

# The Barnabas Model

Every counselor has beliefs about the nature of human struggles. Additionally, every counselor has beliefs about what constitutes healthy struggle. This paper presents The Barnabas Center's view of human nature, struggle in a fallen world and Christian growth.



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“...what is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?  
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.”  
Psalm 8:4-5



THE BARNABAS CENTER  
A COUNSELING, TRAINING & TEACHING MINISTRY

*“First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don’t have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get our lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at the center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.”*

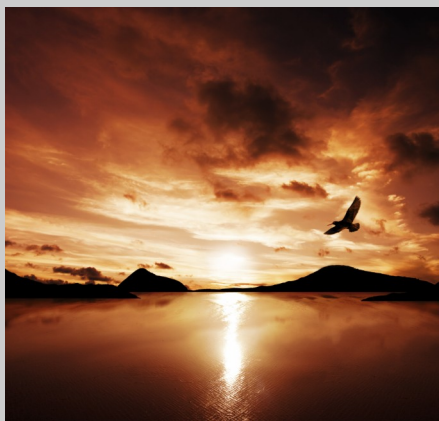
— Eugene Peterson from *The Message*, p.19

### **Dignity -**

God created human beings in His image. As such, we are people of Dignity - created with the longings for both meaningful relationship with God and others, and for impact in relationship and in the world at large. These longings cannot be met this side of heaven. We are created to feel, to choose, and to discover the truth about how life is to be lived.

As image-bearers, we are also created uniquely male and female. While there are more similarities than differences, biological differences do reflect spiritual differences. Man is created with a unique call to move with tender strength into the world at large, and specifically into relationship. Woman is created with a unique call to vulnerably open herself with strength to the world at large, and especially in relationship. Each person, male and female, is created with special gifting (body and soul) that affects their individual call to love. Each person, male and female, is designed for perfect relationship with God and to make fulfilling contributions to people and society. Our Dignity is what creates our potential to be fully human. Our Dignity reminds us of the Garden of Eden – where life was good – and points us to the New Heaven and the New Earth– where life will be perfect and complete.

**W**e begin with God. As Creator and Sustainer of life, all human endeavors must be pursued in the light of proper relationship with Him. To address the horizontally oriented human condition apart from this essential vertical relationship is to ignore the relationship most central to life. In fact, establishing healthy horizontal relationships, requires that we engage with and depend upon God.



### **Depravity & Life in a Fallen World -**

Because of the Fall of Man we are all born sinful, life no longer works for us as originally designed by God. Struggles are therefore inevitable. All of us now live separated from God and victimized by the disappointment and harm we experience in this world. Some are more deeply wounded than others and develop more extreme coping strategies. But fundamentally, we act as sinful agents, each of us developing our own faithless strategies designed to “make life work apart from God”.

Because of the Fall of Man, people are battling several problems at once. While we may truly experience life as victims, we remain agents.

We at times find ourselves at odds with **Creation** itself. It is no longer marked solely by beauty and order, but also by the curses of disease and death. As humans we are forced to cope with a beautiful but flawed creation. This fallen world at times seems random, inexplicably impacting some more than others. But God uses these “thorns and thistles” to increase our awareness of our need for Him.

We also find ourselves at odds with the **Evil One**. The serpent (Satan) deceived Adam and Eve with the belief that they could be “like God”. His successful temptation began the fundamental struggle of faith, doubt and defiance that continues to mark the human condition. Satan continues to work today to diminish our dignity as image-bearers and further separate us from God and people.

We find ourselves to be at odds with **other people**. The immediate consequence for Adam and Eve was a sense of shame and fear that led to both hiding and blaming. Marked by their independence from God, people have harmed one another repeatedly. Even as Adam and Eve’s

*Eph. 2:10  
Rom. 12:3-6  
1 Cor. 12:4?*

*Rom 1:16-32  
Rom. 8:18-23  
James 1:2  
John 14:27*

*Gen.3:16-19  
Gen 3:7-13*

*Gen. 3  
Eccles. 4:1  
Rom. 1:20*

*Gen. 3:1-6  
1Pet. 5:8-9  
Eph. 6:12  
Gen. 3:15  
Gen. 4:7*

*Gen. 3:7-13  
Jas 4: 1-3*

sin affected Cain and Able, so all families are marked by generational sin, with succeeding generations both victims of those who came before and sinful agents in their own right.

We find ourselves at odds even with **ourselves**. Some people are marked by physiological imbalances, genetically predisposed to certain struggles. And everyone lives with a sense of both legitimate and illegitimate shame and guilt, coping with life in ways that take us away from our dignity. We still experience negative feelings, commit ourselves to ungodly beliefs about life, and make ungodly choices. We find ourselves doing what we don't want to do, and failing to do what we want to do in our "new hearts". We live with a shocking ability to deceive ourselves. Yet we know that something is not right inside.

We are at odds with our **Creator**. Since the Garden, each of us is depraved. We each have independently made the decision to defy God and to make our lives work apart from Him. We live in varying states of mistrust of His goodness. We feel a certain distance from God that is the consequence of sin. We each develop our own unique ways to create worlds that at least feel something like the Garden – where we "feel" something that passes for love and where we "feel" some sense of impact. And thus ultimately, we must deal with life primarily as agents, taking responsibility for our lives before God.

#### **Redemption -**

In His love and grace, God has "rigged the world so that it won't work." Our sinful, self-protective strategies designed to make life work without God ultimately fall short. Through the Curse, He ordains struggle in such a way that exposes our design for what only God can offer.

