

## The Crucible of Therapy

**Parenting contained some epiphanies for me.** One of those occurred many years ago when our sons were very small. The three year old chose one evening to relentlessly be disobedient about something—I no longer remember what. The youngest was still nursing, and I was a very tired young mother. I kept dragging myself upstairs with my firstborn, determined to be as relentless in training as he was in disobedience. After several trips I sat wearily on the steps and thought, “So, who is getting disciplined here anyway?” I realized, of course, that the answer was both of us. **Certainly I was parenting the child. However, there was another parent training another child simultaneously—my heavenly Father was training me.**

**I have found the process of therapy to be quite similar.** In fact, both parenting and therapy have served as crucibles in my life. The word crucible has two meanings. First, it is a metal container used to heat substances to high temperatures. Second, it is a severe test causing lasting change. Applied personally, I am hard to manage, stubbornly disobedient at times, and I often struggle to retain my sinful shape even when heated to high temperatures. Many times high temperatures are what have revealed my shape.

The ambiguous and repetitious nature of therapy has often revealed arrogance, impatience, and judgment in me. Among my clients, demandingness, self-absorption, and resistance to treatment often make me want to quit. **Blindness, self-deception, and a preference for darkness weary me. Such things serve as a crucible, heating me to high temperatures, and revealing my heart, a most uncomfortable process.**

Think about it for a moment. We enter counseling with stated motives of caring for others and assisting change. Our training and ethics shape us to serve the clients’ goals and not our own. The focus is on what the client needs to grow, and the process is considered successful when that growth occurs.

**Until recent years, the person of the therapist was not even part of the discussion.** I heard little to nothing about the nurture and care for the therapist during my graduate school days. Don’t get me wrong; the care of the client is foremost. The counseling relationship does not exist to serve the needs of the therapist. When it is used in such a fashion abuse occurs. **The need and concerns of the therapist need to be met outside of counseling. We need to feed, yes, but we are not to feed off the sheep.**

However, God does not confine Himself to human categories and weaknesses. He does graciously use our efforts and our interventions redemptively in the lives of our clients. **Yet I have come to see that He is just as busy using the process of “helping**

**others” to work on me.** Doing therapy for 30 years has been a severe test that has produced lasting change in my life.

Many clients have asked me to enter worlds I do not desire to inhabit or even visit. They take me into worlds of abuse, violence, death, and darkness. They have often been deeply scarred by such things and bring those influences into a relationship with me. **From this crucible I have seen glimpses of the humility of our God,** who entered our world through the womb of a peasant girl and graced many small things with the beauty of His presence.

**I have tasted His infinite patience as He has taught me how to be like Him** to those who need to rework ground again and again before they taste freedom. He has taught me about His pursuit of those in darkness. I would rather sit in the light and invite them in, not go into the darkness to bring them light.

**In essence, God has used the crucible of therapy to make me more like Jesus Christ.** There is no doubt that high temperatures still await me for I have a great deal more to learn. I am, however, grateful for the fact that God is not boxed in by my categories. He is constantly and graciously using my time with those He has called me to serve as a crucible in my life.

It has not escaped my notice that the word crucible comes from the same root in Latin for the word cross. Certainly the cross qualifies as high temperatures or a severe test that brought about lasting change. Once again, He calls us to follow Him, for He never asks us to go where He has not preceded us.

I pray we will not simply view the work we do according to human categories. **So much awaits us if we will allow the Refiner to do His work, and ask Him to give us eyes to see it.**

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