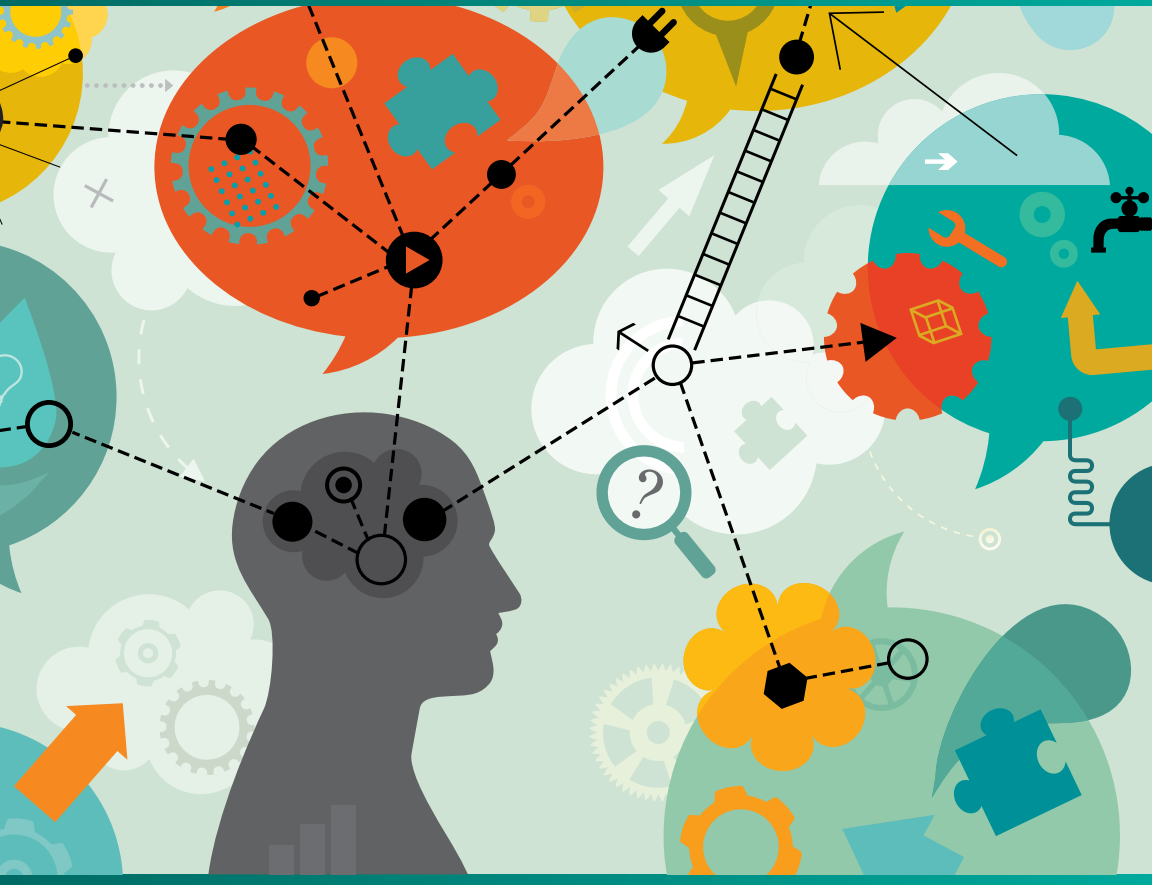
Development on Purpose

Faith and Human Behavior in the Social Environment

Lisa Hosack



Development on Purpose

Faith and Human Behavior in the Social Environment

Lisa Hosack

Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Preface 1

Chapter One
Biblical Themes to Ground Us 9

Chapter Two
A Theological Model for Understanding Human Behavior in the Social Environment (HBSE) 27

Chapter Three
The Perspectives of Social Work from the Lens of Faith 37

Chapter Four
The Biological Dimension 57

Chapter Five
The Psychological Dimension 77

Chapter Six
The Social Dimension 101

Part Two

Chapter Seven
Infancy: Early Growth toward God and Others (ages 0–2) 123

Chapter Eight
Childhood: Playing and Learning (ages 3–12) 143

Chapter Nine
Adolescence: Leaning into Identity (ages 13–18) 161

Chapter Ten
Emerging Adulthood: Feeling In-Between 179

Chapter Eleven
Middle Adulthood: At the Intersection of Growth and Decline 199

Chapter Twelve
Older Adulthood: Finishing Well 215

Preface

One of the things I learned quickly in my roles as a student, social worker, parent, and eventually social work professor, is that while human nature and development is fascinating, it's also incredibly complex and multifaceted. You don't have to work very long in the social work field to encounter head-scratching examples such as siblings raised in the same home environment who turn out as entirely different adults. Or children taught in identical educational environments who wind up learning completely different things. Or the way in which some adults who have experienced trauma recover and grow from suffering while others get trapped in resentment, hopelessness, and despair.

Social workers have long believed that individuals cannot be understood without a careful examination of the person *and* their environment—their families, schools, neighborhoods, ethnic groups, workplaces, and so on. Most social workers are also familiar with the need to do a micro and macro examination of a case in order to understand the immediate context of the individuals as well as the broader forces that impact their lives. That means that studying the health of a depressed client's marriage is no more important than studying the nature of the neighborhood in which the couple rents an apartment. Those forces work together, along with many other important variables, to impact the daily realities experienced by those we serve.

What social workers know (or perhaps intuitively sense) is that there is a complex interplay of nature, nurture, and environmental influences that intertwine to inform and shape individuals. In fact, we could safely say that development takes a uniquely different form in each person on the planet. Indeed, while there are indeed quantifiable aspects of the ways in which humans grow and develop, the particulars of each person and the context in which they live come together uniquely, creating an infinite number of variables and outcomes. And that infinite number of variables, while frustrating for those who wish to accurately describe and predict human behavior, meld in altogether unique and individual-

ized ways. This is the wonder and mystery of human development. No two stories are the same.

Taking into account both the person and the environment is also important because social workers want to help clients to actually change and accomplish their goals and, therefore, need to know where obstacles to progress actually lie. To do this, social workers naturally want to locate the heart of the problem. But a problem may have multiple different underlying causes. Take a depressed male client, for example. He may be depressed because his marriage and family are functioning poorly. In this case, his sense of hopelessness about relationships in his *micro* environment surfaces as the primary factor behind his depression. Another plausible option is that his depression is rooted in pessimism about the future, an obstacle linked to his *macro* environment. The client may have marketable job skills but live in an economically depressed community with bleak vocational prospects. We might also conclude that the man's depression is the result of unresolved psychological issues from his past. He could be depressed because current stresses have overwhelmed his ability to cope or because past emotional wounds have been triggered by his current circumstances. Alternatively, the source of the client's struggle may be neither his interpersonal relationships, setting, nor psychological history, but an illness within his physical body. Finally, we might suggest that, like dominoes, these areas have *each* been activated, one after another, in rapid succession. Indeed in many cases, there isn't a singular cause to a problem such as depression, but a combination of factors working together.

Whenever social workers attempt to help, they face the challenge of holding elements of the unique person in one hand along with elements of the unique environment in the other hand. Social workers are trained to value an understanding of both the person and their environment, a concept often referred to as *person-in-environment*. Historically, social workers have looked to theories for help in explaining this tension. As we will see in later chapters, theories typically emphasize the things held in one hand or the other. *Psychodynamic theory*, for example, locates the problem within the "person" hand. In our depressed male case, it encourages us to look to unresolved past psychological issues as primary sources of his depression. *Cognitive-behavioral theory* also locates the problem within the person hand and suggests that the client has unproductive thought patterns that make and keep him depressed. This theory may connect, for example, his inability to find work with a view of himself as inherently flawed. Other approaches, such as *social learning theory,* look to the "environment" hand, explaining our client's problem on the basis of what he has learned from various social groups, especially those modeling harmful behaviors.

Persons and environments are both divine priorities. Consider, for example, how God interacts with us as separate and unique persons, demonstrating the importance of our individuality. Our unique emotions, concerns, and circumstances are never outside of God's concern. The Psalm writers speak often of God's tender and watchful care for their needs as individuals. On the other hand, God desires just environments where people can flourish as persons, families, and communities. The Old Testament prophets write about our responsibility to work toward policies and practices that are characterized by mercy and justice. We are called to fight injustice and its consequences in our local and global communities. Indeed, Scripture speaks of the ways in which God attends to both the "person" and "environment" hands by attending to us individually while simultaneously shepherding all of humanity, not to mention the entirety of the natural world. Imagine God holding you and the entire universe in His hands. Colossians 1:17 indicates that indeed God is holding all things together through the work of Jesus Christ.

Adding to the complexity of our person and environment challenge is the reality that development is constantly in flux. This is true because nature, nurture, and environmental influences themselves are constantly changing. Human development is not only unique in the way it plays out within each individual; it's an ever-moving target. Children get older and grow up, poverty increases or decreases, physical bodies decline, and religious beliefs strengthen and weaken.

What does this mean for social workers seeking to understand their clients well in order to help them well? Among other things, it means that while most of us like simple answers to problems, categories do not sufficiently capture or explain human development. Grouping individuals by things such as age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status gives us helpful parameters, but never the complete picture. Theories are also useful, but also fall short. Instead, what is consistently required from each of us is a posture of humility and curiosity toward the persons we serve. The complexity of these persons and their environments necessitates carefully listening to their stories and the particular ways they have been shaped by their places and experiences. Ultimately, this is what makes social work so fascinating — no story is the same.

This book reaches farther than most by incorporating faith-based themes with our understanding of persons and environments. This is an important gap in social work literature as the Christian faith offers insights about persons and environments that add remarkable depth and wisdom. As persons of faith in social work, we draw upon rich theological themes related to God, our roles in relationship to God, and the world we

inhabit. For example, biblical themes related to our individuality, relationality, and embodiment provide the appropriate context for accurately understanding human behavior and development.

Our faith has much to say about human nature. For example, the Bible highlights the fallen, sinful nature of humans, a stark reality for each of us. Christian theology also highlights the ways that sin extends to all of creation and, therefore, leaves its indelible mark on every social institution—families, workplaces, schools, neighborhoods, and even churches. Every conceivable environment has been tainted by sin. We see its destructive consequences in our own actions, the actions of others toward us, and the large-scale actions of nations. As social workers, we see the marks of sin all over the cases in which we work.

But the Christian story is ultimately one of redemption and hope. Though sin is destructive and the world deeply broken, God has hardly abandoned His creation. Jesus Himself comes to us like a physician to the sick, offering grace, mercy, and healing. As Christians in social work, we act as God's hands and feet, his tangible, earthly representatives. But we must never imagine ourselves as those who are first on the scene. God is always there before us, calling forth light from darkness.

The Bible also reveals the deeply relational nature of humans, that is, the way in which we are created and hardwired for connection with God and other people. Healthy and life-giving relationships form the rich context—the environment—by which we experience divine and human love. Relationships enable us to grow into the persons we were originally created to be and to fulfill the purposes for which we were created.

