

Christian Spirituality and Mental Health

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The Spiritual Life of the Therapist: We Become What We Habitually Reflect

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As image bearers we reflect, assimilate and are shaped by the forces that surround us. Therapists are profoundly impacted by the suffering and evil with which they sit. We become like that which we habitually reflect. This paper explores the potentially negative impact of therapeutic work and the call of the Scriptures in the life of the Christian therapist to reflect the image of Christ in this world and in our work. Five disciplines are considered as aids in shaping the therapist to reflect the image of Christ: worship, truth, study, prayer and obedience. As these disciplines are pursued, the life of Christ becomes the primary shaping force in the life and work of the therapist thereby bringing his redemptive power to bear in the work of therapy.

I periodically escape to a hideaway in the farm country of Pennsylvania, and am surrounded by beauty and quiet. I leave husband, sons, many patients—and their often critical needs—and an office full of associates. There is no alarm clock, no phone, no pager, no fax machine and no mail. I go only for a few days but those few days work wonders. I sleep, read, pray, walk, write and listen. The things that seemed so urgent have faded. My body and my mind slow way down.

The voice and stamp of the Creator/Decorator God is everywhere. The beauty of the rolling hills, the sunset and the sound of the running brook all remind me of Him. His Word is sweet in that place and my heart gets quiet before Him. I am reminded of Jesus and how we are told that He left the crowds and the demands of His life to be alone with God in the hills. In those alone times He and His Father talked. I too talk with my Father and He with me.

I find I am changed when I retreat. The beauty and quiet work their way into my bones and my spirit. I carry the steadiness of that quiet for a long time when I return to my ordinary life. I

find my heart is finely tuned to the voice of God and I hear Him far more clearly above the din after I have retreated. I return home, ready once more for schedules, noise, needs and pressures. I will return to that quiet place again for I have learned that it is a necessity if I am to do the work God has called me to in a way that brings delight to His heart.

In this essay I will focus on the spiritual life of the therapist—a fairly uncommon theme. But it is a topic I have come to see as absolutely central to the work we do. I hope to show you why I believe that is so and to put before you ways I have found to feed and strengthen my life with God.

I have written before concerning, "The Impact of Evil and Suffering on the Therapist," (Langberg, 2003) and I have been astounded at the response. It has been abundantly clear to me that Christians involved in counseling or therapy are feeling the powerful impact of evil and suffering on their lives. It is also evident that many are hungry and longing to know how to withstand such an impact without being misshapen by it. As a result, I have spent the last couple of years wrestling with these issues and asking God to help me further understand what happens to us as we sit day after day with sin and suffering and how He would have us respond.

I would like to present what I have learned. I will first invite you to consider why it is that we

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are impacted so much by the work we do. Then, I will examine the nature of those things that impact us. Finally, I will discuss some of the treasures God has given me to create *His* life in me.

Why Are We Impacted By Our Work?

Let us begin by considering why we should be impacted at all by anything. I believe it is because of who we are. We are told in the first chapter of Genesis that God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness ... So God created mankind in His own image ..." (Genesis 1:26, 27, ASV). The meaning of being created in the image of God has been discussed and debated for centuries. That is not the primary question I choose to wrestle with here. I would simply like to observe that if something is to be in the image of, or bear the likeness of, something else, it must by definition be capable of bearing an image. It must, in its very nature, be malleable, shapeable or capable of reflecting. You can stand in front of the trunk of a tree until you are one hundred and twenty and you will not see your image reflected there. However, put yourself on the edge of a pond and you will find yourself staring back. To have been created in the image of something is to *be*, in your very nature, an image bearer.

The principle is evident throughout Scripture. Jesus speaks of pruning a vine, shaping it. The prophet speaks of the Potter and the clay. We have the shaper and the shapee. Paul speaks of this principle when he says, "... by reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord we are transformed." (II Corinthians 3:18, ASV)

All of us are image bearers, mirrors. When we talk with one another we see reflected in each our histories, our country or locality of origin, the physical characteristics of our parents. If you listen carefully to me for a long enough time you may see the reflection of my political preference, what I have read lately, or the areas with which I struggle. We read such reflections all the time in the lives of our patients. We often see there the reflection of things they have never explicitly stated. Our ability to do so makes them nervous. They think we can read minds.

