychology." *The Humanistic Psychologist* 40, no. 1 (2012): 38-57.
- Messer, Stanley B., and Alan S. Gurman. *Essential Psychotherapies: Theory and Practice*. New York: Guilford, 2011.
- Michalson, Carl, ed. *Christianity and the Existentialists*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956.
- Mills, Jon. "Existentialism and Psychoanalysis: From Antiquity to Postmodernism." *Psychoanalytic Review* 90, no. 3 (June 2003): 269-79.
- Mitchell, Stephen A., and Margaret J. Black. *Freud and Beyond: A History of Modern Psychoanalytic Thought*. New York: BasicBooks, 1995.
- Moss, Donald. "The Roots and Genealogy of Humanistic Psychology." In *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice*, edited by James F. T. Bugental, J. Fraser Pierson, and Kirk J. Schneider, 3-15. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.

- Mowrer, Hobart. *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*. Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1961.
- Murray, John. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2015.
- Nagel, Thomas. *Mortal Questions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, and William J. Arnold, eds. *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation 1970*, vol. 18. Current Theory and Research in Motivation. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971.
- Neill, Stephen, and N. T. Wright. *The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Niebuhr, Reinhold. *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*. Library of Theological Ethics. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996.
- Noll, Mark A. *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*. Confessional Perspectives Series. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986.
- Olson, R. Paul "Christian Humanism." In *Religious Theories of Personality and Psychotherapy: East Meets West*, edited by R. Paul Olson, 247-324. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Pierre, Jeremy, and Mark Shaw. "The Nature of the Biblical Counseling Relationship." In *Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling*, edited by James MacDonald, Bob Kellemen, and Steve Viars, 309-23. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013.
- Piper, John, Winston Smith, Edward Welch, and Ellen Dykas. *On Relationships*. JBC Must Reads. Glenside, PA: CCEF, 2013.
- Potter, Andrew. *The Authenticity Hoax: How We Got Lost Finding Ourselves*. New York: Harper/HarperCollins, 2010.
- Powlison, David. *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Companions on the Long March." In *Speaking Truth in Love: Counsel in Community*, 187-93. Winston-Salem, NC: Punch, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Critiquing Modern Integrationists." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 24-34.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Crucial Issues in Contemporary Biblical Counseling." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 9, no. 3 (1988): 53-78.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies)." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 5-36.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Dynamics of Biblical Change." Class taken through the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation, Westminster Seminary, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Good and Angry: Redeeming Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2016.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt. 1)." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 1 (2013): 49-66.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "How Does Sanctification Work? (Pt. 2)." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 27, no. 2 (2013): 35-50.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13, no. 2 (1995): 35-50.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Sufficiency of Scripture to Diagnose and Cure Souls." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 2-14.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "What Do You Feel?" In *Seeing with New Eyes: Counseling and the Human Condition through the Lens of Scripture*, 211-23. Resources for Changing Lives, Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003.
- Pratico, Gary Davis, and Miles V. Van Pelt. *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Rahilly, D. A. "A Phenomenological Analysis of Authentic Experience." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 33, no. 2 (April 1993): 49-71.
- Reymond, Robert L. *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*. Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998.
- Ridderbos, Herman, and John Richard de Witt. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975.
- Roberts, Alexander, James Donaldson, A. Cleveland Coxe, and Allan Menzies. *Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*. Ante-Nicene Christian Library. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994.
- Rogers, Carl R. *Carl Rogers on Personal Power*. New York: Delacorte, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy: A Distinguished Psychologist's Guide to Personal Growth and Creativity* 8. Houghton Mifflin Company Sentry ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Some Questions and Challenges Facing Humanistic Psychology." *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1965): 1-5.
- Schaeffer, Francis A. *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy: The Three Essential Books in One Volume*. Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990.
- Schneider, Kirk J., and Alfried Längle. "The Renewal of Humanism in Psychotherapy: A Roundtable Discussion." *Psychotherapy*, Special Section: Humanism in Psychotherapy 49, no. 4 (December 2012): 427-29.
- Schneider, Kirk J., and Orah T. Krug. *Existential-Humanistic Therapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.
- Shields, Grant S., Wesley G. Moons, Carl A. Tewell, and Andrew P. Yonelinas. "The Effect of Negative Affect on Cognition: Anxiety, Not Anger, Impairs Executive Function." *Emotion* 16, no. 6 (September 2016): 792-97.