We will explore each of these points later, but for now we can conclude that Christianity provides particular insights that should not be minimized or ignored. Yes, the study of persons and their environments is complex, but we're also given foundational parameters by which to ground our exploration. Anchoring our study of Human Behavior in the Social Environment [HBSE] in these theological truths enhances our ability to understand persons and their environments.

I want to note at the start that a Christian perspective does not negate the importance of the many theories of human behavior or development offered by social work or sister disciplines. A Christian understanding can, however, prompt us to question, enthusiastically adopt, or soundly reject some of the presuppositions underlying commonly-held theories. By examining theories in light of biblical themes, we are better equipped to understand and serve. Additionally, I am not suggesting that there is necessarily a qualitative difference between the work done by Christians in social work and social workers from other backgrounds. That is not my argument here.

Instead, I outline a perspective I believe to be helpful and important to Christians in social work. We cannot fully understand ourselves and one another without grasping, for example, the ways we were created. Or appreciate the power of sin to deceive and tempt, drawing us toward activities that ultimately bring harm. How often do we as social workers become exasperated when we coach our clients about the right thing to do, yet they still choose the wrong direction. An understanding of biblical themes can lead us to more accurately understand the dynamics surrounding our clients and their struggles. By this I do not imply just an *intellectual* grasp of the situation, but an understanding that translates into empathy, grace, and accountability. I believe that a more accurate assessment of persons and their situations, one that accounts for biblical themes of human nature, also facilitates responses that more closely reflect those to which we are called.

Accounting for biblical themes is also important because it can sustain us during times of discouragement. Working with people is less predictable than working with, say, computers. Both entail flexibility and trouble-shooting, but our clients cannot be programmed to act in the ways we wish they would. At times they make destructive and harmful decisions. When you care about people and their environments, setbacks are disheartening. Grounding ourselves in realities such as human agency, fallenness, and promise of redemption can sustain us when we feel ineffective or even angry. Understanding the nature of persons can, for example, allow us to be faithful in our work while remembering that ultimately persons make their own choices. In complex situations where we play only a small role, an understanding of God's redemptive heart allows us to trust that He is always present and working.

At this point, I want to briefly explain the organization of the text. The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 explores the frameworks and theories of HBSE from a faith-based perspective. Part 2 covers six stages of the lifespan, using case studies to apply some of the theories and frameworks from Part 1. In this sense, Part 1 is designed to be more theoretical and Part 2 to be more applied.

The book is further divided into twelve chapters. Five key biblical themes are briefly identified in the beginning of the book and further discussed in Chapter 1. These themes are not intended to be inclusive, but were chosen because of their application to HBSE. Chapter 2 discusses a theological perspective for HBSE. The biological, psychological, and social realms—the biopsychosocial perspective—was used to organize Chapters 3–6. Chapters 7–12 examine cases across the lifespan using some of the principles described in Part 1. In sum, this book pulls together three

streams by examining: (1) biblical themes and a theological model in Chapters 1–2, (2) the intersection of biblical themes and biological, social, and psychological theories in Chapters 3–6, and (3) the practical application of biblical themes to various stages of the lifespan in Chapters 7–12.

Like every author who comes from a particular vantage point, I want to be transparent about the theological and denominational perspective from which I am writing. My point in doing so is not to suggest my denominational tradition as the preferable one, but simply to identify my roots for the sake of reader understanding. During the majority of my adult years, I have been discipled within the Reformed tradition, and careful readers may hear this denominational "accent" throughout. But each of us speaks with our own accent and must listen carefully to one another's core message. That type of listening is cultivated and intentional, a gift to the speaker.

I have written this text for Christians in social work, while acknowledging this as a wonderfully diverse group. While we likely will not agree on every matter, I write with hopes that this text may be helpful to a group with many common core beliefs. Related to this point, please note that I have chosen to refer to God with male pronouns throughout this book, more for ease in reading than as a specific theological statement.

Readers should also note that this book takes an intentionally micro HBSE focus. Due to space limitations, many critically important macro issues, including groups, communities, social welfare politics and policies, and economic forces will not be significantly addressed. Understand that in no way does this lessen their importance, however, to fully grasping the complexity of human behavior and development.

I wish to acknowledge two excellent texts which greatly influenced this work. *The Reciprocal Self* by Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne King, and Kevin S. Reimer informed my thinking around relational reciprocity and Trinitarian anthropology. *Exploring Psychology and Christian Faith* by Donald J. Tellinghuisen and Paul Moes was equally influential. Their delineation of biblical themes and their general tone influenced my approach in this text. To each of these authors, my sincere gratitude.

This text is designed to accompany standard HBSE textbooks. It has self-contained chapters that may be read and used interchangeably. It is for students and social workers on the frontlines who wish to better understand the remarkable persons you serve. Those on the frontlines also include those working to improve the world by setting and impacting public policy and filling critical leadership roles within the field. This book is also for you, because ultimately persons and environments form the basis of all social work practice.

My hope is that God may guide us in better understanding how and why He has made us. May we all grow and develop in the right direction.

Balswick, J.O., King, P.E., & Reimer, K.S. (2016). *The reciprocating self*: *Human development in theological perspective* (2nd edition). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Tellinguisen, D.J. & Moes, P. (2014). *Exploring psychology and Christian faith*: *An introductory guide*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Chapter One

Biblical Themes to Ground Us

Understanding human behavior in its social environments is a complex, yet fascinating, endeavor. Many developmental theories offer explanations that guide social work practitioners in understanding the behaviors of their clients. However, while social work as a discipline draws primarily upon scientifically-proven explanations of human behavior, Christians in social work draw not only upon those knowledge sources, but also on Biblical revelation. Believing the Bible to be divinely communicated truth, we rightly look to the Scriptures for guidance in understanding God's intentions in our formation. As we will see, the Bible provides us with an understanding of human behavior and development that requires our careful attention. While social scientists, including many Christians in social work, are expanding the current knowledge base through research, the Bible provides another form of revelation from which to understand persons and their development.

In this chapter, we will look more closely at the biblical themes that were identified in the previous pages. There are also many other important biblical themes, but these have been chosen for their relevance to the study of HBSE. The themes will additionally be revisited throughout the book as they provide a foundation for critiquing the theories and cases we will explore later.

Social **Work: Humans are Relational**

> *If the divine Trinity shows a community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bonded by love, then humans created in God's image find their truest life and fulfillment in human community and not in isolation.*
>
> *Donald K. McKim (2001)*

> *Here is the good news: the living God is not a solitary God. The living God is not a lonely God…from all eternity, the living God has existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. From all eternity, God has been able to speak of himself of "we," "us," and "our."*
>
> *Darrell Johnson (2015)*

> *One does not live alone. Living is a communal act, whether or not its communality is acknowledged.*
>
> *Wendell Berry (1990)*

We begin with the theme that we are formed as deeply relational persons. We often think of relationships as interpersonal connections we choose or reject throughout life. Indeed, relationships are demonstrations of our relationality, but the concept goes beyond that. Relationality—being *characterized by relationships*—is a part of our DNA, part of the substance that makes us human. To be human *means* to be relational, whatever the specific number of friends, enemies, or acquaintances one may hold at a point in time.

Human relationality may seem obvious, even intuitive, to social workers who typically appreciate the value of relationships. The name of our discipline—social work—even suggests that there's something inherently *social* about the work we do. However, it is instructive to take a closer look at the nature of relationality. What does it mean that we are formed for relationships? And related to this, if God formed us as inherently relational, what *type* of relationships does God intend for us? Relationships vary significantly in purpose, degrees of closeness, and health. These questions will be addressed more fully as we consider cases across the lifespan. But we first need to consider some foundational truths about our relationality or the ways that we are characterized by relationships.

Human relationality is demonstrated through our relationship with God. We are related to God because we share some of His characteristics. We are created with characteristics that resemble God who "created mankind in His image" (Genesis 1:27, NIV) or as His image-bearers. *Imago Dei* is the theological term that characterizes this truth. Image-bearing is a critical starting point for understanding human development (Grenz, 1994). It means that we can look to the nature of God for clues about ourselves.

Familial metaphors prove somewhat useful here. Like a child who shares his mother's calm temperament or a teenager with musical aptitude like her grandfather, we see resemblance within family relationships. *Imago Dei* goes farther, however, to indicate that core characteristics of God's

nature are actually imprinted on us; among others, these include our moral, spiritual, and intellectual natures (Moes & Tellinghuisen, 2014) and our own creative abilities (Crouch, 2013).

We can take *Imago Dei* a step farther because it forms the basis of understanding ourselves as relational. A core tenet of the Christian theology of most believers is understanding God as a Trinity or, in other words, believing in the triune (three-part) nature of God. The Trinity itself is a picture of God as relational. The three persons of the Trinity—God, Son, and Holy Spirit—share a relationship with one another. This means that within His very being, God is relational. And if God is relational at His core and we are formed like him, we can conclude that our core is relational as well.

We can also look at God's actions as a means of understanding our own relational nature. God interacts with us in ways that *assume* our relationality. Consider the manner in which a relationship is formed. What actions are involved? It depends on the type of relationship, of course, but often an act of initiation and communication between different persons is involved. Relationships also entail the exchange of things such as information, services, or support.

God's actions toward us include each of these aspects. There is divine initiation, communication, and the exchange of resources. But the relationship isn't entirely one-sided. When we examine the nature of God's actions—the way He pursues a relationship with us—we can infer that we have the ability to *respond* to Him (Balswick, King, & Reimer, 2016). It seems improbable that God would reach out to us if we lacked the ability to respond to him and to form a connection. It is true that the divine-human relationship is much different than our relationships with one another, but it has the characteristics of a relationship nonetheless. We can affirm our relationality because we resemble a God whose very being is comprised of three related parts. Beyond this, the Triune God pursues a relationship with us and invites us to respond to His extraordinary invitation. His very pursuit of a connection bears witness to our relational nature.

While theologians debate the meaning of *Imago Dei* or our image-bearing nature, we might further suggest that our formation in God's image creates a foundation for our value, dignity, and rights as persons (Wolterstorff, 2010). In other words, if we bear aspects of God in our nature, then we also carry a measure of the worth and value that is connected *to* God. Like the paintings of a well-known and respected artist, we have value simply because we were formed by Him. Like the son of a famous politician, we have status because of our connection to him.

Human value and worth is extended even farther by God's love. God's love for the persons he has created assigns them additional value and

worth. Our status as His beloved makes us valuable. In the same way that the unconditional love of a parent validates the worth of their child, even when that child does not act lovingly in return, God's love for humanity is a demonstration of the worth and value of all persons. A parent's unconditional love for their child elevates the youngster as one worthy of love, despite the presence of any actions that might suggest otherwise. In the same manner, God's love, demonstrated through his actions toward us, gives each person significance. This point is all the more poignant when we consider the imbalance in the relationship, as what we give back to God pales in comparison to what He offers.