I remember many years ago working with a woman who grew up with a history of extreme neglect, violence and sexual abuse. On her first visit (and many succeeding ones) her fear was a palpable force in the room. Her body literally curled up as she cowered in my presence. She reminded me of a frightened dog who has been

much abused. She reflected in her very being the image of her history.

You watch someone in the workplace and see them interact with their superiors and you see reflected in them what we call "authority issues." Yet they have never told you about their lives. You stand in a department store and watch a dissatisfied customer ream out a clerk over some tiny thing and you know you are looking at someone with so-called "anger issues." We reflect in our persons the image of the forces we have encountered throughout our lives.

Now I believe this principle runs even deeper. I believe that because we as humans are soft, malleable, and permeable, that we not only reflect but we also assimilate.¹ To assimilate means to take something up and make it part of yourself. We carry within that which we reflect. We are image *bearers*, not simply image reflectors. If you stand in front of a mirror you see yourself reflected there. But if you walk away the image is gone. Nothing within the substance of the mirror is any different than before you were reflected in it. Mirrors do not assimilate your image. I believe that human beings, over time, take into their very substance the things that they reflect. They hold such reflections preserved within themselves.

The principle runs deeper yet again. We reflect; we assimilate; we are also shaped. We become like that which we habitually reflect. If you grow up with a violent father, recognizable pieces of him will eventually show in you one way or another. If you grow up with a self-absorbed, neglectful mother, recognizable pieces of her will show in you one way or another. Recognizable bits of one soul, over time, begin to show in another. We become like that which we habitually reflect. I know of a man who works daily, and has done so for years, with those who are dying of AIDS. He is touched by death and dying every day. Someone who works alongside him recently said, "His character is changing before our very eyes." In other words, he is so profoundly impacted by what he does, he does it so much, that he now bears in his person the image of death and grief.

As I have worked with survivors of sexual abuse for the past thirty three years, I have seen startling examples of these principles. Men and women who have been sexually abused carry within themselves both the impact and the image of the perpetrator. Not only do they assimilate his lies, but there are recognizable bits

of the perpetrator within them. The revelation of that fact greatly disturbs any survivor. That reflection can be seen in numerous ways - for example, it is seen when a survivor self-mutilates. It is seen when a survivor finds herself abusive toward another human being in some fashion. It is seen when all relationships are sexualized. It is most commonly seen in the vile and powerful lies lodged in their brains—lies that reverberate throughout their lives. The shaping influence of the perpetrator, over time, has been assimilated into the substance of who they are and continues to influence the scope of their lives long after they have physically left the perpetrator behind.

And so I believe, we have at work in our lives the principle of reflection, the principle of assimilation and the principle of shaping. It is fundamentally a part of who we are as image bearers. You and I *will* bear images in our person. We have no choice for it is who we are. The option lies not in whether or not we will be an image-bearer, but rather in whose image we will bear. What or who will it be that we reflect, that works its way down into our soul, that ultimately shapes us to look like itself?

Things That Shape Us

What are some of the images we bear? What do we reflect in our persons? Let me suggest some things to you. It is certainly not an exhaustive list.

One of the things we know as psychologists is that we reflect or bear the image of our histories. It is true on a physical level. I'll never forget the day I looked down at my hands on the steering wheel and realized, with some shock, that I was looking at my mother's hands. I went from having a young girl's hands to having my mother's hands. Heaven help them, if I catch the person who made the switch! I bear the image of my mother in my hands.

Even more astounding, I find I can see the image of my parents in my sons. Not just physically, but my sons carry in their personalities, traits of my parents. There are ways that they think or react that seem to be reflections of their grandparents.

Of course, our histories impact us far beyond physical or personality traits. The kind of parents we had, the way they treated us, loved each other or didn't, the things they taught us and the circumstances we lived through all have left their mark.