- Sigmund, Freud. *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*. New York: Norton, 1949.
- Silberman, Israela. "Religion as a Meaning System: Implications for the New Millennium." *Journal of Social Issues* 61, no. 4 (December 2005): 641-63.
- Steger, Michael F., and Patricia Frazier. "Meaning in Life: One Link in the Chain from Religiousness to Well-Being." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 52, no. 4 (October 2005): 574-82.
- Szasz, Thomas Stephen. *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*. Rev. ed. Perennial Library Psychology. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Person as Moral Agent." In *The Handbook of Humanistic Psychology: Leading Edges in Theory, Research, and Practice*, edited by James F. T. Bugental, J. Fraser Pierson, and Kirk J. Schneider, 83-86. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2015.
- Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Tillich, Paul. *The Courage to Be*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.
- Tripp, Paul David. "Data Gathering Part 2: What the Counselor Brings to the Process." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 8-14.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *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, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Opening Blind Eyes: Another Look at Data Gathering." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 14, no. 2 (Winter 1996): 6-11.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Strategies for Opening Blind Eyes: Data Gathering Part 3." *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1996): 42-51.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles*. Resources for Changing Lives. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000.
- Twenge, Jean M. *Generation Me*. New York: Free Press, 2006.
- Van Deurzen, Emmy. *Existential Counseling and Psychotherapy in Practice*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: SAGE, 2012.
- Van Leeuwen, Mary. "The Behaviorist Bandwagon and the Body of Christ, pt.1, What Is Behaviorism?" *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 31, no. 1 (March 1979): 3-8.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Behaviorist Bandwagon and the Body of Christ, pt. 2. A Critique of Ontological Behaviorism from a Christian Persepective." *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 31, no. 2 (June 1979): 88-91.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Behaviorist Bandwagon and the Body of Christ, pt.3. A Christian Examination of Applied Behaviorism." *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 31, no. 3 (September 1979): 129-38.
- Ven, J. A. van der. *Formation of the Moral Self*. Studies in Practical Theology. Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998.
- Vitz, Paul C. *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977.
- Wahl, Jean. *A Short History of Existentialism*. Translated by Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron. New York: The Philosophical Library, 1949.
- Wakefield, Norm. *Between the Words: The Art of Perceptive Listening*. Grand Rapids: F. H. Revell, 2002.
- Wampold, Bruce E. *The Basics of Psychotherapy: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. The Basics of Psychotherapy: An Introduction to Theory and Practice. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2010.
- Welch, Edward T. *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave: Finding Hope in the Power of the Gospel*. Resources for Changing Lives. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Shame Interrupted: How God Lifts the Pain of Worthlessness and Rejection*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Side by Side: Walking with Others in Wisdom and Love*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015.
- Wilcox, W. Bradford. "The Evolution of Divorce." *National Affairs* no. 1 (Fall 2009): page-page.
- Wilkerson, Mike. *Redemption: Freed by Jesus from the Idols We Worship and the Wounds We Carry*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
- Wolman, Benjamin B., ed. *The Encyclopedia of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Psychoanalysis*. A Henry Holt Reference Book. New York: Henry Holt, 1996.
- Wolpe, Joseph, and Stanley Rachman. "Psychoanalytic 'Evidence': A Critique Based on Freud's Case of Little Hans." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 131, no. 2 (1960): 135-48.
- Wood, Alex M., P. Alex Linley, John Maltby, Michael Baliouis, and Stephen Joseph. "The Authentic Personality: A Theoretical and Empirical Conceptualization and the Development of the Authenticity Scale." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 55, no. 3 (July 2008): 385-99.
- Yalom, Irvin D. *Existential Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Gift of Therapy: An Open Letter to a New Generation of Therapists and Their Patients*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.
- Yalom, Irvin D., and Molyn Leszcz. *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic, 2008.

## ABSTRACT

### THE MEANING OF BEING: THE CHALLENGES OF EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR BIBLICAL COUNSELING

Frederick Nobuya Rodeheaver, Ph.D.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017  
Chair: Dr. Jeremy P. Pierre

Chapter 1 explains the theoretical and practical similarities and distinctive between existential psychology and biblical counseling that justify the study. In addition, chapter 1 highlights the different approaches each system takes to the counseling relationship. The chapter also informs the reader of the historical, theoretical, and personal background to establish the overall trajectory of the research.

Chapter 2 establishes the origins of existential psychology as a movement, discusses the concept of “existence,” the crucial feature that distinguishes existential psychology from other psychologies and Christianity, and how this distinguishing feature is both its strength and weakness.

Chapter 3 focuses on the crucial questions that existential psychology asks that arise directly because of its distinguishing feature discussed in chapter 2. This chapter details the unique theoretical perspective and emphasis developed in existential psychology in response to its unique emphasis on existence and how it is developed in the counseling relationship.

Chapter 4 articulates the biblical-theological doctrine(s) that grounds a biblical counseling anthropology and offers the apologetic for this anthropology as superior to the existential understanding of man. This chapter recasts the theoretical foci and emphasis of chapter 3 in Christological terms and thus grounds the counseling relationship in its proper theological context.

Chapter 5 begins by revealing the drive in biblical counseling to improve its theory and methodology in general, but particularly in its understanding of the counseling relationship. The bulk of the chapter offers a methodology of cultivating a deeper counseling relationship based upon the insights, critiques, and work of chapters 1 to 4.

Chapter 6 reviews the salient points and critiques of both existential psychology and biblical counseling's anthropology and counseling relationship practice, reviews the overall arguments made in the study, and makes recommendations for future research.

## VITA

Frederick Nobuya Rodeheaver

### EDUCATION

B.A., LIFE Bible College, 1998  
M.A., Talbot School of Theology, 2001  
Certification, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation, Pennsylvania, 2010

### PUBLICATIONS

“Christianity & Counseling Review.” *Biblical Counseling Coalition*. August 21, 2013. <http://biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2013/08/21/counseling-christianity-review/>

### ORGANIZATIONS

The Evangelical Theological Society

### ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT

Adjunct Faculty, Fullerton Community College, 1999-2000  
Adjunct Instructor, Calvary Chapel School of Ministry, 1998

### MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, Calvary Chapel Pearl Harbor, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 1995  
Associate Pastor, Compass Bible Church, Columbia, Missouri, 2002-2004  
Lead Pastor, Compass Bible Church, Columbia, Missouri, 2005-2008  
Executive Pastor, Grace Evangelical Free Church of La Mirada, La Mirada, California, 2008-2015  
Senior Pastor, Christ Community Church, Laguna Hills, California, 2015-