Our core relationality and connectedness to God also provides a foundation for our relationships with one another. As fellow image-bearers, we are fundamentally similar. While on the surface there are many things about one another we do not share or even understand, we all carry the unique marks of humanness. We all bear the marks of our Creator. Remarkably, God's glory is displayed in us, His creation, however dimly that glory may appear at times. Importantly, our shared status as image-bearers should inform our posture toward relationships with those with whom we differ. We hold more in common than we often realize.

Our experiences also testify to our relationality. Each of us has a wide range of relational experiences. We are indebted to people in our lives who have come close and offered healing, encouragement, instruction, and guidance. We can also recall the pain and disappointment of relationships that have lacked critical ingredients such as faithfulness, trustworthiness, or consistency. Undoubtedly, our relationships have been both deeply meaningful and deeply problematic. But despite their qualities, our experiences tacitly affirm our relational nature, that we are interdependent beings, connected to God and each other.

Social workers around the world rightly prioritize the importance of relationships. As people of faith, we affirm this priority. A difference is, however, that we tie our relationality *first* to God who created us to be in relationship with Him and other people. We ground our relational nature in Him, the one we resemble. Beyond this, we desire to use the characteristics of His relationship with us as a model for our relationships with others.

In sum, we may conclude that if the Triune God is relational and created us in His image, we share His relational nature. In other words, we are relational because God is. Our relational nature is further confirmed by the ways that He interacts with us, reaching out and inviting a relationship. Our relatedness to God is the ultimate foundation for our shared value and worth as persons. We can also look to our shared humanity as

the basis for forming relationships, especially with those with whom we differ. Our relational nature informs innumerable aspects of our lives and, as we will see, is a critical force in development.

All have Sinned and Fallen Short: Humans Sin and are in Need of Redemption

> *If only there were evil people somewhere, insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of their heart?*
>
> *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1973)*

> *Grace remits sin, and peace quiets the conscience. Sin and conscience torment us, but Christ has overcome these fiends now and forever.*
>
> *Martin Luther (1529)*

Christians in social work have, perhaps, a keen sense of the effects of the fall. In many respects, the very existence of social work is a manifestation of the fall. Our work presupposes that something is wrong and needs fixing. Our efforts to act as agents of redemption within places of darkness reflect this core biblical theme.

Most Christians are familiar with the concept of sin as a violation against God and His laws for the world. The Bible speaks not about God's laws as arbitrary or despotic restrictions of our freedom, but as loving means of our protection. Sin violates God's laws or protections and therefore is harmful for us. Sin, in all its tempting forms, keeps us trapped in unproductive or harmful patterns; ultimately, it inhibits our freedom. Freedom is experienced when we work in tandem with God's purposes for the world and for us as individuals. We experience freedom when we are for what God is for and against what God is against. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (2002) writes:

> …the real human predicament, as Scripture reveals, is that inexplicably, irrationally, we all keep placing our lives against what's good for us. In what can only be called the mystery of antiquity, human beings from the time of Adam and Eve… have so often chosen to live against God, against each other, and against God's world (p. 50).

Placing ourselves under the authority of God and His commands has the paradoxical effect of making us the most free as human beings because we are living in alignment with God's purposes for us. In other words, living in accordance with God's good intentions for us facilitates our flourishing as persons. The problem is that in our sinfulness, we have the inherent sense that *we* know what is best for us—that *we* have the ability to act as God. From our skewed vantage point, we perceive God's path as anything but freedom. At times, submitting to God seems more like a burden than the "light and easy yoke" that Jesus spoke about. We fight the same temptation as Adam and Eve, the impulse to act as our own god.

To complicate things more, our sin and rebellion against God often takes on highly subtle forms. Martin Luther famously wrote, "Your gods are whatever your heart clings to (as cited in Lenker, 1908)." The problem is that we are often drawn to things that appeal to our hearts, yet are ultimately *false* gods—things that imitate God. Because they are imitations of God, they lack the ability to deliver on their promises and quickly disappoint.

Beyond this, we struggle to see ourselves as we actually are, rationalizing bad behavior, blaming other people for our actions, and minimizing the depth of our sinfulness. The fall penetrates our own thinking and our own desires. Many followers of Christ have experienced the sense of frustration that Paul writes of in Romans 7:18, "For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

But God has not abandoned His creation. Desiring a continued relationship with us, he offers redemption through the work of Jesus Christ. Though we are "dead in our sin," we can be "alive in Christ" and no longer the "slaves" of sin. The word redemption implies "paying off," something like what we do with a mortgage or a student loan. Sin created a hefty debt that only an enormous redemptive act could pay. The cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the most pivotal events in human history—provided the basis for redemption from sin as Christ paid the penalty for sin and its deadly consequences once and for all.

It might be difficult to find another biblical theme with as much application to social work because sin forms the backdrop and the basis for much of our work. While God's good creation has not been entirely destroyed by sin, it has been significantly damaged. In essence, sin forms the foundation for a multitude of problems that harm and place our clients (not to mention ourselves) at risk such as poverty, abuse, racism, disease, environmental damage, and human trafficking.

Sin negatively affects persons as well as the environments around those persons. In fact, the Bible reveals sin as so extensive that it invades individuals, families, institutions, organizations, governments, and every conceivable part of the world. The words of confession from The Book of Common Prayer (1960) describe well our individual and corporate predicament related to sin,

> We have erred and strayed from thy ways, like lost sheep…we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts…we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done (pp. 41-42).

In our current context, as people of faith, we live with a tension that some refer to as the "already, but not yet." Christ's redemptive work has already occurred, but the world continues to suffer under the effects of sin. We are waiting for the destructive effects of sin to be eliminated for good. But we don't wait passively. As Christians in social work, we are invited into the holy work of co-laboring with God. Our small acts of daily obedience contribute to His grand purposes. The call is to work in ways that are redemptive and restorative, whatever the precise nature of our jobs. Plantinga (2002) writes:

> Proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus isn't nearly everything Christians have to offer the world, but it's the platform for everything they have to offer. Every Christian hospital, college, orphanage, media ministry, counseling service, political party, relief agency, and AIDS clinic builds on this platform (p. 80).

Within the "not yet," the consequences of sin remain great for both individuals and institutions. People get snared by sin, both through their own intentional acts and through the macro-level effects of the fall. Our clients experience this when they struggle with issues far outside their control such as disease, poverty, and death.

But Christians in social work operate from a platform of redemption. It is from this firm and hopeful place that we serve in the myriad places we are called. Because of redemption, there can be no situation or person beyond hope. We do not work alone, however, as the Holy Spirit ultimately leads and guides this divine labor. As co-laborers and Christians in social work, it is critical that we understand that God is the one doing the work and we are simply responsible to respond to Him in obedience and submission. Even in our roles as helping professionals, we are easily tempted to see ourselves as self-important saviors rather than humble servants.

While sin is the core problem, it is helpful for Christians in social work to understand the different ways that sin is manifested. For example, we need to differentiate between sin on the micro level, such as parents who make the choice to abuse their children, and sin on the macro level, such as unjust social welfare policies. While sin has affected everything, the primary sources of client problems may lie primarily in one place or another. In many situations, we assist clients in dealing with micro-level sins (for example, substance abuse) that may partly be related to systemic injustice.

Often, the more complex the problem, the more numerous are the ways in which sin is manifested. Sin in one situation may spread to another. A person who is unjustly fired from a job, for example, and does not find forgiveness or peacefulness may project unresolved anger and a need for revenge onto other people. Corruption within a government may limit economic opportunities for those in poverty, contributing to negative behaviors such as theft or drug sales. In these ways, the negative effects of sin move across micro and macro levels and from person to person.

Christians in social work are wise to understand that sin undergirds most of the situations we encounter. The goal is not to identify the presence of sin for the purpose of condemnation, but to assist people in finding freedom from its destructive effects. At times, calling dysfunctional situations what they are and identifying sin as a powerful influence provides much-needed clarification. It can also lead to what is often needed—repentance, a turn from what is destructive toward what is instead life-giving.

Applying a theology of sin to social work practice requires careful and thoughtful application. It must be balanced with an understanding of grace, compassion, and redemption. If we, for example, do not remember ourselves as sinful, we will adopt a posture of superiority and impatience with our clients. We must closely monitor our own tendencies toward judgement. We have to pair an understanding of sin with a working knowledge of human development. Some childhood behaviors, for example, are less willful forms of disobedience than normal developmental responses. Above all, we must hold the tension between identifying sin and its effects while also holding grace, compassion, and the hope of redemption.

Finally, Christians in social work may wonder about situations in which clients are not persons of faith. Many clients, groups, and organizations obviously do not endorse a theology of sin. It is still the case that identifying sin is important, whether it is acknowledged by clients and organizations or not. Regardless of the mission and values of one's employer, Christians in social work can internally acknowledge the presence of sin and work to lead others toward freedom. While it is inappropriate to use the language of faith within secular settings, by tacitly acknowledging the

role of sin and the need for redemption, we rightly understand the scenario and our roles within it.

A Messy World: Creation is in Need of Restoration

> *For the creation was subjected to frustration...*
>
> *Romans 8:20*

> *In the biblical narrative, what begins in the Garden of Eden finds its completion at the consummation of history, when God establishes the new creation, the realm in which humans enjoy perfect fellowship with each other, creation, and the Creator.*
>
> *Stanley J. Grenz & John R. Franke (2001)*

> *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together, and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together; and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*
>
> *Isaiah 11:6-9 (NIV)*

It has been said that a big view of fallenness necessitates a big view of redemption and restoration (Plantinga, 2002). God's restoration project is a massive one indeed. He is steadily renewing all of creation to its original, unblemished state. God is not passively waiting for His perfect kingdom to come; He is working in the present to restore a fallen world. In the language of social work, His restoration project is micro, mezzo, and macro. He is renewing relationships within individuals, within organizations, and within governments.

As we stated in the previous section, the fall introduced many obstacles, notably shame, into our relationships. Relationships lost their inherently life-giving qualities and instead became vehicles for selfish purposes. Like Adam and Eve, humankind learned to hide its sinfulness behind rationalizations and blame. The natural world became something to exploit for self-centered ends versus a treasure to tenderly steward.

The original, unblemished creation, however, provides a model for human flourishing and arguably the ultimate model for the work of Christians in social work. While it is hard to visualize the world without sin, we can

try to imagine completely healthy and life-giving relationships. We can try to envision relationships of every sort—micro, mezzo, and macro—that lead to the flourishing of participants of every age, race, and ethnicity.

Our world scarcely resembles Eden though. Humans, for example, exploit the natural world, have violent conflicts with each other, and experience feelings of shame and self-loathing. How is God restoring our presently broken world? In a big picture sense, God is doing so by *restoring* broken relationships between Himself, us, and the natural world. Not only is He doing this work, but He is employing us as agents of restoration. Ultimately, tangible activities such as facilitating reconciliation between parents and children or enforcing policies that protect the poor are examples of divine restoration in action.