I have been profoundly, unalterably shaped by the fact that my father suffered from a debilitating illness for thirty years. From the time I was thirteen until I was forty-three I was influenced by his illness, his response to it, the changes it brought about in our circumstances and my mother's response. The way I think about suffering, sickness, God, and relationships all bear the image of those years. That image runs so deep in me that it impacts my patients in turn, for it has greatly affected my thinking about therapy. It is also, I think, my awareness of the impact of my father's life on me that has made me appreciate the profound impact of sexual abuse on the life of a developing girl or boy.

I am influenced also by the fact that my father was a colonel in the Air Force before he became ill. We moved almost every two years and by the time I graduated from high school I had attended eleven different schools. The image of those years has had many consequences, some negative and some positive. One of the things it has left imprinted on my nature is that difference, diversity, fascinates me. That has been a great asset for a therapist. I never assume anyone is fully like anyone else and when I encounter difference, no matter how unusual it is, I tend to go in boldly and explore the frontiers of another's mind.

You too have been impacted by your histories. You bear the image of many people and circumstances in your very person. Those things which you reflect influence your marriage, your work, your thinking and your faith. Assuming this is true, we are wise to have some understanding of those images we bear in our person.

We not only bear the images of the past in our person, but those of the present as well. You have within you recognizable bits of where you did your graduate training and those who mentored you. You carry the influence of the surrounding culture. You bear the image of those authors you so avidly pursue. Those with whom you live and work leave their mark on you. Those whom you love impact you perhaps most profoundly of all.

If you do the work of therapy day after day, then you also bear the image of your patients and their struggles in your person. Think with me about what it is our patients bring to us. As a rule, people do not come to see us for the purpose of sharing their happiness and stability with us. They come in crisis. They come afraid. They come needy. They come when they cannot see, cannot think and sometimes cannot function at all.

They, of course, bring us *their* histories. Like us, they take it with them wherever they go. The shaping influences of violence, sexual abuse, alcoholism, neglect and abandonment are often spilled out all over our offices and our persons.

They bring us their inabilities, inadequacies and failures. They come unable to think; to speak; to remember; to feel. They have destroyed their lives or want to. They have quit. They don't know how to get up. They have no hope.

They come into our offices bringing rage, violence, sobbing, ranting, terror, panic, fear and obsessions that won't quit. Not only will they describe such things, they may in fact, re-enact them with you. You then become the recipient of anger, accusations, fear, obsessions and seductions.

They bring you their stories. A perfect stranger walks into your room with a story unknown to you. They will take you places you have never been and perhaps do not want to go. They will force you to be present to abuse, violence, death, deceit, brokenness and darkness.

You sit surrounded by all of this stuff day after day, hour after hour, and you are an image bearer. You *will* be impacted or shaped. If you are not, something is dead, and frankly, such deadness is one of the ways we bear the image of what we do. Obviously, we are working with many things that are of the nature of death. Make no mistake, the work of therapy means sitting intimately with evil and suffering. To think otherwise is to be deceived. If we combine the knowledge that we work closely with evil and suffering with the knowledge that we are, by nature, image-bearers we should be terrified. However, the scenario is even more frightening than that. Not only are we image-bearers, but the people who come to us for help are themselves image-bearers. And you can be sure, that if they spend any significant amount of time working with you, they will walk away from that encounter bearing the image of you in their person.

I recently had a young woman tell me that when she was in college, one of her psychology professors told them that they should be very careful about who they would choose to see for therapy because if they go for any significant amount of time they will end up resembling their therapist in some way. My person not only impacts those who seek my help, they are shaped by their interactions with me.

The fact that we as therapists are impacted by our clients is acknowledged in the professional

literature. Jung referred to the phenomenon a long time ago when he spoke of working with psychotics and talked about the dangers of mental contagion or the adverse effects that one personality might have upon another. Judith Herman (1992, p. 141), the psychiatrist who wrote *Trauma and Recovery*, says that engagement in the work of trauma "poses some risk to the therapist's own psychological health." This is being acknowledged in discussions on secondary traumatic stress disorder. As a therapist who has worked with trauma for over three decades I can attest to the existence of such a phenomenon. I believe, however, that it is not restricted to those who work with trauma. I believe that it is a limited observation of a much broader principle—the fact that we are all image-bearers.

