

LIVING A PRIESTLY LIFE

TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

ROBYN HUCK
rhuck@ccef.org

A workshop session for *Created to Draw Near*, CCEF National Conference 2020.

Presented remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This workshop will present a brief explanation of what it is to be a priest and introduce four models of priestly behaviors developed from biblical precepts. The author gives permission for these models to be used in counseling and pastoral ministries.



The Role of Priest

A priest, as described by the Old Testament, was a servant of God who acted as intercessor on behalf of the people. The priests had specific jobs of caring for the tabernacle, implementing the sacrificial system, observing all the rites and celebrations God required. The holy God desired closeness with his people, and this is how their sinfulness could be atoned during the lead up before Christ's fulfillment. Everything the priests did was to facilitate the relationship between God and his people before Jesus came. Prior to Jesus's death and resurrection, the role of priest was required and mandated by God.

But what about now? Christ has fulfilled the required sacrifice and is the only intercessor needed between God and man.

Now God has extended the role of priest to all believers in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:9). We remain a type of facilitator, in that we are to teach all we know of the character and purposes of God so others can believe and grow close to him. We remain a type of intercessor, in that we speak to God, praying on behalf of others. And we are to fulfill his requirements of us as best we can. What requirements? To grow in grace. To continually put off the old selfish ways and live from the new heart he gives us. To love others as a conduit of his love.

What follows are 4 models of behavior that show the evidence of a transformed heart. You are invited to use these models in your efforts at living a priestly life.

RELATIONSHIPS | FOR GOD'S PURPOSES

THE OLD NATURE

The old nature is one of selfish desires. It says, "I will get what feels good to me, and all people and situations are mine to use as I please." It worships only itself.

James 3:14-16

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

God made humankind and all creation for his purposes. The two greatest commandments are to love God and love your neighbor as yourself.

Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 22: 26-29

THE NEW NATURE

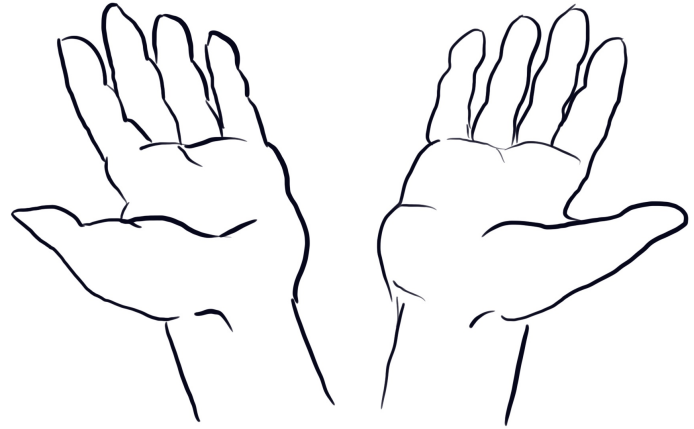
Seeing the example of Christ who laid down his life for the glory of the Father, we offer up all we are and all we have for his purposes. We worship the God who first loved us.

1John 3:16; Galatians 2:20

THIS MODEL

Selfishness could be portrayed as closed fists, demanding that people serve the purpose of our fleshly desires. The selfish closed fist symbolizes a claim of ownership and control over others. Selfishness denies that there is anything more important than its own desires.