If restored relationships between God, us, and creation represent an ideal context where persons flourish, we do well to pursue this ideal in our work with persons and their environments. In a practical sense, we ought to ponder what restoration would look like in the lives of our clients. We might ask ourselves what it would look like for our clients to have restored relationships with God, that is, to see themselves as His beloved. We may ponder how they might have restored relationships internally, seeing themselves more honestly and accurately. We might ponder how they could experience restored relationships with other people, actively pursuing forgiveness or setting appropriate boundaries. We will thoughtfully contemplate what truly restorative institutions and communities look like and work toward that vision.

An expansive view of restoration can be applied to all aspects of our work. Indeed, restoration is a broad concept that can entail constructive movement of any size in any area—healing in one's relationship with God, one's self, or with other people, for example. These areas are also interconnected. For example, individual psychotherapy may lead someone to better understand how the affirmation that was absent in their background results in their unrealistic expectations of others. This insight can lead to them changing their behavior and considerably improving their relationships with others. The reality is that healthier relationships *of any type* more closely mirror the relationships God intends. In other words, growth and healing in *any* of the God-creation-self dimensions reflects God's intentions and facilitates human flourishing.

Many aspects of the way God is bringing restoration to the world lie outside of our comprehension. We have limited vision and often find it difficult to see the possibility of restoration and hope within the darkest of places. Here is where we as Christians in social work must hold the tension between the gravity of sin and God's redemptive and restorative purposes.

Our responsibility is listening for God's leading and faithfully responding in ways that *facilitate* redemption and restoration, whether in individuals or systems. In doing so, we also leave the outcomes in God's hands.

Seeing our work through this perspective requires faith, imagination, and, at times, the ability to find meaning in mundane tasks that appear to hold little restorative value. Sometimes work bears little restorative "fruit," forcing us to hold out hope for the change that is needed. At times, we must see our work as seed planting, with hope that others will faithfully nurture what we have started. Other times, we have the privilege of seeing restoration clearly in the form of a reconciled marriage or the reversal of an unjust policy. However incremental the progress seems, we engage the holy work of restoration whenever we work toward restored relationships between persons, themselves, and God.

Our daily work is couched within the knowledge that the restoration of all things will eventually be complete. Grenz (1994) sums up the marvelous reality of the ultimate restoration,

> …the entire biblical panorama may be read as presenting the purpose of God as that of bringing into being a people who reflect the divine character and thus are the *imago dei*. At the eschaton [end of the world], God will complete what was the divine intention from the beginning and has from the beginning been set before us as our human destiny. On that day, we will reflect fully the divine image as God's representatives after the pattern of Christ (p. 200).

Dust of the Earth: Humans are Embodied

> *We talk about the need to deal with the real, the material, this worldly stuff…the Christian faith is a* this worldly *faith. In a sense, the very core of it is the notion that God himself became flesh. That's, I think, what puts us in a different position in the way we view the world. It should at least.*
>
> *Brian Dijkema (2015)*

> *We are made in God's image and have a unique relationship with him, so we occupy a special place in his creation, yet we are made from the "dust of the earth" and have much in common with the rest of creation. God created us to be physical in order to care for a physical creation—to tend the garden.*
>
> *Paul Moes & Paul Tellinghuisen (2014)*

Why emphasize the biblical theme of embodiment—the idea that we have been created with a physical body, that we are made of tangible, physical material? Aren't bodies just unimportant containers for holding more important things like souls and minds? On the contrary, we are wise to carefully consider our embodiment as the Bible emphasizes the importance of the physical body. As Brian Dijkema (2015) writes, our faith is "this worldly." It has a true, earthly dimension. In His incarnation, for example, Jesus took on a physical body with all of the accompanying needs that bodies entail. Many of his earthly miracles involved the physical body as he healed diseases and multiplied food for hungry crowds. Importantly, the cross included real physical suffering with blood, bruises, and broken bones. The resurrection was not solely a "spiritual" one as the living Jesus, bearing the scars of His ordeal, was witnessed by many (Setran & Kiesling, 2013).

Our physical selves matter. This point is important because we are prone to both over- and under-emphasize our physical nature. At various points in history, the physical body has been deemphasized in ways that have distorted views of human development. This was true when, for example, portions of the early church emphasized the nonmaterial aspects of our humanness—the soul and spirit—over the physical body (Plantinga, Thompson, & Lundberg (2010). If we deemphasize our physical selves, we run the risk of overemphasizing "spiritual" solutions that can prove shortsighted and even damaging. In some streams of modern Christianity, there has been a lack of emphasis on our embodied selves, a perspective which can contribute to an unhealthy detachment from the body or a shallow understanding of components such as sexuality.

Conversely, the scientific revolution has contributed to overemphasizing our material selves by seeking biological origins to nearly any observable phenomenon (Moes & Tellinghuisen, 2014). Scientific advances in understanding human behavior and development have been remarkably helpful. Significant biochemical breakthroughs in understanding psychiatric disorders, for example, have led to significant relief for those who suffer. But as we will discuss in a later chapter, this view can go too far by deemphasizing free will and our responsibility in decision-making.

Philosophers and scientists have historically disagreed about this issue. While Plato and other ancient Greeks advocated a mind-body distinction, *dualism*, that persisted for centuries, many people now lean toward a form of *monism* which assumes the mind and body are one entity. In this view, the mind is part of the brain, not external to the brain (Myers and Jeeves, 1987). Within the monistic perspective, human components or qualities identified as "spiritual" (e.g., the soul), are believed to operate *through* the physical. This view subscribes to a "holistic duality" of body and soul. Plantinga and colleagues (2010) provide this helpful reframing of the issue:

> In dualism, there are two eternal principles—spirit (the divine) and matter. In monism there is only the first of these principles, the divine, which possesses true reality…The Christian [view]…is neither dualistic nor monistic…Rather, it is best characterized as a duality that embraces two sorts of things: Creator and creature (p. 168).

A full exploration of the issue is beyond this book, but a proper understanding of embodiment provides guidance in understanding HBSE. The physical world was created and declared "good," highlighting the value of all that God made. As part of the creation, our bodies are good—in fact, they are holy and sacred. Therefore, they must be carefully nurtured and protected. Far from just a container, our bodies are critical to our growth and development as humans. The needs of our physical body are not tangential, but central to our very existence. They are also central to our flourishing.

The implications of embodiment for Christians in social work are profound. We uphold the importance of embodiment when we attend to the basic physical needs of our clients such as safety from physical harm. When we attempt to help families impacted by disease or illness. When we assist poor clients in signing up for food stamps. And when we advocate for policies that protect the physically vulnerable, such as persons with disabilities and older adults. Myers and Jeeves (1987) summarize this section well:

> The human part of you and me is not a ghost in a body but rather the whole, unified system of brain and mind…we may indeed have been created from dust…but the end result is a priceless creature, one rich with potential beyond our imagining (p. 23).

Choices, Choices, Choices: Humans have Agency

> *"It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."*
>
> *Professor Dumbledore in Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (1998)*

> "*Every day brings new choices.*"
>
> *Martha Beck (2011)*

"Agency" refers to the ability of a person to make choices and to act within a particular environment. Often, agency is contrasted with "structure" or those elements of an environment that limit someone's choices, such as their socioeconomic status, job skills, or geographical location. As persons, we are agents who are free to make regular decisions about our lives including what to eat and where to go. At the same time, our choices are bounded by a whole host of structures. We are free to make choices about the type of job to pursue, for example, but the range of our vocational options will be limited by our qualifications and skills. Our agency is limited by many factors, such as our physical nature, our individual abilities, and our specific environments.

In a different sense, social psychology highlights other limits on agency by describing conditions under which we are highly influenced, almost hard-wired, to respond as social beings. These tendencies regularly play out in our lives, often completely outside of our awareness. For example, we are prone to defend what we believe by paying careful attention to data that reinforce our beliefs or to use *confirmation bias*. Or we are prone to credit successes to our individual abilities, but blame failure on things outside of our control or to use *self-serving bias*. We often view our own groups as superior and other groups as inferior, using *in-group bias*. If responses such as these are automated, predictable patterns, one could argue that agency is also limited in these ways, many of which we are unaware.

Additionally, neuroscientists increasingly locate genetic origins for human behaviors, indicating that what appear to be choices may actually represent involuntary responses that are partly or entirely automated. The search, for example, for the genetic sources of personality traits such as empathy and compassion is well underway. The same is true for religious beliefs.

Holding the possibilities of agency with the realities of structure—in the form of environmental elements, unconscious behavioral tendencies, and biological forces—social workers may wonder, "just how free are we?" With time and further research, learning about agency and structure will continue to evolve. Research into aspects of the environment that trigger particular biological or behavioral responses also continues to grow.

Despite many unknowns, however, Christians in social work can affirm the fact that God has formed humans with agency. Many biblical concepts imply the presence of human agency, such as obedience and submission. These imperatives suggest that we have actual choices. God's commands throughout the Old and New Testaments infer an ability to follow or to deviate from His standards. Some may argue that human responsiveness to

God actually originates with Him who does the prompting, but some level of human agency is still implicated, even when considering the role of the Holy Spirit.

Agency plays an important role in our faith lives. Some have questioned why God does not function as a dictator, creating persons with no choice but to follow Him. In response, we can infer that while God wants a connection with us, He wants us to choose that connection rather than to have it forced upon us (Grenz, 1998). Refusing to control our actions, He instead draws us through acts of love that capture our hearts and minds. Even acts of discipline are entirely undergirded by love and a desire to draw us. God does call us to obedience, but not like a tyrannical boss or an oppressive slave master. Instead, he wants willing submission as we trust His goodness.

Agency implies many things, perhaps most importantly, responsibility. Choices carry consequences. Because agency implies the freedom to make choices and choices involve consequences, we are "responsible agents" (Moes & Tellinghuisen, 2014). Our responsibility extends to our individual choices, but also to the choices of groups of which we are a part, such as our families, churches, and neighborhoods. For Christians, this responsibility extends to our most important group, the body of Christ. As community members and members of the Church, we are responsible, for example, to advocate against local government policies that unjustly impact the poor. At times, we are responsible to lovingly confront friends who are making destructive choices. In our various roles, we have responsibility for choices that are made.

Because agency is a part of how we were formed, relationships require adequate opportunity for freedom and choice. In fact, at times we can pinpoint problems in relationships by assessing the levels of freedom and autonomy they allow the participants. Relationships that overly control an individual's choices restrict the room necessary for healthy growth, development, and creativity. We see this principle illustrated clearly in authoritarian families where agency is minimized. We also see this principle among people who suffer under corrupt governments where their rights and free speech are thwarted.