So, here we are, a bunch of image-bearers running around impacting each other. In the therapy hour, we are shaping and being shaped in a very intense fashion. To be a Christian in this world is to live with death and darkness. To do the work of therapy is to encounter such things intensely and repetitively. What am I to do so that I do not end up in the very shape of that death and darkness?

Reflecting the Image of Christ

How am I to keep from reflecting and assimilating bitterness, cynicism and despair? The answer, I believe, comes to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. He encountered death and darkness far more intensely than any of us ever will; and He was impacted, bearing the image of sin and suffering in His person. Yet somehow, He is not made in its image. He came into darkness and yet remained light. He lived with death and through death and yet remained life. He was surrounded by deception and yet remained truth. How is this so and if it can be so for Him, then can it be so for us as well?

Scripture tells us that through the incarnation, Jesus came in the flesh to explain the Father to us. We read in John 1:14, 18 (ASV): "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us...the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has explained the Father to us." We are told in Hebrews 1:4 that "the Son...is the express image, the exact representation of the Father's nature." If you want to know what God is like in being or character, then look at the person of Jesus. Jesus carries within His person the image, the exact representation, of the Father. Jesus too,

is an image-bearer. Jesus, as man, reflected and assimilated, was shaped by the character of the Father. Jesus, as man, also became like that which He habitually reflected. He became like the one He habitually loved. The Father is recognizable in the person of the Son.

At the same time, because He was man, Jesus was shaped by the forces around Him. He is called the Man of Sorrows because He bears in His image the sin and suffering of mankind. His form and face tell the story of grief, sorrow, affliction, oppression and rejection. His hands and His feet carry the literal scars of that sin and that suffering. In fact, the impact on His person is so profound that He will bear the scars for all eternity. Obviously then, bearing the image of God in one's person does not mean that one is untouched by suffering for God has been eternally touched by such things. To truly reflect the image of God in our being is to be affected, impacted by sin and suffering because God is so affected. The sin and suffering we encounter will be written in our eyes and across our faces. But it also means we will not be made into its image in any way that fails to look like Jesus. The key, I believe, is this: Though Jesus bears the image of our suffering in His person, because He habitually reflected the Father, He does so in a redemptive or transformative way. He bears death, and brings forth life. He bears sin, and brings forth redemption. He bears suffering, and brings forth healing and holiness.

If these principles of image-bearing are true, then to have lived with Christ must have made one like Christ; that is to say, a Christian (which literally means "Christ one"). To live with Christ *did* produce this effect. A handful of raw men spent three years with Him. They may not have fully understood it, but one day they found that they were different men. They found themselves, like their Master, going about and doing good. The people who watched them knew exactly how to account for it—"They have been," they said, "with Jesus." The mark of His character was upon them. Poor, Galilean fishermen reminding other people of Christ! These men suggested to others who watched them, the very character of God! What an astounding thought! That is why John taught that where we are not like Him it is because we do not know Him. To know Him truly is to bear His image in our person.

Jesus came in the flesh not only to explain the Father to us, but also for the purpose of accomplishing redemption. He came to buy back what

was lost (for the image of God in us was shattered). He came to set free the captives and to make all things new. I believe that you and I as believers first, and as therapists, second, are to live in such a way that we too explain the Father to others. While bearing the image of suffering in ourselves we are to habitually reflect the Father so as to serve as a redemptive force in this world. I believe that is true because Scripture calls us to walk as Jesus walked. That means that if we want the work that we do to restore and make new, if we want who we are to reflect the image of Christ to others, then we ourselves must incarnate who God is. We must learn to bear God's image in our persons. We must learn to be under God's influence more than any other influence, for to live with God is to become like God.

I am not referring to mere imitation. It is far deeper than that. It is a process. It is habitual. Paul acknowledges this dynamic when he speaks to the Galatians regarding his experiencing "the anguish of childbirth until Christ be formed in you" (Galatians 4:19, ESV). It is very clearly expressed in Paul's statement recorded in II Corinthians 3:18 (ESV) "And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory (or character) are being [gradually, hourly] transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." As we habitually, daily turn toward God we are made into that same image. If you and I desire to explain the Father to others, rather than be misshapen by the forces of death and darkness; if you and I desire to serve as a vehicle for redemption in the lives of others, then we must learn how to be shaped like Jesus. We must learn how to reflect His character so we are gradually transformed into His likeness.