The struggles that bring people to counseling are almost always horizontal in nature – relational disappointment, unhealthy behaviors, and internal strug-

gle. We live unaware of internal realities and have no words for the fears and strategies within. We live with fears of rejection and failure that are both real and imagined; yet most often coped with in ways harmful both to others and to ourselves. But most significantly, we live independently from our Creator – defiantly and instinctively so.

Crisis reveals upon whom and what I depend. Crisis creates the opportunity to examine the unhealthy strategies that we have each created in an attempt to "make life work".

Life-changing growth requires changes both internal and external. It often requires that we face the realities of life – who we are, where we come from, what we are doing and believing. It usually requires us to put words to our hearts in order to see where

we are, and to see where we need to go. Counseling affords the opportunity to acknowledge the places in life where we are truly victims and face the sorrow and powerlessness appropriate to such. It also helps us to discover the strategies we each have used to cope with life in our unique and fallen world. And fundamentally, it helps us to see where we have turned away from God and the life to which He has called us.

The central place of change in counseling comes at the point of repentance – when we admit our independence and even defiance of God and find His mercy, grace and love in a way both personal and powerful. The power to change comes not just in embracing our victimization but primarily our agency, and making a choice to reconnect and depend upon God.

The Cross of Christ and His Resurrection are central in the process of change. They make it possible to face our sinful hearts – how defiant and selfish we truly are. Rather than tritely minimizing the darkness of our hearts, God instead says that we are so sinful that His Son's death was the necessary payment for our sin. The Cross is where we discover the great love of the Father – that He provided the



*Is. 53:6*  
*Jer. 8:5-8*  
*Rom. 1:26-32*  
*2 Sam. 13:20*

*Rom. 3:23*  
*John 3:19*  
*Eph. 2:14*  
*Jer. 2:13*

*Gen. 3:14-19*  
*Rom. 8:20*  
*Hos. 2:7*  
*John 4:13*  
*Ps. 42*

*Is. 53:6*  
*Gen. 4:1-8*  
*Prov. 20:5*

*1 Pet. 4:12*  
*James 1:12*  
*1 Cor. 1:8,9*

*1 John 1:9*  
*James 5:16*

*Luke 15*  
*Is. 30:15*

*Rom. 2:4*  
*1 Peter 3:18*



John 3.16  
John 17.3

way to deal with shame and guilt and paid this ultimate price in order to forgive and restore us to right relationship with Him. And that relationship with Him is life. Hearts change in the midst of this ongoing supernatural encounter with the God of love. It is His kindness and mercy that lead us to repentance, and gratitude for His mercy that fuels growth in and toward a life of love.

Luke 7.47  
Titus 2.11

### ***Sanctification -***

God's Spirit gives us the power to move against our sinfully designed strategies. He empowers us to embrace disappointment and fear and choose love over self-protection. And He forgives us again when we intuitively return to self-reliant and long-standing patterns of living. Indeed the Christian life should be, as Oswald Chambers comments, a life of conscious repentance that leads to unconscious holiness. It is this ongoing experience of grace that fuels a life of love.

Change usually takes place in the context of community. God uses others to provoke an awareness of our struggle. God requires that we live out this new life in relationship, where our hearts are exposed and changed. It is here that we express this new life of grace, love and gratitude.

Phil. 2.12  
Roms 5. 3-5  
Heb. 6.1-3  
1 John 4.10  
Jn. 13.34,35  
Prov. 3. 5,6

Such a life is a life of worship and develops over time. Maturity comes with repentance and risky steps of faith in godly yet seemingly unnatural ways, tailored uniquely for each person. They lead toward healthy and loving relationships with others and toward deeper dependence upon God. And they are marked by an increasing desire to live differently from self-reliance, freed to love and live in response to His goodness.

### ***The Barnabas Methodology of Change***

Counseling is one arena that God can use to work in our hearts in such a way that we know Him better and are more able to live for Him.

The counselor must come with the perspective that God is at work already, calling the client closer in relationship with Himself, pointing them toward a

life grounded in Him and lived for Him in love. God uses the struggles that bring clients into the office for their good, and ultimately to glorify Him. The role of the counselor is to help the client find the ways in which their unique set of struggles can be used to deepen dependence of God in a way that provides the strength and wisdom needed in life. God is revealing Himself in the midst of their personal story. Pain always has a redemptive purpose in God's economy.

The counseling relationship is an experience and experiment of safe community. It offers a place where one's individual story can be brought before God's ultimate plan. Counseling can be a context where this discovery can begin to grow in a person's heart.

We believe that no one can take another further than they have gone themselves. Hence, it is of vital import that the counselor live with personal integrity – wrestling with their own dignity and depravity, constantly in the battle to become more dependent upon Christ.

The counseling relationship offers a place to discover more of one's heart and more of our need for Him. Dignity and depravity, will show up in the moment. Our job as counselors is to reveal the human condition, exposing it in the moment, both in its potential to become what God has in mind and in its self-centered autonomy. It is in this context that we pray God's Spirit will choose to move in the depths of one's heart. Ultimately, no methodology or theology can change a heart. Only God can.

Rom. 8.28  
1 Peter 4.12  
James 1.2-4

Matt. 7.-3-5

Eph. 2.1-4  
John 16.8



*“The entrance into the Kingdom is through the panging pains of repentance crashing into a man's respectable goodness; then the Holy Ghost, Who produces these agonies, begins the formation of the Son of God in the life. The new life will manifest itself in conscious repentance and unconscious holiness, never the other way about.”*  
Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, December 7