Agency is an important biblical theme for social workers to consider. As a part of our created nature, human agency must be carefully protected. The nature of human agency varies greatly depending on the developing stage and maturity of a person or group, but all persons, even those with highly limited capacity, benefit from appropriate agency. Restricted agency can be harmful as it ignores a core component of our created nature; in this respect, it can inhibit human flourishing. At the same time, people must be held responsible for the choices they freely make, even

choices that prove misguided. We rightly respect agency by giving others choices when possible, holding them responsible for their choices, and fighting for their opportunities to have a voice.

Chapter Summary

Biblical themes of relationality, fallenness and the need for redemption, the need for restoration, embodiment, and agency provide considerable insight into understanding HBSE. When we frame our understanding of HBSE through these themes, we better grasp the ways that our created nature directly impacts our clients and our world.

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? If so, how will this change your understanding of agency?

References

Balswick J.O., King, P.E., Reimer, K.S. (2016). *The reciprocating self: human development in theological perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

Beck, M. (2011). *Expecting adam: a true story of birth, rebirth, and everyday magic*. New York: Three Rivers Press.

Berry, W. (1990). *What are people for?* Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint.

Church of England (1960). *The Book of common prayer with the additions and deviations proposed in 1928*. Cambridge: University Press.

Crouch, A. (2013). Playing god: redeeming the gift of power. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Dijkema, B. (2015). The work of our hands. *Comment Magazine,* March, 2-4.

Grenz, S.J. (1994). *Theology for the community of god*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Grenz, S.J. (1998). *Created for community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Grenz, S.J. & Franke, J. (2001). *Beyond fundamentalism: shaping theology in a postmodern context*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Johnson, D. (2015). Entering the trinity: living in the circle of "us." *Conversations*, *13*(1), 5-8.

McKim, D.K. (2001). *Introducing the reformed faith*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.

Meyers, D.G. & Jeeves, M.A. (1987). *Psychology through the eyes of faith*. Washington, D.C.: Christian College Coalition.

Moes, P. & Tellinghuisen, D.J. (2014). *Exploring psychology and christian faith: an introductory guide*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Plantinga, C. (2002). *Engaging god's world: a christian vision of faith, learning, and living*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Plantinga, R.J., Thompson, T.R., Lundberg, M.D. (2010). *An introduction to christian theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rowling, J.K. (1998). *Harry potter and the chamber of secrets*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.

Setran, D.P. & Kiesling, C.A. (2013). *Spiritual formation in emerging adulthood: a practical theology for college and young adult ministry*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Solzhenitsyn, A. (1973). *The gulag archipelago 1918-1956*. New York: HarperCollins.

Wolterstorff, N. (2010). *Justice: rights and wrongs*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Part Two

Now that we have a big picture of human development, we will consider ways to apply a biblical view of human development to the stages of life. Starting with infancy and concluding with old age, we focus on a few noteworthy aspects of each stage. In doing so, we will refer back to the biological, psychological, and sociological themes in earlier chapters. As in Part 1, our goal is to assist our clients in developing closer relationships with God, themselves, and the created world. Part II takes us farther down that road by asking, "But how do we best do that?" And also, "What types of environments help individuals in this stage to develop in the right direction?"

Chapter Seven

Infancy: Early Growth toward God and Others (ages 0–2)

Most potential mental health problems will not become mental health problems if we respond to them early.

Center on the Developing Child (2013)

We begin our study of the life span by exploring infancy, a stage of unique and foundational human growth and development. The case of an infant will be described first, followed by a discussion of key characteristics of infancy, and concluded by a review of the case from the perspective of the key characteristics and the biblical themes outlined in an earlier chapter.

As we consider infancy (ages 0-2), it is important to recognize that persons at every stage are developing toward something. As Christians in social work, our goal is for infants to develop in the direction of healthy connections with God, themselves, and other people. In this chapter, we will ponder how development of this nature may be fostered within infants. This may sound like a grandiose goal when we consider the limited speech and cognition of infants, particularly newborns. However, as discussed in Part 1, numerous theories indicate that one's relational foundation is laid during this stage. This makes infant development vitally important.

Beyond the important tasks of their stage, infants themselves are full image-bearers who beautifully reflect and respond to their Maker. This point is well-illustrated by Jesus' response in Matthew 21:15-16 (NIV) where he quotes from Psalm 8:

> But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked. "Yes," Jesus answered, "Have you never read, 'From the mouths of children and infants you have ordained praise?'"

Remarkably, infants are identified as worshippers. As we will see, we can learn a great deal about our formation as image-bearers by observing the nature of infants.

We begin by examining the life of one infant, Anastasia, and her family.

The Case of Anastasia

Anastasia is a six-month old infant who is being raised in a "ring" suburb of Chicago—one that falls just outside the perimeter of the inner city. She was born to a 20-year old mother, Luisa, who is in an on-again, off-again romantic relationship with the father of Anastasia, a 23-year old man named Carlos. Luisa also has a two-year old daughter, Carmela, from a different father—Juan—with whom she has no current relationship. Juan pays child support when he is employed, but he is frequently unemployed. He has no current relationship with Carmela and has not seen her in over a year.

Luisa essentially functions as a single parent as neither Juan nor Carlos take an active role in parenting their daughters. When Luisa and Carlos are together, Carlos attempts to help with Anastasia's care, but this takes the form of activities such as shopping for groceries or doing laundry. He has minimal emotional attachment to Anastasia and rarely interacts with her during the times he is present in the home. It is clear that Anastasia does not actually recognize her father as she cries when he picks her up and looks in the direction of her mother.

Anastasia was born four weeks early and weighed 4 pounds at birth. She was healthy overall, but remained in the hospital for two weeks in order to gain weight. Luisa did not consume alcohol or drugs during the pregnancy, but smoked cigarettes daily. Luisa was relatively healthy during the pregnancy, but she has an extensive mental health history that dates back to her childhood.

Currently, Anastasia is up to date on all of her vaccinations, but is slightly behind in some developmental markers. She is not sitting up unassisted or crawling. She is, however, "cooing" and responding verbally when prompted. Anastasia is small for her age, at the fifth percentile for the national average of height and weight, although she was slightly premature at birth. She has been formula-fed since birth as Luisa chose not to breastfeed. Anastasia is currently being introduced to cereal. Her sleeping patterns are erratic and unusual for her age. She rarely sleeps for more than two hours at night before waking.

Luisa was born in the same suburb where she currently resides. The community is primarily populated by first and second generation Hispan-

ic immigrants. Luisa's parents immigrated from Mexico a year before she was born. They recently became naturalized United States citizens. Luisa was born in the U.S. and is fluent in Spanish and English. Spanish was spoken in her family of origin and is the primary language of her current home. Luisa had planned to attend a community college to study nursing, but became pregnant with Carmela at age 17 and dropped out of high school in the second semester of her junior year.

Luisa and her daughters qualify for public assistance as their income is considerably below the federal poverty line. Their income comes from two sources—child support (although this is inconsistent) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) government assistance. They additionally receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits which assist with food, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) which helps to pay for formula and diapers, and basic medical insurance through Medicaid. Luisa has no current employment. To receive TANF cash assistance, she is required to demonstrate attempts to find work, but the jobs she qualifies for pay minimum wage. If employed, daycare expenses for two children would represent a large percentage of her income.

Luisa and her daughters live in a one-bedroom apartment on the third floor of an aging building. The neighborhood is comprised of sturdy, but aging, apartment buildings and modest single-family homes. She has lived in the apartment for the past two years and has remained current with her rent and utility payments, but her housing costs consume most of her monthly income, leaving little money for additional expenses. She has no debt, but also has no money in savings.

The neighborhood around the apartment building has a significant amount of crime. Luisa rarely ventures out at night, fearing for her and the children's safety. Two gangs reside in her neighborhood and there are frequent uprisings, occasionally involving the use of guns. Luisa and her children have thankfully not been directly affected by gang violence, but this is a constant fear. Not owning a car, Luisa uses public transportation for appointments, grocery shopping, and outings, but she remains at home much of the time because of the challenge of transporting two young children. There are convenience stores within walking distance, but no public parks or playgrounds where she can take her young children.

Luisa is the second of four children born to her parents. The siblings are all two years apart in age. Her parents divorced when she was eight years old and she and her siblings spent weekdays with her mother and alternate weekends with her father after the divorce. Both of her parents remarried shortly after their divorce. Luisa has a good overall relationship with her mother who lives in the same suburb. Luisa's mother works full-

time as a restaurant cook and is unable to help much with childcare, but she does try to come over on Saturdays to see her granddaughters. Luisa is not close to her stepfather, although he is not unkind, just distant. Luisa's father also resides nearby and works long hours as a car mechanic. Luisa has historically had a distant relationship with her father. She has minimal emotional attachment to her father as she has experienced him as harsh, critical, and unsupportive throughout her life. She currently sees her father very infrequently. Her stepmother is a nice person, but she rarely sees her either due to the disconnection with her father.

Luisa was an average student throughout school. She attended a large public school where she was a quiet, reserved student with few close friends. She complied with most academic expectations, but was minimally motivated at school. Her teachers viewed her as an immature and unassertive student.

This perception mirrors Luisa's general perception of herself as insignificant and unimportant. She has struggled with depression since she was a young girl, even before her parent's divorce, although it has never been professionally diagnosed or treated. As a result of her depression, or perhaps more accurately as its root cause, she views herself very negatively. She describes herself as physically unattractive and not particularly smart or talented.

Luisa's negative self-perception led to several relationships with young men who took advantage of her emotional vulnerability. She became sexually active at age 11 and had a series of short-term, sexual relationships with males. In her sophomore year of high school, Juan, a popular but immature male, pursued her and the two began dating. Luisa felt proud that Juan was dating her. Their relationship was unfortunately a chaotic one with repeated conflicts and breakups due to Juan's possessiveness and jealousy. Despite the instability of the relationship, Luisa was excited to learn that she was pregnant. Juan distanced from her which was initially hurtful, but Luisa focused instead on the pregnancy and her hopes of having a baby to love and be loved by unconditionally.

Luisa's first pregnancy was uneventful and Carmela was born full-term. Luisa's style of parenting is an emotionally-stunted, mechanical one. She cares for the physical needs of her children relatively well—feeding and bathing them regularly—but is highly limited when it comes to emotionally connecting with her children. She rarely plays with them and is almost exclusively focused on their physical needs. She disciplines Carmela harshly with yelling and swats to her bottom.

Her parenting behavior may largely be explained by the current state of her mental health. Since Anastasia was born, Luisa has struggled with

postpartum depression, including symptoms of severe fatigue, irritability, feelings of hopelessness, poor sleep, and intermittent thoughts of suicide. This is not a new development in light of her long-term depression but her symptoms have been markedly worse in the last six months since Anastasia's birth. She has not shared the extent of her depression with anyone as she is embarrassed by her inability to cope. Luisa sees her current struggle as confirmation of her overall ineptitude as a person. Thankfully, Luisa does not think about harming her children, but she often wishes they were never born.

Luisa lost her high school friends when she dropped out of school and has very little current social contact or support. Beside her mother and Carlos when he is present, she has no other social support. She stays away from her neighbors as she does not trust them. She does not attend church, although she was raised Catholic and attended church on major holidays while growing up. Luisa believes in God and sometimes asks him to give her a better life, but that is the extent of her faith involvement.

