

Development on Purpose

Instructor Resources

Chapter One: Biblical Themes to Ground Us

Connection to 2015 EPAS of the CSWE

This chapter may be used to explore the following EPAS core competencies:

Competency 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

In looking at these biblical themes, social workers are applying knowledge of human behavior and the social environment to engage with clients and constituencies.

Competency 7: Assess Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

In learning about and applying these biblical themes, social workers are applying knowledge of human behavior and the social environment in the analysis of assessment data from clients and constituencies.

Competency 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities

In learning about and applying these biblical themes, social workers are applying knowledge of human behavior and the social environment in interventions with clients and constituencies.

Key Concepts and Terms

This chapter centers around the idea that we cannot ignore aspects of our creational nature when we study HBSE. To do so would be ignoring fundamental realities about how and why we were made and why we do what we do. These realities are part of the “human behavior” and the “social environment” we seek to understand in every specific case and every policy that impacts those with whom we serve.

At this point, encourage students to begin thinking about these biblical themes as *starting points* for understanding human behavior in the social environment (HBSE), not as concepts simply “added on” to prevailing theories. Point out

Persons are relational
Humans sin and need redemption
Creation is in need of restoration
Persons are embodied
Humans are agents

also that these themes are enormously helpful for their potential to shed light on the most complex of cases.

Agency—the ability of a person to make choices and to act within a particular environment

Confirmation bias—tendency to pay particular attention to information data that reinforces one's beliefs and to minimize information that challenges them

Self-serving bias—tendency to credit successes to our individual abilities, but blame failure on things outside of our control

In-group bias—tendency to view one's own group as superior and other groups as inferior

Discussion Questions

1. How does an understanding of the universal nature of sin impact the way we interact with those who are suffering?
2. How does the concept of embodiment impact our work with clients? What examples of prioritizing embodiment can you identify in various areas of social work practice?
3. Many Christians in social work are employed in secular settings. How can one incorporate these biblical themes in settings where they cannot be explicitly discussed or referenced?
4. Do you think scientists will eventually discover a biological origin for every human response or behavior? If so, how will this change your understand of agency?

Class Activities and Assignment Ideas

1. Pass out the following case description and ask students to read it individually. Then separate into small groups and identify how the five biblical themes are represented in this case involving domestic violence. Alternatively, you could use this case and the following questions as a writing assignment.

Janelle Roberts is a 48 year-old female living in rural New York. She has been married to Tom for 25 years and has three children, ages 19, 16, and 13. Tommy, 19, lives at home and attends a community college for computer programming, Maria, 16, is a sophomore in high school, and Sawyer, 13, is a seventh grader. Janelle works second shift as a LPN at a nearby nursing home and Tom is in charge of managing the facility at another local nursing home.

The Roberts family struggle in multiple ways. For some time, there has been high conflict between both parents and the two older children. Tommy and Maria indicate they do not respect either of their parents, viewing them as weak and not very intelligent. They frequently violate family rules, staying out past curfew, partying with peers, and isolating in their rooms when they are home. Sawyer is a withdrawn child with few friends or close relationships. He spends all of his time out of school playing video games in his room. All three children are underperforming academically.

The relationship between Janelle and Tom is very poor. The relationship involves domestic violence from Tom to Janelle which has steadily increased from emotional abuse early in the marriage to physical abuse in the past several years. As teens, the children are aware of the abuse and, in the past, have tried to intervene. Currently, however, they primarily cope by withdrawing from their parents and the home whenever possible. Janelle has disclosed the abuse to a friend from work who has encouraged her to seek specialized domestic violence assistance, but she has not followed through due to concerns about finances if she were to separate from Tom.

Ask the students to answer the following questions about this case.

- a. Families are a core part of God's design for the nurture of both children and adults. How is the Roberts family functioning at this point? What relational concerns do you have for the members of the family?
 - b. Where do you note the presence of sin in this case? Remember that pointing out sin is never for the purpose of judgement, but for redemption. Who needs redemption and this family and what might that look like?
 - c. Families never operate in a vacuum. They exist within larger systems. How might those systems be failing this family?
 - d. Individuals perpetrate domestic violence for many reasons. Behavior can never be excused by biology, but can you identify physiological variables that factor into Tom's behavior?
 - e. There are problems related to agency in this family. What members are struggling with agency and how might these struggles be resolved?
2. The chapter mentions that *we* are relational because we're made in God's image and *He* is relational. In small groups, ask students to develop a plan and then to roleplay teaching this truth to a young child.
 3. There is difficulty in achieving a balance between acknowledging sin and holding on to grace and redemption—a common theme in Paul's letters in the New Testament. In small groups, ask students to brainstorm an example that illustrates these concepts in balance.
 4. We are each impacted by the fall in the sense that our views of ourselves get distorted. Sometimes we think too highly of ourselves and other times, we may view ourselves with shame or self-loathing. In small groups, ask students to contrast the distorted ways we often view

ourselves with Romans 5:5, “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” How does the concept that God longs to pour His love into our lives impact our work with people?

5. Play this brief video clip entitled “*Inside: Undercover in North Korea: 1 of 5*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4RwAhbA9wE>

Ask students to consider the concept of agency as it applies to individuals under authoritarian rule. What type of rights are thwarted in their daily life and how might this affect their growth, development, and creativity?

6. In small groups, ask students to connect the research regarding parenting styles (that an authoritative style facilitates the best outcome versus a permissive or authoritarian style) to this chapter’s discussion of agency. How might these areas be connected?

7. Ask students to write 2-3 paragraphs providing their opinion and rationale for each of the following questions. Ask them to additionally indicate whether their beliefs are based on their faith, personal experience or observation, or schooling.

1. Are we products of nature or of nurture?
2. Is human behavior determined or are we free to make choices?
3. Are people inherently good or bad?
4. Do we possess a physical body and non-physical soul/spirit, or are we fully physical and embodied people?
5. How do your answers to these questions influence how you would help a person?