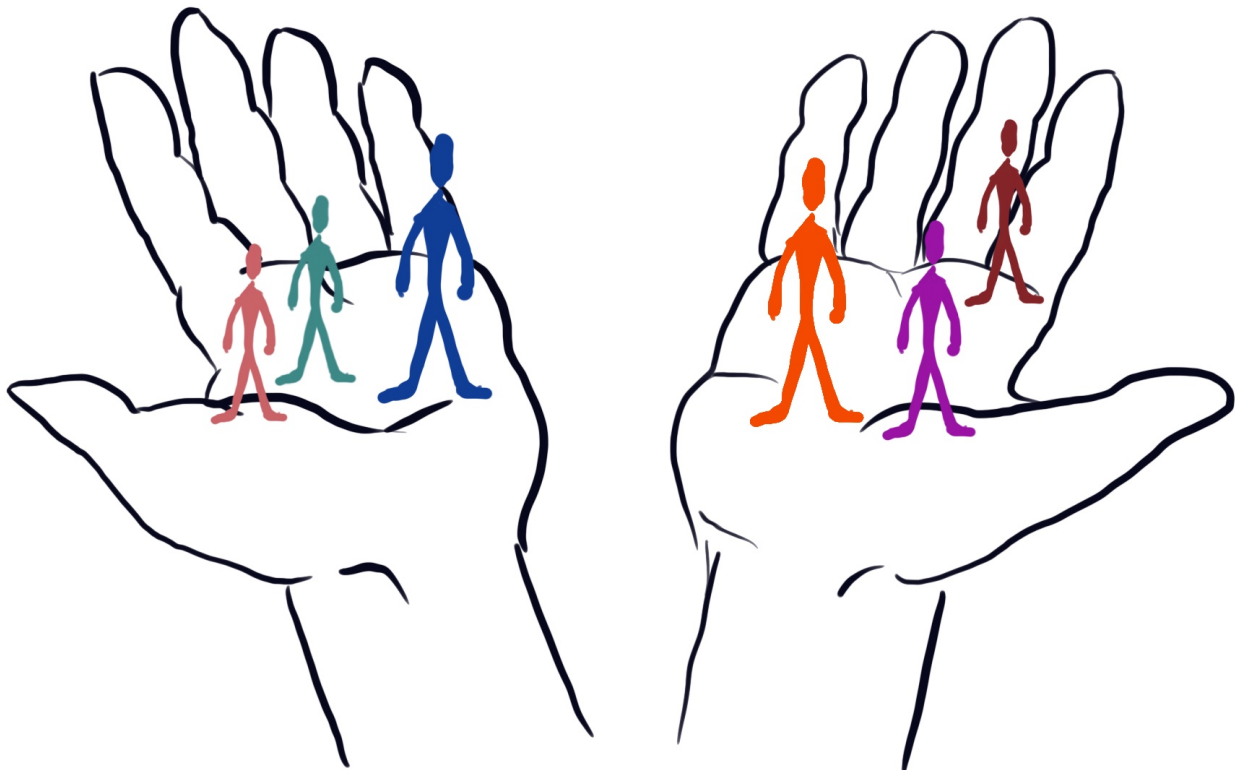
The opposite is open palms, as hands held up in worship.



Worship Hands

In worship we lay our full selves before the Lord, including every relationship he has given us. We acknowledge that each person and every interaction is for his purpose, not our own. We do not demand control over people, nor do we expect them to serve us. Our hands are open to the giving and receiving of life and love as he sees fit.

This first step of humility, defining our selves and all our relationships for God's purposes not our own, is foundational and a prerequisite of the next 3 models.



COMMUNICATION | THE CONVERSATION GAME

THE OLD NATURE

Words are one of the most effective weapons of selfishness. Selfishness can be displayed simply by talking too much or listening too little. But words can also be agents of evil through manipulation, lies, and harmful intent.

James 3:6-10

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

Our words are powerful because God has made us in his image. He used words to create the universe, and as we use words we actually create something as well. We can build up or we can destroy, using words alone.

Genesis 1; Proverbs 12:18

THE NEW NATURE

The power of words must come under the jurisdiction of grace-filled self control. As ambassadors of Christ, every word we speak must be acceptable to him.

Ephesians 4:29

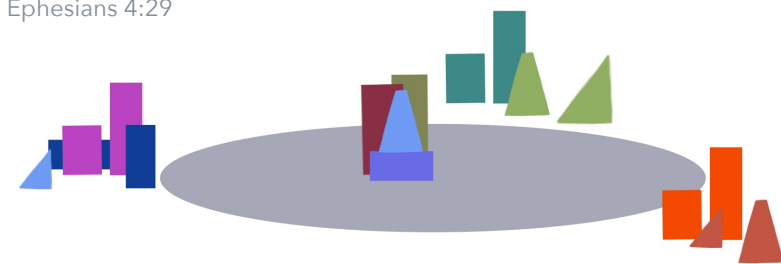


1) The Conversation Game Set Up

THIS MODEL

This model is intended to illustrate a truly good conversation. Hopefully it will also spark the conscience in convicting us of the intentions of our hearts.

- 1) "The Conversation Game" is played with a round game board in the middle of the players. Each participant has a collection of blocks of differing sizes and shapes. A topic is chosen. The topic could be a decision that needs to be made or a subject that needs attention.
- 2) Players take turns placing a piece on the game board, and saying something to the group that contributes to the conversation.
- 3) The purpose is to demonstrate that when everyone is involved and revered as an important contributor (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) the cooperative endeavor of conversation creates something new that no individual could have done on his or her own.