At this time, Luisa's main hope lies with Carlos. She believes that if they married, her life would improve significantly. Unfortunately though, he resembles her father in the sense that he is emotionally cold and minimally communicates with her. Carlos also secretly maintains relationships with other women. He has struck Luisa twice during arguments, but apologized and each time indicated it would not happen again. Luisa does everything she can to appease him and keep the relationship going because she sees it as her only hope for a better life.

We will return to a discussion of Anastasia and her family later in the chapter, but first we need to explore **two key characteristics of infancy**.

Infants are Hardwired to Survive

Ashford, LeCroy, and Lortie (2006) write, "Before modern times, the major developmental task of infancy was simply to survive it" (p. 214). Sadly, this is not just an historical phenomenon; it is a contemporary reality as infant mortality rates remain high in many parts of the world. Importantly, this quote draws our attention to a critical characteristic of infancy. That is, regardless of their context, infants are hardwired to survive, to live. Indeed, a remarkable array of life-affirming biological, psychological, and social mechanisms are embedded in infants.

But how can infants be hardwired to survive when they are so ill-equipped to meet their own needs? They lack the ability to run from danger or even to identify situations that are life-threatening. Beyond this, they cannot meet their basic physical needs for food, water, and shelter.

They are entirely dependent on others. Remarkably, infants are hardwired to survive through the mechanism of attachment. That is, they are physically and emotionally drawn toward the persons upon whom their survival depends. Indeed, it is incredible to note how relational attachment—an infant's core means of survival—is supported by a host of emerging biological, psychological, and social processes.

For example, there are many biological processes that support attachment. There is no life stage with more biological growth than infancy. By the end of the first year of life, infants typically triple their birth weight, crawl or walk, and speak their first word. They gain gross and fine motor strength and control. The cerebral cortex, the center of language and emotional regulation, increases in sophistication through extensive nerve myelination, laying the foundation for the transition from involuntary to voluntary responses (Gross, 2019).

Eyesight changes rapidly. A newborn's vision is limited to objects that are 8-10 inches away. Cells are not separated by function and type as myelination is incomplete, meaning newborns cannot discriminate between objects. But within just three months, infants can visually follow moving objects and reach for objects within their sight line. By five months, depth perception permits coordinated movement toward objects. Vision improves from 20/400 at birth to approximately 20/25 by six months of age (Slater, Field, & Hernandez-Reif, 2007).

Each of these biological processes supports and nurtures attachment, the infant's hardwiring for survival. For example, developing infants can see, recognize, and move toward their parents. Increased motor development allows them to crawl toward and physically embrace their caregivers. Early language creates the ability to communicate recognition and interpersonal connection—interestingly, the first words of English-speaking babies are often "Da-da" or "Ma-ma." These behaviors work to strengthen the parent-child relationship.

Psychological processes also facilitate attachment for survival. Relating to others requires the ability to recognize one's self as distinct and separate from those with whom you are interacting. One study indicated that infants produced a more robust sucking response when touched on the cheek by another person as opposed to touching their own cheeks, implying knowledge of the difference between their own bodies and external stimuli (Rochat & Hespos, 1997). Researchers have also pinpointed self-consciousness or embarrassment—indicators of the ability to imagine the perception of others—during the second year of life (Rochat, 2003). In other words, infants are developing the psychological tools for attaching to caregivers now and forming more complex relationships in the future.

Though they are dependent on caregivers, infants are simultaneously developing as unique persons. Individuation is triggered as their temperaments emerge. Their likes and dislikes become increasingly evident as they gravitate toward certain foods, toys, and persons. Developing individualized characteristics increases the child's awareness of how they are separate from those around them. Indeed, individuation and self-awareness are core psychological components of relationships with others (Rochat, 2001, 2003).

Social processes also facilitate attachment. The hardwiring for survival through attachment can also be seen in the way that infants respond socially. By two months, infants demonstrate socially-elicited smiling. By smiling at a parent, for example, positive feelings are elicited within the parent which stimulate further interaction. By three months, infants learn to cry in ways that garner the attention of others. Between two and six months of age, they expect certain responses during social exchanges and display negative affect when, for example, someone is playing with them and abruptly stops (Rochat, Querido, & Striano, 1999). Such responses demonstrate hardwiring for survival as they solidify and deepen relationships with those on whom the infant depends.

Ultimately, biological, psychological, and social growth contribute to the formation of agency—the child's ability to act on their world. Agency forms the basis for future relationships and represents an extension of the infant's survival hardwiring. While initial attachment is necessary for one's basic needs, over time, children typically shift toward relationships increasingly driven by choice (Margoni & Surian, 2018). As a child matures and is more able to meet their own needs, relationships become motivated by goals beyond mere survival. Although independence will not come fully until years into the future, agency represents a critical part of the child's future.

In sum, early in life, children attach to their caregivers to survive. Over time, they grow in the agency which will be needed for their future thriving. The biological, psychological, and social processes embedded within infants contribute the ingredients necessary for rich relationships, both in the present and future. Indeed, from birth, infants display clear characteristics of the biblical themes of relationality and agency. The stage is being set for their flourishing in the world.

Infants are Vulnerable

The shadow side of dependency is vulnerability. Unfortunately, persons with high levels of dependency are also at high risk for harm. Grant-

ed, dependency is not entirely negative as it often facilitates qualities such as humility, but it can place someone at the mercy of persons with impure motives or harmful behaviors. It is important to appreciate the vulnerability of infants if, as social workers, our role is to promote their flourishing. To illustrate vulnerability, we will discuss two different examples of risk—the lack of necessary developmental inputs and child abuse and neglect.

Vulnerable to Missing Inputs

The brain operates on a pre- and post-developmental trajectory, meaning that while core mechanisms are in place at birth, they mature in response to specific environmental inputs. Brain formation involves the interaction between genetic programming, cell functioning, and inputs from the environment. Therefore, early experiences have the potential to actually shape the brain.

The quality of early emotional interactions directly influences core psychological and social development. Neural pathways develop in response to relational inputs, a process described as "experience-dependent" development (Twardosz, 2012). Without the experiences, particular desirable developmental outcomes may not occur. Maladaptive brain development may also result from poor-quality environmental inputs, negatively impacting the child's future psychological or social functioning. Perry (1999) writes:

> Despite the genetic potential for bonding and attachment, it is the nature, quantity, pattern and intensity of early life experiences that express genetic potential. Without predictable, responsive, nurturing and sensory-enriched caregiving, the infant's potential for normal bonding and attachments will be unrealized. The brain systems responsible for healthy emotional relationships will not develop in an optimal way without the right kinds of experiences at the *right times* in life (pg. 3).

This means that while infants are hardwired to survive, they are entirely dependent on others to supply the inputs they need to mature and thrive. The importance of high-quality inputs cannot be overstated. Such inputs impact neurological formations that underlie nearly every human behavior imaginable. Environmental inputs take many forms, but to illustrate their importance, we will briefly focus on one example, the child's home environment.

A large body of research highlights the connection of a high-quality home environment and positive child outcomes. For example, the degree

to which a home environment is stimulating is linked to higher child cognitive performance (Bradley et al., 1994). Specific parental behaviors, such as speaking frequently to the infant, asking questions while reading, and spending time gazing at the infant, are all correlated with executive functioning and cognitive development (Obradovi, Yousafzai, Finch, Rasheed, 2016). Emotionally warm parent–child interactions during daily routines are positively linked to child communication skills (Camp, Cunningham, & Berman, 2010). High-quality home environments additionally predict the level of child fine and gross motor performance (Saccani, Valentini, Pereira, Muller, and Gabbard, 2013).

A high-quality home environment also relates positively to academic performance. For example, enriching experiences, such as regularly reading to young children, are linked to increased competence in math (Bradley and Corwyn, 2016; Melhuish et al., 2008). Reading to infants and toddlers also related to improved attitudes towards reading and language ability (Hartas, 2012; LeFevre, Polyzoi, Skwarchuk, Fast, & Sowinski, 2010; Westerlund & Lagerberg, 2008).

Notably, the importance of a high-quality home environment has been demonstrated across cultures. In a study from Italy, the home environment demonstrated considerably more influence on infant neurological development than socioeconomic status (Ronfani et al., 2015). A study in Portugal reported a strong association between the quality of the home environment and infant motor and cognitive development (Pereira, Valentini, & Saccani, 2016). An Australian study reported that a stimulating home learning environment correlated with language development and school readiness (Yu & Daraganova, 2014). In a large Taiwanese study exploring numerous physical, psychological, and social factors, home environment explained nearly two-thirds of the variance in infant developmental outcomes (Hwang, et al., 2014).

In home environments that lack stimulation, such as those where a parent is depressed, infants display more negative outcomes. Maternal depression poses risks for children's cognitive, language, and socioemotional development (Downey & Coyne, 1990; Goodman & Gotlib, 2002). Maternal depression contributes to poor child outcomes through either intrusive or withdrawn parenting. Such responses disrupt the attachment process as infants typically respond to such parental behaviors by reducing their own engagement (Dix, Cheng, & Day, 2009; Dix, Stewart, Gershoff, & Day, 2007).

Importantly, a high-quality home environment has the ability to offset other risk factors, such as a low socioeconomic status. While socioeconomic status has been shown to account for approximately 20% of the

variance in childhood IQ (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997), explanations related to the qualitative nature of the home environment often explain the disparity. That is to say, socioeconomically disadvantaged children are more likely to experience homes with less linguistic, social, and cognitive stimulation than children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Bradley & Corwyn, 2016; Hart & Risley, 1995; Rowe & Goldin-Meadow, 2009).

It is important to note that while children from economically disadvantaged households demonstrate poorer outcomes across several domains, this does not have to be the case. A high-quality home environment can serve to offset many of the negative effects of poverty. One study, for example, demonstrated that the quality of the home environment mediated the effect of poverty on the cognitive abilities of toddlers (Benson, 2014). Indeed, while income impacts parents' ability to afford expensive enrichment activities, many aspects of a high-quality home environment are not directly related to economic status (Tandon et al., 2012).

Indeed, infants are vulnerable to the effects of poor-quality home environments. They have no ability to control their circumstances and many aspects of their healthy development are entirely dependent on the provision of stimulation and love. For this reason, the nature of the inputs in an infant's life must be carefully evaluated.

Vulnerable to Abuse and Neglect

Unfortunately, the high dependency level of infants also are makes them vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Abusive and neglectful behaviors fail to provide basic human needs for safety and protection. An understanding of the attachment process highlights the difficulties connected with abuse and neglect. Young children are hardwired to survive physically and psychologically. But in abusive situations, such hardwiring means that infants will not attach to the unsafe person. Similarly, neglectful behavior communicates threat and marks the caregiver as an unsafe attachment object. Psychologically distancing from the unsafe person is a critical self-protective response (Perry, 1999, 2002).

