

**Carditive
Therapy:
Working with
the Heart in
Christian
Counseling &
Psychotherapy**

ELF Conference

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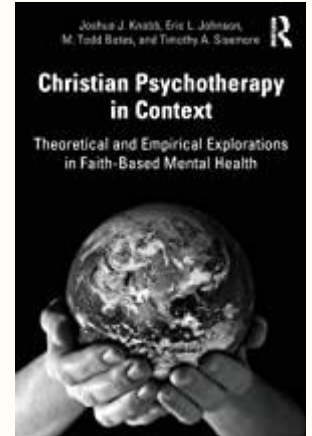
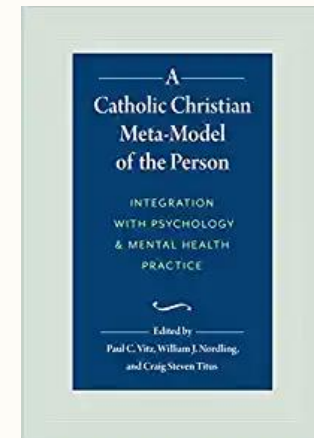
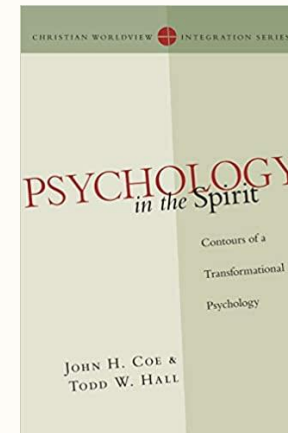
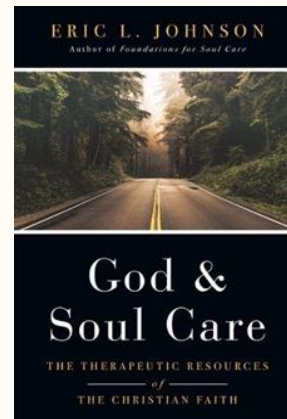
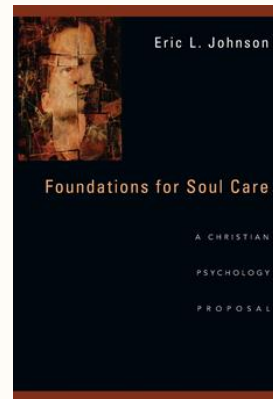
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Disclaimer:

The following model is currently under construction...

Foundations, walls, and utilities have been established



But drywall, paint, and decor are still in development

What is Carditive Therapy?



A Christian experiential approach to soul care – derived from the resources of the Christian tradition(s) and everyday life, and deeply informed by evidence-based secular and Christian models of therapy – to promote the healing and maturation of the psychological heart.



Overview

Christian Psychology Foundations

Carditive Psychology: Theory, Evidence, and Rationale

Carditive Therapy: Theory, Evidence, and Rationale

Practice of Carditive Therapy

A Carditive Therapy demonstration



Christian Psychology Foundations

Its mission statement: To develop distinctly Christian psychological theory, research, and clinical practice, insofar as Christianity makes a difference

Humans are multi-dimensional

A diagram illustrating the multi-dimensional nature of humans. On the left, a stylized tree with many thin branches is shown in a light beige color. To the right of the tree, four horizontal bars of different colors are stacked vertically. The top bar is teal and labeled 'Spiritual'. The second bar is a darker green and labeled 'Ethical'. The third bar is a medium green and labeled 'Psychosocial'. The bottom bar is a brownish-green and labeled 'Biological'. To the left of these bars, two teal boxes are positioned: 'SOUL' is to the left of the top three bars, and 'BODY' is to the left of the bottom bar. A large teal bracket on the left side of the bars groups the top three bars under 'SOUL' and the bottom bar under 'BODY'.

SOUL

Spiritual

Ethical

Psychosocial

BODY

Biological

To understand human beings as comprehensively as possible, it helps to distinguish their multiple dimensions, which are related hierarchically and profoundly influence each other.