I will close this essay by providing a brief overview of those things which God has given me and which God is using to gradually, hourly, shape me.

My Molten Soul

First and foremost, there is the foundational principle from which all else flows. If we look at the life of Jesus we see that the incarnation led to redemption by way of the cross. If the perfect Son of God had to go that way, it is unlikely you and I will be excused. To go by way of the cross, of course, speaks of many things. One of the things the cross does is give us the truth about what God thinks. The cross teaches us that this world,

and those of us who inhabit it, are so hideously dark and wrong that only the death of God himself could remedy it. The cross also demonstrates a depth of love for the unlovable utterly beyond our comprehension. It is a startling exhibition of the heart of God. In the cross we have an eternal symbol of God's point of view.

I have come to see that the only way I can hope to look like Jesus and bring life to others is by way of the cross. If I do not go by way of the cross and have put to death the things in me that are not of God, then those things will put to death the things that are of God, in me and in those whose lives I touch.

There are five specific ways that God continues to use to create his life in me. I first wrote about these in *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse* (Langberg, 2003). I will refer to them as disciplines. I choose that word, not because it is currently popular, but because it states my position. It reminds me of who I am. I am forever a learner. I am a disciple undergoing training. It is a position from which I will never graduate. These disciplines are simply some of the methods of instruction that God is using.

Worship

The first is the discipline of worship. God began to teach me about worship when I reached a critical juncture with a client and simply did not know what to do. I was truly facing a life and death situation. At such a time as this, I tend to go to God and ask "What should I do?" I do not know about you, but when I go to God with a question, I am, not infrequently, surprised by his response.

I was, at that time, in great need of an answer and waited for one expectantly. I needed to know what to do and what to say. Even waiting to hear God's answer at that time required a radical shift for me. I believed action was required immediately. The initial response from God was a very "loud" silence. Typically, my response to silence is to jump in and try to figure it out for myself. As a young therapist, I often responded to my clients' silences by filling them with words. It was *always* a mistake to do so. Being educable—though somewhat on the slow side spiritually—it dawned on me that if filling those silences between people with words or actions was a mistake, then perhaps the same thing might be true in my relationship to God.

As I waited, the answer came. It was not an answer that said, "Do this or that." It was an

answer that surprised me. I had come to see that the Christian lives out his life in the context of the most important battle of time and eternity. It is a battle against a relentless, deceptive, brilliant schemer with massive forces we cannot see. In such a context every fiber of our being calls for action. And yet, in that context, the answer I got back was, "Worship me." You want to outsmart this schemer? You want to win in this battle? You want what you do to be deathless, redemptive? You want to leave behind you the aroma of Jesus? Then worship me.

To truly go by way of the cross is to fall down and worship. What other possible response is there to the sight of the great God of the universe bending down to bear our sin? It is very easy, when working with hurting people, to think that speaking the truth of God into the situation is of primary importance, or that loving the people of God is foremost. But the great essential, the source from which all else is to spring, is the private relationship of worshipping God. Nothing—no crisis, no need, no work, no person—should ever remove us from being what Amy Carmichael often calls, a worshiper at the feet.

The discipline of worship reminds me that God is God. The discipline of worship is what keeps me from being shaped by the evil and suffering I confront on a daily basis. We are profoundly shaped by what we worship. None is worthy of our worship but the Lamb that was slain. The discipline of worship reminds me that God is holy and just, though this world is teeming with evil and injustice. Worship reminds me that he who is high and lifted up also dwells with the humble and broken, and that, because of the cross, none of us, no matter how small or crushed, need be afraid. Worship takes me into the very presence of God. The power and healing force of the presence of God then shapes me so that I am changed to look like, to bear the image of, the one I worship.

Truth

The second is the discipline of truth. Many years ago, when I first began hearing about sexual abuse from my clients, I was shocked, and found it incomprehensible. Not unbelievable; simply difficult to understand. A time came when I was asked to speak on the topic of abuse, and I did as I so often do—I began my study by looking up the word. Our word for abuse comes from the Latin, *abutor*, which means "to use

wrongly." Further definition includes, "to insult, to consume, to violate, to tread underfoot, to tarnish" (Costa & Herberg, 1966, p.11).