Abuse and neglect toward infants not only exploits their dependency, it also is extraordinarily poorly timed. The infant brain grows at an astonishing speed. Infancy is a highly neurologically sensitive period. But the high sensitivity of the infant brain also means that damaging experiences are highly potent. In this sense, a neurological window of opportunity is simultaneously a window of vulnerability to harm. Perry (2002) writes, "While experience may alter the behavior of an adult, experience literally

provides the organizing framework for an infant and child" (p. 88). Indeed, the earlier and more severe abuse and neglect are, the greater the impact on the developing child.

These realities mean the abuse and neglect of infants can lead to a number of negative outcomes. Importantly, many of the damaging outcomes come through the pathway of trauma—extreme and sustained stress—which, in essence, hijacks the survival hardwiring. In the presence of sustained trauma, the brain's core mechanism for survival, its fight-or-flight response, is continually triggered. This differs from healthy development where threats and the ensuing stress response are occasionally triggered. In some cases, the stress response functions adaptively. When over activation of the stress response occurs during the sensitive infant period, the brain is formed maladaptively. The hippocampus, amygdala, prefrontal cortex, and endocrine system are implicated in the complex physiological response to trauma (Shonkoff and Garner, 2012).

In a general sense, the brains of children who have been abused and neglected have been formed to view the world as threatening. Unsurprisingly, with brains that are hypersensitive, they demonstrate high levels of emotion, including aggression, in response to everyday stressors. Their perceptions of stress have been skewed by early trauma, a factor with wide-ranging implications. The negative impact of trauma on brain formation can contribute to a wide range of potential outcomes. These include numerous long-term physical (Lee, Chioun, Coe, & Ryff, 2017), behavioral, and psychological problems (Freeman, 2014). For example, adults with histories of early trauma may demonstrate high anxiety (Sperry & Widom, 2013), poor emotional regulation (John, Cisler, & Sigel, 2017), criminal behavior (Herrenkohl, Jung, Lee, Klika, & Skinner, 2015), substance abuse (Banducci, Hoffman, Lejuez, & Koenen, 2014), depression (Jung, Hyunzee, Herrenkohl, Lee, Klika, & Skinner, 2015), self-injurious behaviors (Auerbach et al., 2014) and a higher risk for suicide (Harford, Yi, & Grant, 2014).

This daunting list of outcomes clearly illustrates the vulnerable nature of the infant. Vulnerability will extend into later stages of development, but it will never again be as profound as during the infancy stage, when dependency is highest and neural pathways are primed for growth. These realities have implications for social work practitioners.

Understanding the fragile nature of this stage is important for Christians in social work who long for infants to develop in the right direction. Those working in the field of child welfare particularly encounter situations where the vulnerability of infants is exploited. The nature of infancy and our view of children as sacred image-bearers requires the highest view

of their protection and safety. It also requires the strongest reproach of those who intentionally harm them.

An understanding of the nature of the infant stage also highlights its developmental opportunity. Intervening with children and families at this stage has potentially lasting impact. Educating, nurturing, and supporting families during this time period can profoundly influence the future. Indeed, it is vital to influencing the earliest human development in the right direction.

Now that we have explored some big ideas regarding infant development, we will return to the case of Anastasia and her family.

Anastasia Revisited

At six months of age, Anastasia is in an exciting stage of life. Her developing brain is fully primed for growth and her abilities are quickly expanding. She is a compact bundle of opportunity. Though only six months old, Anastasia is a relational being whose current relationships are laying a foundation for her future connections to God, others, and the world as a whole.

Biologically, Anastasia's rapid neurological growth is resulting in improved fine and gross motor control. She can eagerly extend her arms towards others. Her eyesight, memory, and language are expanding. She can see, remember, and verbally respond to familiar persons in her world. Appropriately, Anastasia displays self-protection when she exhibits anxiety toward persons and objects that are frightening to her. Anastasia is a small, but growing agent, displaying affinity for the things she likes and withdrawal from those she dislikes.

Psychologically, Anastasia is developing self-awareness, growing in the realization that she is a unique and separate being. Her self-perception is steadily being formed as others engage with her. She is growing in cognitive skills that allow her to actively connect to others in the present and future.

Yet Anastasia is vulnerable, and several areas of risk must be addressed in order for her to develop in the right direction. Anastasia's relationship with her mother presents developmental concerns. Luisa is parenting alone, and while this does not preclude secure and attached parenting, it does introduce risk. The challenge of parenting two young children alone places significant physical and emotional responsibility on Luisa. Time for emotional bonding and play is necessarily limited by the demands of caring for two young children. Time for Luisa to attend to her own needs is also limited by the demands of single parenting. Her energy is strained by the daily realities of poverty.

Luisa's own developmental stage is an area of concern. As an adolescent mother, her own developmental needs were undoubtedly shortchanged. Luisa's early sexual activity and general immaturity suggest a young woman with unmet psychological needs, including the need for unconditional love and affirmation. Luisa needs and desires close relationships, but these will undoubtedly be difficult in light of her emotional wounds and current emotional state. Luisa admirably demonstrates resourcefulness by responsibly maintaining her apartment and financial responsibilities.

An immediate concern is Luisa's postpartum depression which is impacting her functioning to the dangerous point of contemplating suicide. Luisa needs an immediate psychiatric assessment and psychotherapy. The initial goals of these referrals will be stabilizing her depression, decreasing her problematic symptoms, and improving her daily functioning. Once her mood is stable and her symptoms are under better control, insight-oriented psychotherapy to address underlying issues related to her depression and hopelessness is strongly indicated. Areas of focus in psychotherapy include her relationships with Carlos and her family of origin, vocational future, experience as a parent, and social isolation.

Another significant concern is the absence of a strong emotional attachment between Luisa and Anastasia. While she is capably caring for her physical needs, Luisa's depression and compromised emotional capacity impact her growing daughter. Anastasia is at risk for adopting withdrawal and distrust as her primary ways of being in the world. Instead of healthy dependence and trust, she may be internalizing an anxious posture that will cause her relational difficulty in the future. Instead of feeling cherished and loved unconditionally in the present—the root of her self-esteem and ability to experience the nature of God's love someday—she is at risk for experiencing and internalizing herself as a burden in her mother's life. Additionally, it is unlikely that Anastasia is receiving the stimulation she needs to fully develop cognitively, physically, and psychologically.

In addition to postpartum depression, there are areas of unresolved need and concern in Luisa's life that also impact Anastasia. Luisa appears to be relatively connected to her mother, which is a protective factor. The positive relationship with her mother may represent a model or template for Luisa's current and future parenting style. There is no indication that Luisa was abused or neglected by either parent, another positive factor. Luisa's distant relationship with her father raises concern, however. At this point, the impact of this relationship on Luisa is unknown. However, the nature of the relationship should be explored, especially as Luisa demonstrates a pattern of poor choices in romantic relationships, which could be rooted in her family of origin.

The relationship between Luisa and Carlos introduces particular risk as domestic violence is present. Violence in the home creates a high level of risk for both daughters who will, directly or indirectly, witness its effects and likely internalize anxiety. Both children are at higher risk for physical abuse when partner violence is present (Bragg, 2003). The situation is further complicated by the fact that Luisa has pinned her hopes for the future on a lasting relationship with Carlos. Her determination for the relationship to work may produce undesirable effects. Luisa's desperation could cause her to make decisions based on her need to preserve the relationship versus using good judgement. A break in this relationship could also destabilize Luisa's fragile mood and increase her hopelessness about the future. This is risky for an individual with suicidal ideation who is parenting two children alone.

After her depression has stabilized, Luisa will need to identify short- and long-term goals that are independent of her relationship with Carlos. Affirmation of her strengths and abilities, including caring for two young children alone, is critical. A strengthening of her sense of agency—her ability to make informed and independent decisions—is important. Further, she will need assistance in exploring the impact of her history on her current relational patterns. Like many young women, she is looking to a romantic relationship to fulfill her unmet emotional and social needs.

Beyond her interpersonal and psychological challenges, Luisa is ill-prepared to financially support her family as a high school dropout and single mother. The poverty of the family and the sustained stress related to chronic economic instability place each member of this family at developmental risk. A further concern relates to the safety of the neighborhood. Viable future possibilities, including GED completion, eventual community college for nursing, and subsidized, quality daycare should be explored. Luisa has a long path to adequately caring for her family financially, but her original vocational plan could likely be achieved with sustained assistance.

Another risk to Anastasia's development is her family's social isolation. This is particularly concerning for Anastasia as Luisa is not functioning well and the home environment therefore lacks appropriate stimulation. Because Anastasia's exposure to others and her world within the apartment is highly restricted, there are few alternative sources of social stimulation in her life. Beyond her mother, Luisa also has little social support, a situation that is undoubtedly exacerbating her depression and hopelessness about the future. She also has no faith community as the family lacks a church connection. This is particularly significant

in the life of a family lacking the psychosocial support that a church could offer.

There is additional concern related to the role of Carlos as Anastasia's father. He is intermittently in Anastasia's life, a reality that likely prevents emotional bonding. Anastasia's memory is minimally developed, so she requires the consistent presence of her father in order to retain familiarity. Carlos is not facilitating an emotional connection with Anastasia through time spent together and play. This prevents Anastasia from forming a positive internal perception of her father. It is unsurprising that Anastasia interacts with her father as a stranger. This relationship could be nurtured and developed, however. If Carlos regularly spends time with Anastasia, she will retain a positive memory. If he interacts calmly with Luisa, Anastasia's anxiety toward her father will eventually decrease.

Finally, there are risks related to Anastasia's physical development. As a premature infant who is small for her age, she remains at mild risk for developmental delays. It is possible, however, that her delays are the product of a lack of adequate stimulation. With conscious attention to enrichment activities, Anastasia's gross and fine motor control may markedly improve. Luisa should also consult with her pediatrician regarding Anastasia's sleep patterns. The lack of consistent sleep for both Anastasia and Luisa undoubtedly place additional strain on the entire family.

In sum, there is no question that Anastasia has been born into a fallen world. There are numerous challenges in her immediate environment, including poverty, domestic violence, and a depressed mother. This is concerning because Anastasia is in a stage of highly sensitive neurological development. The trauma of her current environment could create entrenched neural patterns that prove problematic in her future. Her life is just beginning, but changes are needed to help Anastasia to develop in the right direction. Without intervention, we fear that her future ability to see herself accurately, as one who is deeply and unconditionally loved by God, may be affected.

Immediate changes are needed in order for Anastasia to develop in the right direction. Her key means of developing well—the relationships around her—currently lack the stability she will need to experience the world as reliable, stable, and emotionally safe. Anastasia is wired for survival, so she will find ways to adapt to her environment, but her adaptation will likely be maladaptive. However, with the interventions suggested, the direction of Anastasia's development could be refocused toward the purposes for which she was created.