Humans are to...

1. Work with all relevant dimensions
2. Work at the highest dimensions *possible*
3. And at the lowest dimensions *necessary*
4. Transposing lower dimensions into the higher

*“So, whether you eat or drink,
or whatever you do, do all to the glory of
God.” - 1 Cor 10:31*

Psychopathology from a Christian Perspective

(Johnson, 2007, 2017)

Negative emotions are often the most immediate and complex indicators of exposure to fallenness

All three kinds of fallenness should be taken into account to avoid reductionism and over-simplification

There are three kinds of psychopathology (soul-disorder):

1. **Sin:** original sin, sinful desires, sinful actions, and vices
2. **Suffering:** physical or emotional pain. If severe (as in trauma), suffering is potentially damaging
3. **Biopsychosocial damage/weakness/brokenness/disability:** damage to the body, the self; cognition, emotion, and action; relationality; shows up in dissociation, defenses, and part-selves

Contemporary psychology focuses on **biopsychosocial damage** and **suffering** at the exclusion of **sin**

- **NB:** mysteriously, suffering and biopsychosocial damage can be hinderances OR means to God's glory and human well-being

Some Distinctives of a Christian Therapy Model

- Primarily for those seeking therapy who are already Christians
- Christ-centered, rather than client-centered, and therefore incarnational
- The Bible and the Christian tradition(s) are considered *guiding resources* for the practice of Christian therapy, but creation grace resources (reflection and research) – including modern psychology – are also highly valued
- The Christian metanarrative (creation, fall, redemption, consummation) provides the ultimate temporal context for understanding human beings and their stories, including evolution
- Christian therapy is intrinsically *trialogical*: a formative conversation between the therapist, the counselee, and Jesus, based in divine love
- The therapeutic telos includes spiritual and character formation; as well as healing and remediation, where possible; and acceptance and surrender, where not possible

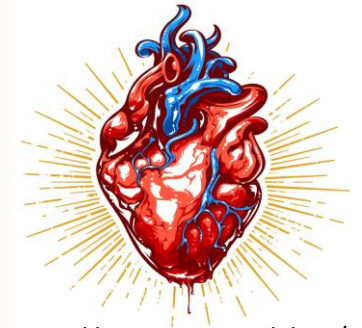




Carditive Psychology: Some Evidence and a Rationale



The physical heart and the autonomic nervous system



Designed by Sergey_Kandakov / Freepik

Our feeling, sensing bodies provide the ground for later development, including cognition

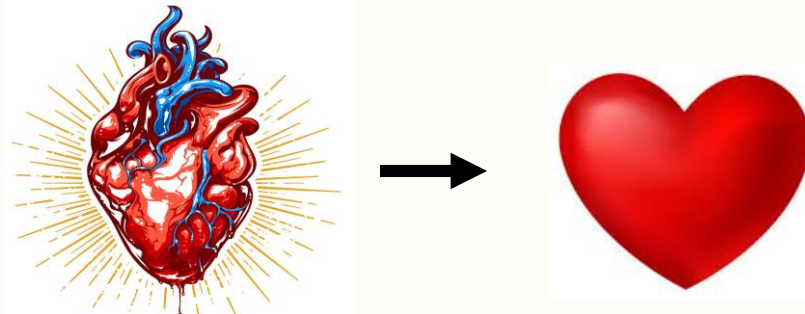
Though processed in the brain, emotions are experienced in our torso, where the sympathetic (SNS) and parasympathetic nervous systems (PNS) provide a dense network of nerves that regulate organs and hormones and receives information that has two-way communication with the brain. The physical heart has 40,000 neurons that are part of the SNS and PNS through the vagus nerve, that make it sensitive to psychological input, both good and bad, which we are able to *feel* in and around it

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) have documented that human embodiment has markedly influenced English language in metaphor. For example, “up” is a metaphor for “good,” as in “I’m feeling up;” and “She’s in high spirits.”

The *physical* heart as a metaphor for the *psychological* heart

Another example in English is the use of the word “heart” to refer metaphorically to our emotions and other important psychological processes experienced in our chests.