If abuse occurs when we treat another in injurious ways then, I realized, I must admit to being an abuser. I have used others wrongly. I have shown partiality or favoritism. I have tried to manipulate others to serve my own ends. I have tread others underfoot by ignoring them or by treating them as if they did not matter.

The discipline of truth as seen at the cross is that I am guilty of abuse. I, who react with shock, surprise and disdain for perpetrators, also abuse or violate others. I, who find abuse of children with one's genitals incomprehensible, have abused others with my tongue. The ground at the foot of the cross is indeed level. The discipline of truth helps me see who I am before God, lest I become haughty and blinded to my own mistreatment of others. The discipline of truth prevents me from getting filled up with hate or condescension toward perpetrators, lest an arrogant rage cause me to mislead others in the way they confront the evil that is in their lives. The discipline of truth keeps me ever before God, pleading with the psalmist, "Keep your servant from presumptuous or arrogant sins; cleanse me from secret, hidden sins" (Psalm 19:13, NASV). The discipline of truth ever reminds me that no matter how much I know or how many people I help that I am ever a learner, a disciple undergoing training. I am not the Teacher. I am only a servant of the Teacher. There is no arrogance at the foot of the cross.

Study

The third discipline that instructs me in my life and work is study. God has said that God's thoughts and mine are not the same. My thoughts are easily influenced by the people and experiences I encounter. If I am to think God's thoughts, then I must engage in disciplined study of those thoughts. I will fail to bring light and life to others unless I live and think among the facts as God sees them.

I have found that there are two kinds of study that need to inform both my life and my work. The first of these is the study of Scripture. Whatever I am dealing with in a life, be it my own or another's, it must be built on, and permeated by, the truths of Scripture. I need to have my life and my mind saturated by the facts in God's book, living among them and continually asking God how to apply them.

When Jesus gave us the first and greatest commandment he said that we were to love the Lord (worship) with all of our minds. There is much discussion today about the fact that Christian thinking is a rare and difficult thing. If part of what the cross teaches is God's point of view, then part of its call to me is to acquire the mind of Christ, to learn to think God's thoughts. Nothing I think is valid unless it is based on God's understanding of that thing. The discipline of study will, over time, train my mind to see things from God's point of view, rather than my own. The discipline of study will, as I bow to it, work out the truths of God in my life so I do *not just know* what God says, but I *live* what God says. We fool ourselves if we think we have actually studied the Word, when we have merely read it, yet failed to obey it. Any truth of Scripture we have read and not obeyed, we do not truly know.

The second kind of study that needs to inform my life and my work is the study of people. If I am not a student of people (instead of theories), then I will be of little use when it comes to skillfully applying God's truth to their lives. I need to understand people—how they think, how they feel, what has shaped them. I need to be ever learning no matter how many degrees or years of experience I have. I need to read, study, ask questions, seek out supervision and listen, listen, listen to people. As a therapist God brings me into contact with all sorts of sordid human "stuff." It is easy to be arrogant and assume I know what someone else is like, but if I assume I know, I will very likely misunderstand them and ineptly apply God's Word to their lives as well. I will hear a problem and apply a text like the jab of a spear. The study of human beings can be confusing and messy. Many of us prefer to study our theories, theological and/or psychological. I am not suggesting that theories are not helpful. Theories are part of what we should study. I am saying that unless we discipline ourselves to live among the facts of God's word, as well as the human facts, we will miss the mark in our work.

The discipline of study keeps me ever a student, one who listens, examines and pays attention. The study of God's Word in its proper sense, keeps me from simply acquiring more and more knowledge, and causes me to continually bow before what I learn, so that my Teacher might work in me what his life and death have taught me. The ongoing study of human beings keeps me listening acutely, so

that my responses, verbal and nonverbal, might be wise, loving and timely applications of the truth of God.