Chapter Summary

Infants are tiny image-bearers latent with potential and primed for growth. Their entire being is oriented toward stable connections with others. Infants illustrate our human need for one another and for God. Remarkably, they have the capacity for worship, an innate desire to praise their maker. Their level of dependency beautifully reflects the dependency that is core to our nature. Yet in their dependency they are also vulnerable to the effects of a broken world. Infancy represents a stage of tremendous opportunity and an important time for intervention all around the growing child. Indeed, many infants can benefit from interventions that refocus their development in the right direction.

Discussion Questions

1. How are dependency and vulnerability both positive and negative realities in our lives?
2. What implications do the principles from this chapter have for work in child welfare?
3. In terms of Anastasia's future, what are your greatest concerns? What are your greatest hopes for her?
4. Now answer the same questions for her mother, Luisa. What are your greatest concerns and your greatest hopes for her?
5. Think about the model for development—connections with God, ourselves, and others. Now summarize a telos for Anastasia's development in two or three sentences.

References

Ashford, J. B., LeCroy, C. W., & Lortie, K. L (2006). *Human behavior in the social environment: A multidimensional perspective*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.

Auerbach, R. P., Kim, J. C., Chango, J. M., Spiro, W. J., Cha, C., Gold, J., . . . Nock, M. K. (2014). Adolescent nonsuicidal self-injury: Examining the role of child abuse, comorbidity, and disinhibition. *Psychiatry Research, 220*, 579-584.

Banducci, A. N., Hoffman, E., Lejuez, C., & Koenen, K. C. (2014). The relationship between child abuse and negative outcomes among substance users: Psychopathology, health, and comorbidities. *Addictive Behaviors, 39*, 1522-1527.

Benson, J.G. (2014). Socioeconomic status and cognitive outcomes: Mediating role of the home environment. Retrieved from http://digitalrepository.unm.edu/psy_etds/9.

Bradley R.H., Whiteside-Mansell, L., Mundfrom, D.J., Casey, P.H., Kelleher, K.J., Pope, S.K. (1994). Early indications of resilience and their relation to experiences in the home environments of low birthweight, premature children living in poverty. *Child Development*, *65,* 346–60.

Bradley, R. H., & Corwyn, R. F. (2016). Home life and the development of competence in mathematics: Implications of research with the HOME inventory. In B. Blevins-Knebbe & A.M. Berghout Austin (Eds.). *Early childhood mathematics skill development in the home environment,* (pp. 29-49). Switzerland: Springer International.

Bragg, H.L. (2003). *Child protection in families experiencing domestic violence*. Child Abuse and Neglect User Manual Series. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau Office on Child Abuse and Neglect.

Brooks-Gunn, J., & Duncan, G. (1997). The effects of poverty on children. *Future Child*, 2, 55-71.

Camp, B. W., Cunningham, M., & Berman, S. (2010). Relationship between the cognitive environment and vocabulary development during the second year of life. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 164, 950-6.

Center on the Developing Child (2013). *Early Childhood Mental Health* (In-Brief). Retrieved from www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

Dix, T., Cheng, N., & Day, W. H. (2009). Connecting with parents: Mothers' depressive symptoms and responsive behaviors in the regulation of social contact by one- and young two-year-olds. *Social Development, 18*, 24-50.

Dix, T., Stewart, A. D., Gershoff, E. T., & Day, W. H. (2007). Autonomy and children's reactions to being controlled: Evidence that both compliance and defiance may be positive markers in early development. *Child Development,* 78 (4), 1204-1221.

Downey, G., & Coyne, J. C. (1990). Children of depressed parents: An integrative review. *Psychological Bulletin, 108*, 50-76.

Freeman, P. A. (2014). Prevalence and relationship between adverse childhood experiences and child behavior among young children. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 35*, 544-554.

Goodman, S. H., & Gotlib, I. H. (2002). *Children of depressed parents: Mechanisms of risk and implications for treatment*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Gross, D. (2019). *Infancy: Development from birth to age 3* (3rd ed.). Lanham, MD: The Rowan and Littlefield Publishing Group.

Harford, T. C., Yi, H., & Grant, B. F. (2014). Associations between childhood abuse and interpersonal aggression and suicide attempt among U.S. adults in a national study. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 38*, 1389-1398.

Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.

Hartas, D. (2012) Inequality and the home learning environment: predictions about seven-year-olds' language and literacy. British Educational Research Journal, *5*, 859-879.

Herrenkohl, T. I., Jung, H., Lee, J. O., Klika, J. B., & Skinner, M. L. (2015). Effects of physical and emotional child abuse and its chronicity on crime into adulthood. *Violence and Victims, 30*, 1004-1018.

Hwang, Ai-Wen, Liao, Hua-Fang, Chen, Pau-Chung, Hsieh, Wu-Shiun, Simeonsson, Rune J., Weng, Li-Jen, & Su, Yi-Ning (2014). Applying the ICF-CY framework to examine biological and environmental factors in early childhood development. *Journal of the Formosan Medical Association*, *113*, 303-312.

John, J.S., Cisler, J.M., & Sigel, B.A. (2017). Emotion regulation mediates the relationship between a history of child abuse and current PTSD/depression severity in adolescent females. *Journal of Family Violence, 32*, 565-575.

Lee, C., Coe, C. L., & Ryff, C. D. (2017). Social disadvantage, severe child abuse, and biological profiles in adulthood. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 58*, 371-386.

LeFevre, J., Polyzoi, E., Skwarchuk, S., Fast, L. & Sowinski, C. (2010). Do home numeracy and literacy practices of Greek and Canadian parents predict the numeracy skills of kindergarten children? *International Journal of Early Years Education*, *1*, 55-70.

Margoni, F. & Surian, L. (2018). Infants' evaluation of prosocial and antisocial agents: A meta-analysis. *Developmental Psychology, 54*, 1445–1455.

Melhuish, E.C., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., Taggart, B., Phan, M. & Malin, A.(2008). Preschool influences on mathematics achievement. *Science*, *3*, 1161–1162.

Obradović J., Yousafzai, A., Finch, J., & Rasheed, M. (2016). Supplemental material for maternal scaffolding and home stimulation: Key mediators of early intervention effects on children's cognitive development. *Developmental Psychology*, *52*, 1409-1421.

Pereira, K. R., Valentini, N. C., & Saccani, R. (2016). Brazilian infant motor and cognitive development: Longitudinal influence of risk factors. *Pediatrics International, 58*, 1297-1306.

Perry, B. D. (1999). *Bonding and attachment in maltreated children: Consequences of emotional neglect in childhood.* CTA Parent and Caregiver Education Series, Volume 1: Issue 3. Child Academy Press.

Perry, B. D. (2002). Childhood experience and the expression of genetic potential: What childhood neglect tells us about nature and nurture. *Brain and Mind, 3, 79-100.*

Rochat, P. (2001). *The infant's world.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Rochat, P. (2003). Five levels of self-awareness as they unfold early in life. *Consciousness and Cognition*, *12,* 717-731.

Rochat, P., & Hespos, S. J. (1997). Differential rooting response by neonates: Evidence for an early sense of self. *Early Development and Parenting, 6*, 150–150.

Rochat, P., Querido, J. G., & Striano, T. (1999). Emerging sensitivity to the timing and structure of protoconversation in early infancy. *Developmental Psychology*, *35*, 950–957.

Ronfani, L., Brumatti, L. V., Mariuz, M., Tognin, V., Bin, M., Ferluga, V., Barbone, F. (2015). The complex interaction between home environment, socioeconomic status, maternal IQ and early child neurocognitive development: A multivariate analysis of data collected in a newborn cohort study. *Plos One, 10,* 1-13.

Rowe, M. L., & Goldin-Meadow, S. (2009). Differences in early gesture explain SES disparities in child vocabulary size at school entry. *Science, 323,* 951–953.

Saccani, R., Valentini, N. C., Pereira, K. R., Müller, A. B., & Gabbard, C. (2013). Associations of biological factors and affordances in the home with infant motor development. *Pediatrics International, 55*, 197-203.

Shonkoff, J. P. & Garner, A. S. (2012). The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress. *Pediatrics, 129*, 2011-2663.

Slater, A., Field, T., & Hernandez-Reif, M. (2007). The development of the senses. In A. Slater & M. Lewis (Eds.). *Introduction to infant development*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Sperry, D. M., & Widom, C. S. (2013). Child abuse and neglect, social support, and psychopathology in adulthood: A prospective investigation. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 37 415-425.

Tandon, P. S., Zhou, C., Sallis, J. F., Cain, K. L., Frank, L. D., & Saelens, B. E. (2012). Home environment relationships with children's physical activity, sedentary time, and screen time by socioeconomic status. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, *9*, 88.

Twardosz, S. (2012). Effects of experience on the brain: The role of neuroscience in early development and education. *Early Education and Development*, 23, 96-119.

Westerlund, M., & Lagerberg, D. (2008). Expressive vocabulary in 18-month-old children in relation to demographic factors, mother and child characteristics, communication style and shared reading. *Child: Care, Health, and Development, 34,* 257-66.

Yu, M. & Daraganova, M. (2014). Children's early home learning environment and learning outcomes in the early years of school. *The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual Statistical report.* Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Development on Purpose: Faith and Human Behavior in the Social Environment

Courses in human behavior and the social environment (HBSE) raise important questions about the nature of persons and our multi-layered social world. The Christian faith offers answers to these deep questions about human nature and our relationships with one another and the world. Also, Christianity provides a compelling purpose for human development. As social workers, this grand purpose can rightly inform the trajectory of our own lives and sustain our work on behalf of those at risk in the world.

This book provides both students and seasoned professionals with a coherent framework for considering HBSE from a Christian perspective. The first half of the book outlines a purpose for human development, examining biological, psychological, and social theories through the lens of faith. The second half then uses detailed case examples to illuminate the way that faith can relate to work with persons across the lifespan.

The book's chapters can be used interchangeably, making this an excellent supplemental text.

"This book provides a helpful resource for thinking about the complexities of theoretical frameworks and their application in social work practice. Dr. Hosack acknowledges both the limitations and the importance of our models as we try to understand and help others. This is an important complement to the literature in the field." — David A. Sherwood, Ph.D., *Emeritus*, Newberg, OR

Lisa Hosack (MSW, University of Illinois-Chicago; PhD, Michigan State University) is an associate professor at Grove City College where she founded and directs the social work program. Prior to her teaching career, Dr. Hosack was a practitioner for over twenty years, working in child welfare and clinical social work in Chicago and Grand Rapids, MI. The sum of these experiences is a passion for reclaiming social work's roots in Christianity. Her research and writing focuses on the intersection of theology, human development, and social work. She is married and the proud mother of three grown daughters.

NACSW
North American Association of Christians in Social Work

NACSW's mission is to equip its members to integrate Christian faith and professional social work practice.

NACSW, PO Box 121, Botsford, CT 06404-0121
Telephone/Fax: (203) 270-8780
www.nacsw.org • Email: info@nacsw.org

978-0-9897581-5-4