Such usage is found throughout the West, from in Ancient Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin cultures to Spanish, French, and English; and even Mandarin.



Designed by Sergey_Kandakov / Freepik

Common idioms that refer to the psychological heart



She wears her heart on her sleeve.

Ted was broken-hearted after the divorce.

Becky had her heart set on going to college.

I mean it from the bottom of my heart.

They had a heart-to-heart talk.

Sam's a hard-hearted man.

Be true to your heart!

Mary has a heart of gold.

He's devoted to God with all his heart

So, “heart” is used to refer to emotion, commitment, meaning, value, love, morality, and spirituality.

The use of heart in English from 1500 to 2019

Google Books Ngram Viewer

heart

1500 - 2019

English (2019)

Case-Insensitive

Smoothing



The most important psychological term in the Bible

Wolff, 1974, p. 40



“Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the issues of life” (Pr 4:23)

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but **the LORD weighs the heart**” (Pr 21:2)

“Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord” (Lam 2:19)

God promised to write his law on his people’s hearts in the new covenant (Jer 31:33)

Even God has a psychological heart: “The LORD regretted he had made man on the earth, and *it grieved him to his heart*” (Gen 6:6)

Jesus said, “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Mt 6:21)

Paul prayed that “Christ may *dwell in your hearts* through faith” (Eph 3:17)

As a result, one can find a “heart tradition” within the Christian tradition:

Brain, Mind, and Heart and their relation



It's hard to overstate the value of the mind to humankind. However, the West has so prized the mind and its capacities, especially in the modern era, that the heart and its capacities have become comparatively neglected, and often disparaged as irrational. And modern psychology has long reflected this "cognitive bias" (e.g., Sampson, 1981).

More recently, we've come to appreciate how important the brain is. Part of Christian psychology's calling is to allow the Bible and the Christian tradition(s) to set its agenda and priorities, including a prioritizing of everyday life and "common sense" and a healthy skepticism regarding secular scientism.

What if the heart's role as the psychological structure dedicated to meaning, values, love, morality, and spirituality gives it a special priority in human life, reflected in the Bible's emphasis?

What if the mind's primary purpose in human life is actually to serve the purposes of the heart?

Stages of Heart-Mind-Heart Development

Infancy: The infant is all heart; it's the fount of life; mind has not yet developed

Childhood to early adulthood: The mind develops and comes to rule over the heart

- During childhood parents are needed to wisely, kindly regulate their child's heart; and as the child's mind grows, they internalize that parental scaffolding and learn how to regulate their own heart (emotion regulation)
- ***Problem 1:*** if parents dishonor and coerce their child's heart, they don't learn how to regulate it well themselves; at best, they can learn how to shut it down, and they lose touch with their hearts (and their true self)
- ***Problem 2:*** many people get stuck in their heads, and avoid their emotions throughout life

Middle to late adulthood: As the heart matures, the mind comes to serve the heart

- Humans are supposed to learn how to listen to their hearts again (become as

Carditive therapy assumes the priority of the heart in everyday life

- This model utilizes the body, the mind (consciousness, memory, reasoning, and the imagination), narrative, symbolism, the counselee's relationship with God and the therapist, and especially the emotions to bring healing to the heart and promote its maturation and preeminence in human life, so counselees can realize their fullest potential, in accord with God's design.



Carditive Therapy: Theory, Evidence, and Rationale



What are emotions?



An emotion is a sign

**And a sign is anything that
points to something else**

**Therefore, signs are always
meaningful**

What are emotions?

Emotions are bi-valent, conveying meaning about value:

- What is good for us (positive emotions) and what is bad for us (negative emotions)
- However, our *perceptions* of good and bad can become false and distorted
- Our understanding of good and bad can develop from pleasure and pain, in childhood, to a sense of righteousness and evil, to a sense of holy and defiled

Emotions are complex, for they can involve...

Bodily sensation, feelings, implicit memory, explicit memory, perception, beliefs, values, and always involves neural activity

Emotions *move* us, and they can influence...

