



## Imago Dei and Family Therapy: A Communications Framework

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## The Importance of Self-Image and Self-Worth

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- Our self image reflects how we see ourselves as human beings
- Our self-image impacts our self esteem and our sense of worth and worthiness.
- Poor self image may be result of accumulated criticism from childhood, from family systems and from other assorted sources.



## Achieving Self-Worth

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- Achieving a sense of worth is a key driving force in our lives and our concern about our worth and value is always present
- As human beings we yearn to experience high value and worth
- Our sense of worth is related to our emotional reactions
- Our sense of worth and value is tied into our psychological survival



## A High Self-Image, Self-Esteem and Self-Worth

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- People with high self-esteem feel worthy within themselves and accepted by others.
- Feeling good and positive about key parts of their life, mind, emotions, personality and relationships
- Ability to accept oneself.



## A Low Self-Image, Self-Esteem and Self Worth

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- Many suffer from a sense of woundedness - not feeling worthy and not feeling valued
- Many suffer from the pain of living
- Many suffer from being in families where they did not experience validation, love, a sense of being protected



## Some Indicators of Low Self-Image: Not Feeling Worthy or Valued

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- Comparing self to others
- Having self-doubts about attaining goals
- Feeling unlovable
- Motivated by the need to fit in
- Feeling self conscious and unable to be assertive
- Loneliness has caused drug/alcohol use and forms of self-harm
- Feelings of depression



# Who Are We?

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## What Is our “True Image”?



### Biblical Foundation for Addressing Self-Image: Imago Dei

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**Genesis 1: 26-27, 31 (NIV)**

- <sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,<sup>[a]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”
- <sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
- <sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

**Psalm 139:14**

- <sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well



## Imago Dei: Bearing the Image of God

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- Idea that humans are created in image of God and implies that all human beings have inherent dignity and worth.
- God's nature embodies ultimate worth as the Supreme Being from whom all else flows.
- Consequently humans have intrinsic worth because God, in whose image they are created is the personification of worth



## Imago Dei: Bearing the Image of God

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- The possibility that we in our essential nature mirror the divine, we bear the image of God it is imprinted on our souls.
- In the midst of rubble of our sense of fragmented self, and our sense of unworthiness there is that sense that we are valued
- We cannot be separated from bearing the image of God even in our "brokenness".



## Imago Dei: Bearing the Image of God

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- In addition to man being created in the image of God, Jesus represents the image of God in man (humanity) - God in human form.
- Through Jesus, God raised the status of human existence.
- The capacity to love is the essential component of Imago Dei since love exemplifies Christ's life.
- To be created in the image of God means that individuals are able to enter into loving relationships with God, with each other, and with creation.



## Imago Dei and Brokenness

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- The Image of God in man is marred by effects of his brokenness:
  1. self-centered,
  2. self-absorbed,
  3. self-promoting,
- Brokenness negatively affects man's sense of worthiness, value, relational capacity as well as the capacity for human love.



- How Might Family Therapy help Restore a Sense of Worthiness?



## **PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS**

- Respect for the individual
- Self-esteem important family function
- Individual always in touch with their (growth) potential
- Self-help ability and self-discovery—given a nurturing environment.



## Conceptual framework: major tenets.

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- Each person contains all the resources one needs for growth and healthy functioning
- Therapist beliefs an important tool



## Dysfunctional Communication

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- Poor communication is indirect, unclear, vague, dishonest, distorted, and incomplete
- Functional families have clear, complete, congruent communication
- Nurturing, low self-esteem and poor communication
- Roles and rules to govern family processes
- Family presenting problems, coping and low self esteem





## Four dysfunctional communication stances

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- Different ways to hide the reality of one's real feelings of low self-esteem and low self-worth
- Family members and various roles



## The *Placator*

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- Attempt to please others/emotional survival depends on it
- Engages in apologetic, tentative, and self-effacing communication
- Pleases others to avoid rejection
- Blocks and inhibits important communication attempts between members



## The *Blamer*

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- Attempt to control others
- A sense of importance despite inner feelings of loneliness and failure.
- Engages in fault finding, name calling, and criticism.
- Cannot feel good or secure without placing family members in the “one down” position



## The *super-reasonable*

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- Hides feelings by attempts to anesthetize and insulate from true feelings.
- Response to family family conflict, is often an intellectual or overly rational one—bypassing the (emotional) inner self
- This posture conveys noninvolvement
- Inner feelings are downplayed or avoided altogether
- Encouraging other family members to do the same,
- Impeding open and honest communication



## The *irrelevant*

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- Handles family conflict and stress by pretending it is not there
- Internally feels uncared for and alienated from the family
- Attempts to refocus family communication elsewhere from the present and away from inner feelings
- Impact on family communication can be one of incomplete communication




## Incongruent Communication Messages


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- Matching verbal (overt) message with the nonverbal (covert) message
- Contradictory messages are sent via different levels (e.g., verbal versus nonverbal)
- Intended messages are distorted
- Family members are often confused, conflicted, and even hurt
- Listener does not know which level message to respond
- Need for clarification and getting the person touch with feelings

## Metacommunication

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- Message about the message
  - Punctuates and explains the real and possibly 'hidden' message to the receiver
  - The sender's full and intended message (functional or dysfunctional, or congruent or incongruent)
  - One "cannot NOT metacommunicate" ie the message may be affirmed and punctuated by nonverbal messages.
  - Metacommunication can also be expressed by facial grimacing, body posture, and lack of eye contact

## Double-Bind Message

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- Also referred to as 'double-level' message
  - The message itself (statements or commands) is paradoxical
  - The messages are mutually exclusive, in that the receiver feels punished (or is punished) no matter which way he or she responds
  - Can be considered a 'catch-22': damned if you do and damned if you don't

## Family Rules and Roles

- Central to understanding family pathology and dysfunction
- A transgenerational issue
- Expected behaviors that get woven in the “family fabric”
- Behaviors that family members believe should or should not be performed
- Healthy, functional, and adaptive family rules and roles are clear, flexible, and adaptive to the environment and changing developmental needs
- Dysfunctional family rules are rigidly enforced, autocratically developed

## Family Myths and Secrets

- Typically erected to ‘protect’ some family members
- Members do not comment about these areas openly and often justify their secrecy
- Some family myths and secrets are traceable back through three or more generations.



## ROLE OF THE THERAPIST

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- Not one of a neutral party standing on the sidelines casually intervening from time to time
- Help people realize their own potential
- *Facilitator* (of healthy communication within the family)
- *Role model* to the family (for good communication),
- *Mediator* (to help families with communication impasses)
- *A teacher and educator* (to help the family see new solutions for old problems and view new ways of coping with problems)



## Therapeutic Tools and Techniques

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- *Family Sculpture*
- *Communication Stances*
- *Reframing/Relabeling*
- *Humor*
- *Touch*



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