Prayer

The fourth discipline that feeds my life in Christ is prayer. Prayer does not seem to be anything we do naturally or easily. It is, however, a discipline Jesus modeled for us and exhorted us to do. Jesus was continually in contact with God through prayer and we are called to do the same. As the years pass I find I am coming to view prayer in quite a different way than previously. I used to think of prayer as a way of getting things from God. However, if I consider prayer by looking at the cross I find that my former view is backwards. Prayer is not about God indulging my spiritual propensities, as if somehow I needed things to go my way in order to serve him. Rather, prayer is for the purpose of getting to know God and developing God's life in me.

Jesus' prayer just prior to the cross was that "all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us..." (John 17:21, ASV). Surely, that prayer, above all others, is the one that God will honor. To be one with God means to think like God, to be like God, to look like God. If that is Jesus' prayer for me, then how can I pray for anything else?

I am finding that my prayers tend to run down two different channels. The first of these is that I am continually asking God to teach me how to think about something the way that God does, to love someone the way that God does. In essence, no matter what I encounter, in the office and out, the request is, "Show me who you are and how you would be, and then make me like you." Because of the work of Jesus on the cross, I can boldly enter the presence of God requesting to be made like God wherever I am, so that God's name is glorified.

Secondly, rather than simply praying for what I want, I am learning that therapy and the ministry of intercession go hand in hand. It is true that as counselors we have a profound impact on those we counsel. It is also true that we are, as human beings, very limited in what we can do. Prayer not only enables me to apprehend the nature of God and begin to assimilate God's thinking; prayer also allows me the inestimable privilege of being part of the unseen work of God in another's life. As we intercede, God works out things often choosing not to show us

for a long time. Entering the school of intercession means learning to believe that God will do God's work, though we see no evidence of it in the broken life before us. It is a strenuous school, for we would much rather push and pull on the life in front of us trying to force change, rather than live out Christ before them and wait for him to use our intercession as a means to touch them.

Obedience

The final discipline I have found necessary is the discipline of obedience. Certainly the concept of obedience is woven throughout all of those mentioned above. I find within myself however, a propensity to simply externalize the truths of God. By that I mean acquiring knowledge about God and his word, and even exercising the disciplines I have mentioned, without being shaped and altered by them. Therefore, I find it helpful to continually state to myself the need for obedience, or for the outworking of what God has wrought at the cross.

We cannot be conductors of the life of God to others unless that life permeates, shapes, our very being. Death is transformed into life only by the work of the Spirit of God in a life. If the result of truth, worship, study and prayer is not obedience, then death will reign. Our lives will not be redemptive in the lives of others unless we have learned to bow to God's work of redemption in us. Obedience results in lives that explain the grace and truth of the Father to others. Obedience results in lives that are used to buy back others from the realm of death in the name of Jesus. Obedience results in lives that bear the image of Jesus in them.

As therapists we have seen the power and darkness around us. And I know we have seen and felt the great suffering of others. I also suspect that for many of us the longing of our heart is to bring life. As Christians who have seen glimmers of the greatness of our God, tasted of the love of the Father, and experienced the beauty of redemption in Christ, how can we not obey? The discipline of obedience means that our faithfulness to him is demonstrated by taking heed to both ourselves and our doctrine (1 Tim.4:6), so that we bear an ever-growing likeness to the person of Jesus.

Summary

You and I were created by the Almighty God to be image-bearers. Those things which surround

us imprint us with their image. We, in turn, impact others. The principle is: We become like that which we habitually reflect. Unless we all with unveiled face reflect the character of our Lord, so that we are hourly being transformed into God's likeness, we will be likely to catch the soul disease with which we are working instead of helping to cure it. As sinners, who serve as therapists to those both devastated by the evil of others and yes, are also evil themselves, we will not survive unless we know how to become like the cedars of Lebanon. Their most striking characteristic is that instead of feeding parasites, the strength of the life within these trees is so great, it kills the parasites. May we learn from God how to be so filled with God's life and how to so clearly bear God's image that like the cedars of Lebanon, our very existence destroys those things that are of the nature of death. May our work in the dark and painful places of others' lives be a redemptive work because, bearing God's image in our person, God's life is being poured out through us all the time.

Note

1. The concepts of mirroring, assimilating and shaping originally came from a sermon by Henry Drummond, "The Changed Life" found in Drummond (1930) *The Greatest Thing in the World*, London: Collins.

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