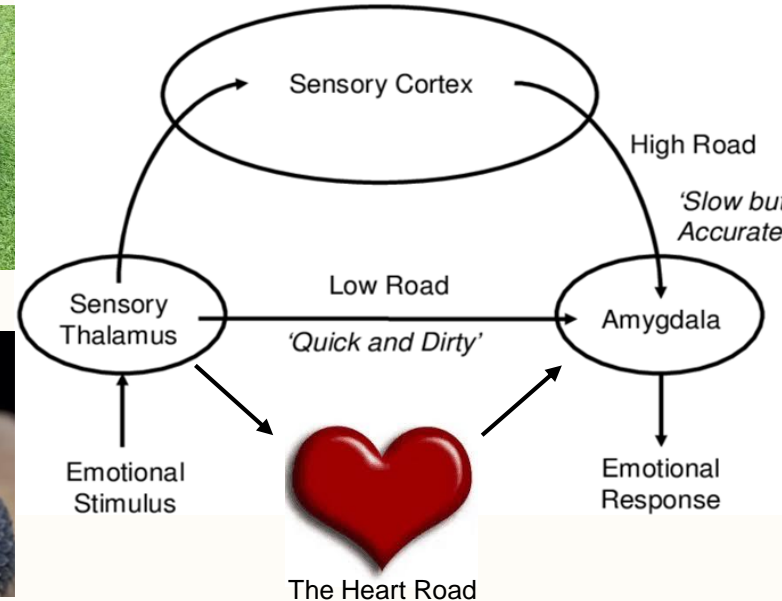
Our memories, perceptions, beliefs, goals, relationships, and actions

What are emotions?

Meaning can be processed and appraised rapidly or automatically

Our felt bodily reactions occur more quickly than our thinking

As we've seen, another road develops that is fast and accurate,



Adapted from
LeDoux et al. (2010)




Why are there *negative* emotions?

- Negative emotions are unpleasant, so we naturally try to avoid them
- God created humans with negative emotion capacities for life in a fallen world
- Negative emotions can be stored in memory, so adult emotion tendencies are a record of the fallenness to which they have been exposed
- Because of *the world's evil*, humans experience basic negative emotions of anger, fear/anxiety, sadness, guilt, shame, and disgust
- Because of *their own evil*, humans experience basic negative emotions of guilt and shame
- However, by adulthood, most people have become masters at avoiding negative emotions

Therefore...
emotions should be used
as a **gauge**, not *only* a
guide

(Bloom, 2012)

The meaning of emotions




Situation	Appropriate Emotion	Meaning
Violation or attack	Anger	Injustice, defend, surmount
Death, abandonment, neglect	Sadness	Loss warrants grief, support
Anger of others, violence, threat	Fear	Danger
Self-recognition of wrongdoing or being deficient	Guilt/Shame	Hiding signifies there's something wrong
Offensive or dirty stimulus	Disgust/Contempt	Avoid or reject object/person
Pursuit of our Good	Joy/Contentment/Love	Flourishing

Rationale for the emotional/experiential emphasis of Carditive therapy

1. **Emotions are fundamentally meaningful, valid, and good to experience**
 - Throughout the Bible, God is portrayed as experiencing and expressing a wide range of emotions, including anger (Num. 11:1-2; Matt. 21:12-13), disgust (Ezek. 5:11), joy (Lk 15:7), sadness (Gen. 6:5-6), and love (Jn 3:16)
 - Humans are created with emotions (Johnson, 2007); they are not a result of sin
2. **Emotional awareness, expression, and exploration facilitate well-being**
 - Emotional avoidance, suppression, and rumination have detrimental effects on many mental health outcomes (Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Schweizer, 2010; Chervonsky & Hunt, 2017)
 - Emotions play a vital role in Christian faith, devotion, and daily life

Rationale for the emotional/experiential emphasis of Carditive therapy

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3. Adds a redemptive, spiritual dimension absent in secular experiential approaches
 - Relationship with God and therapist promotes healing, while aiming at transcendent goods: God's glory and the wellbeing of others, rather than self-actualization
 - Acceptance of weakness/damage and confession of sin (compassionate discernment), rather than non-judgment per se
 4. Secular experiential interventions have been well-validated empirically and can be translated into Christian theory and practice
 - Strategies for increasing emotional awareness and regulation skills are creation grace/common factor resources, available to everyone
 - Narrative, meaning, and emotion change strategies are more impacted by WV differences in therapeutic goals and assumptions

Reframing Change through Redemption

Derived, in part, from the apostle Paul's metaphor of "putting off the old self," and "putting on the new self" (Eph 4:22-24), it is based on the counselee's union with Christ in heaven (Eph 2:6), which it seeks to *realize* in the counselee's body and soul, by

- Reframing the counselee's personal narrative in the context of the Christian metanarrative, centered on Christ, as an ongoing participation in Christ's death and resurrection through faith (Rom 6:3-6)
- Promoting ongoing experiential movement from "old-self" emotions (e.g., restlessness; despair; Augustine, 1980; Kierkegaard, 1848/1980) to "new-self" emotions (e.g., love, joy, peace; Gal 5:22),
- with the long-term goal of cultivating a more virtuous character

Working *through* Emotion Processes in Session


Process diagnosis:

1. What type of emotion is this?
2. What is the client's zone of emotional proximal development? (What is the client capable of doing with counselor support?)
3. What types of emotional processing are needed at this moment? (down-regulation or up-regulation)

Emotional Processing:

Carditive therapists seek to 1) activate negative emotion schemes in session; 2) explore their old-self/fallen context of meaning; and 3) uncover and address unmet created needs, so that 4) new-self/new-creation emotion meaning (glory) can be appropriated to meet those needs. Over time, this meaning/glory gets more deeply internalized in the heart, thus helping counseling to become, more fully, a new self.

Stages of working through emotions in session

- 
1. Awareness, engagement
 2. Expression & arousal
 3. Emotional down-regulation
 4. Reflection on the emotion, while feeling it
 - More coherent narratives can be constructed experientially in the context of the Christian meta-narrative, esp. the story of Christ
 5. Sequences of emotional transformation
 - “Changing emotion with emotion” (Greenberg, 2002)
- Empathic exploration and experiencing (e.g., focusing)
- Other-soothing to soothing oneself
- Narrative re-storying & re-interpretation of core themes
- Co-activation of incompatible emotions to create a new emotional experience

Helping counselees identify, differentiate, and experience their emotions

1. **Role model tolerating the counselee's emotions. Be a "holding environment."**
2. **Encourage counselees to look for signs of emotion**
E.g., attending to bodily sensations, and the "felt sense" of the experience (Gendlin, 1996)
3. **Guide counselees in distinguishing emotions from each other**
4. **Affirm the revelation of negative emotions, and seek to normalize them (given their story).**
5. **Explore places where emotion would be expected, but is absent.**
6. **Seek to uncover layers of emotion (e.g., primary emotion of sadness buried under the secondary emotion of anger)**



Redemptive Differentiation

Distinguishing between healthy created/redeemed emotions, sinful emotions, and damaged created emotions

1. Emotions from creation (e.g., anger at perpetrator).
2. Emotions that flow mostly from sin (e.g., anger at God for the difficulties in one's life).
3. Emotions that are best understood as a result of damaged creation structures (e.g., dispositional neuroticism, intense anxiety in the face of someone's anger that's due to past trauma).
4. Emotions that flow from redemption (e.g., feeling forgiven, the love of God).



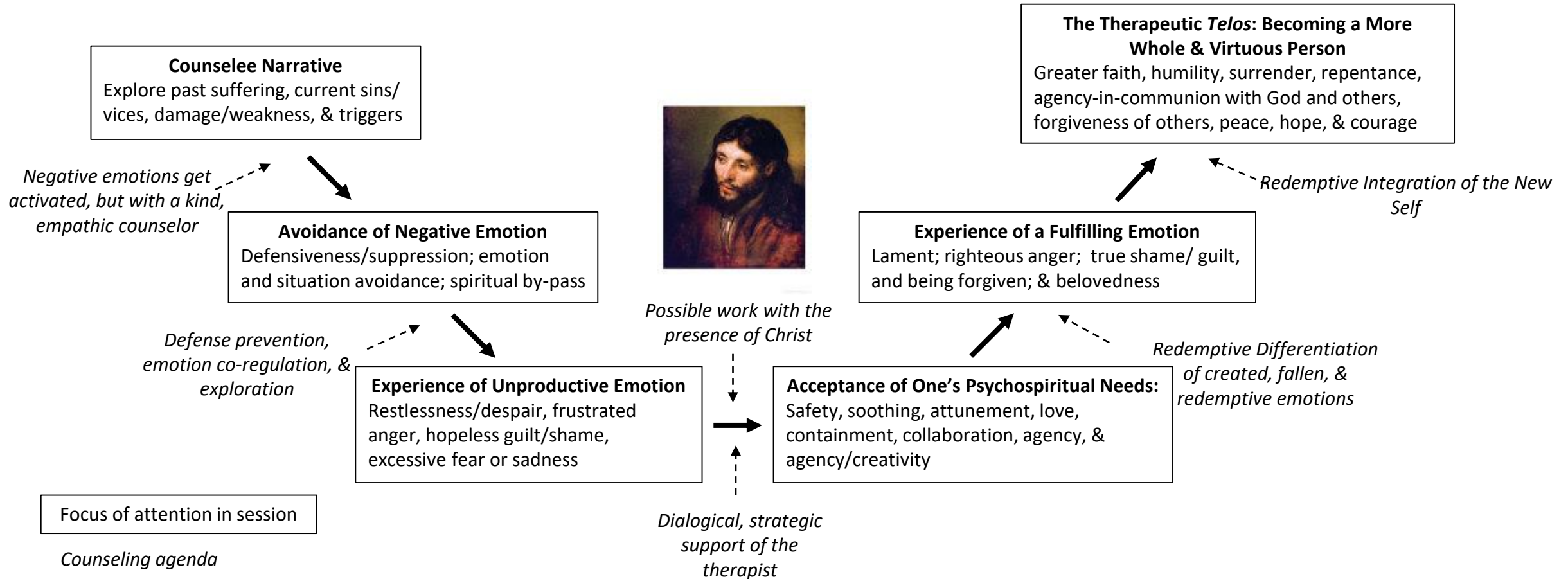
Redemptive Integration

Bringing a new-self emotion together with an old-self emotion

1. **Folding a sense of divine forgiveness into a sense of guilt**
2. **Tie feelings of shame related to one's story into Christ's story: "My story has been thoroughly united with Christ's story, so it's been given transcendent meaning and is a manifestation of his glory."**
3. **Taking some strong anxiety to the cross of Christ: "My anxiety was nailed to the cross by God. Now, by faith, *I* experientially participate in what God did on the cross, and I let it go and give to him. After awhile, I imagine myself being raised from the deadness of my anxiety through Christ's resurrection, and allow the anxiety to be replaced with a positive emotion that reflects Christ's resurrection (e.g., contentment).**
4. **While feeling legitimate anger towards a perpetrator, receiving a fresh sense of Christ's love and forgiveness of me, issuing in a sense of forgiveness for my perpetrator**



The Carditive Model of Change



The Practice of Carditive Therapy



Specific In-Session Strategies

Summary of chair tasks

The efficacy of the following **EFT interventions** is well-documented. They can also be used to further redemption and promote engagement with Jesus Christ.

Task Marker	Intervention	Christian Extension
EFT: Self-Evaluative Split (used for self-criticism or a dilemma)	<i>2 or 3-chair dialogue</i>	Jesus's compassionate responses can soften self-criticism Also, Old Self/New Self split
EFT: Self-Interruptive Split (used to block feelings)	<i>2 or 3-chair enactment</i>	Jesus as a compassionate healer who is eager to listen
EFT: Unfinished Business (used for unresolved neg. emotions towards a significant other)	<i>Empty-chair task</i>	Lamenting, complaining, or crying out for justice to Jesus

Specific In-Session Strategies

1. Wisely and gently pursue the counselee's emotions

Asking questions that help the counselee explore his or her emotions, like “What is the worst thing about what happened?” At the right time, Christ's redemption might be brought to bear on the emotion experience.

2. Encourage counselee prayer that experiences and expresses negative emotions to God in lament (sorrow, anxiety) and imprecation (anger).

3. Chair strategies

Empty-chair:

but **Counselee tells someone what s/he needs to say to them, cannot right now (for whatever reason)**

Specific In-Session Strategies

(cont'd)

Two-Chair technique (sometimes more than two chairs are needed)

Invite counselee to have a conversation between two parts (depending on the conflict, it could be between old self and new self)

Invite counselee to have a conversation with Jesus, in which counselee takes turns speaking as counselee and as Jesus

4. Guided imagery exercises

Have counselee symbolize their negative emotion (legitimate or sinful) and imagine a redemptive resolution (e.g., Jesus washes it out of one's body; Jesus absorbs it in his body on the cross).

When the counselee feels safe enough in the process, take counselee back to a traumatic event and invite Jesus into that event, to bring about a resolution.



Between-Session Strategies

Many of the strategies practiced in session can be assigned for homework to great effect, for example, during their personal devotion or “soul-work” time.

- a. Train counselee in Christian meditation and encourage the use of guided imagery or a chair technique to activate and process emotions redemptively on their own (e.g., the “Death/Resurrection emotion shift”)
- b. Practice emotion regulation skills (down-regulation or up-regulation of the emotion, as needed) to keep an emotion in the “window of tolerance”
- c. Identify, differentiate, and explore one’s emotions and their meaning, if possible, in the presence of God
- d. Practice taking one’s emotions to the cross and expressing them to God in prayer



A Carditive Therapy Experience





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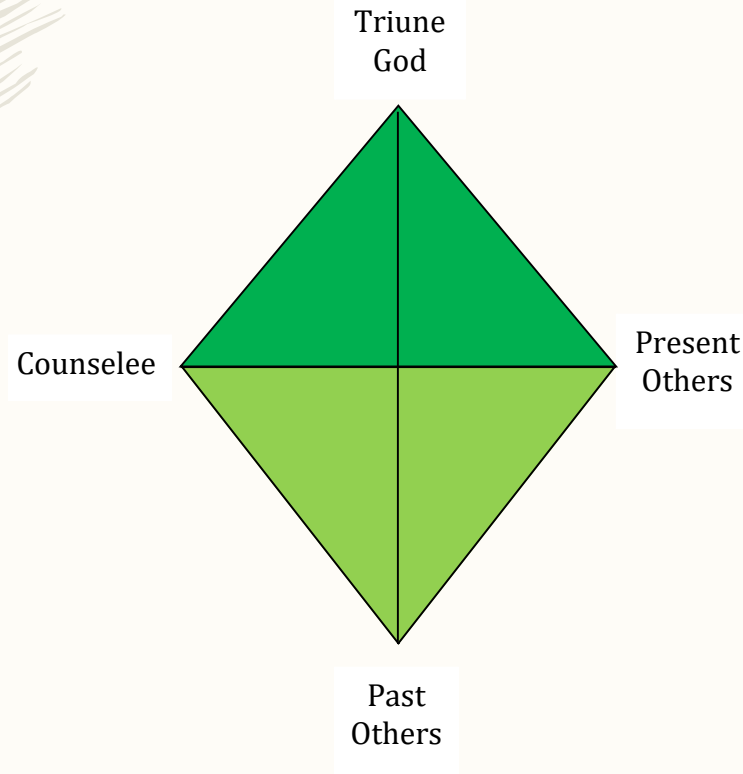
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The Two Pyramids

Relational Pyramid



Internal Conflict Pyramid