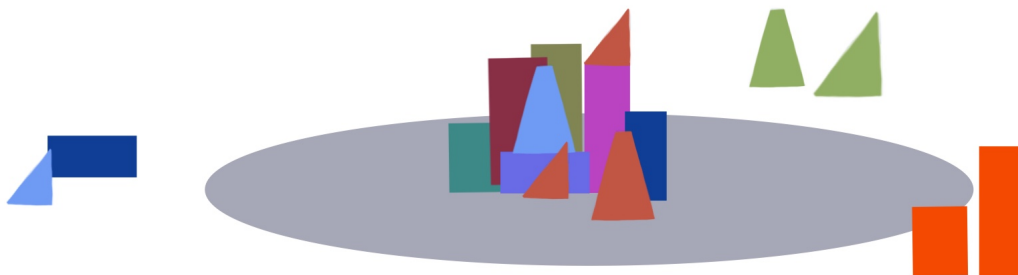
2) Each turn involves listening or speaking with the intention of blessing others.

The newly created thought or decision should be greatly valued, partly because everyone contributed and partly because each participant practiced godly character in the making of it. The creation is esteemed highly because the creators are esteemed highly. This biblical precept ultimately brings glory to God, the creator of all good things.

Be aware: Arrogance is shown when any player esteems his/her own contribution as more valuable than others. The arrogant player may try to dominate the game by playing more pieces or strategizing to control the outcome. Hate is shown when any player harmfully attacks another's contribution. *We must encourage caring discourse that raises differing views while also forbidding attempts to win arguments with force.* Always remember that God is at work within this process. Be patient.

Each player should be intent on using turns for the purpose of good; blessing the others with truth spoken in love. Each player should be more interested in understanding the others than in being understood. Together the group is able to achieve more than any of them could themselves. This is the practice of growing together toward maturity.

Proverbs 16:5; James 4:15-17; Proverbs 18:2; Leviticus 19:17-18; Ephesians 4: 1-7, 11-16



3) At the conclusion of the game something new and good has been created.

ANGER | THE JAMES 4 DIAGRAM

THE OLD NATURE

James 4:1-3 "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions."

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

Anger in its perfect, holy form is an attribute of God. But within the sinful realm of human form, it is a fast road to foolishness. Rather than act in anger, God instructs us to trust him, realizing he is working in and through this circumstance. He wants the fruit of the spirit to direct our hearts and behavior as we trust him to fulfill his purposes.

Numbers 14: 18; Psalm 37:7-9; Proverbs 19:11

THE NEW NATURE

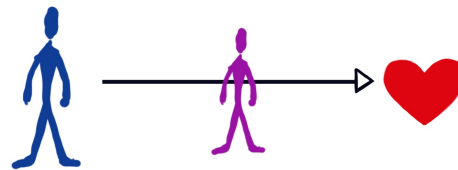
James 4:6-8, 10 "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you... Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

The new nature responds with humility. This is in direct opposition to the old nature that was driven by desire. Notice that this is all geared toward the individual: the person's desires, and understanding of God and self.

When a person grows in humility, having gained a James 4 understanding of anger, it is often a life changing event that affects every aspect of life.



1) Here I am, happily doing life, going toward whatever I want at that moment.



2) Until something or someone comes between me and what I want.

THIS MODEL

James 4 is an excellent description of anger. The entire chapter fits with this model, but for many counseling situations you'll want to skip some of the more difficult verses to keep the focus on anger, desire, and humility.

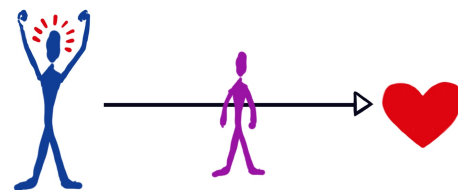
I highly recommend drawing these figures on paper or white board as you read or recite portions of James 4 to your counselee. Use a personal story or a situation your counselee told you about to bring the Scripture to life.

- 1) The text tells us that anger comes from within us. There is something I want that I don't have. But my life is happy if I'm pretty sure I'm going to get what I want. (Identify the desire in the situation you are using as an example.)
- 2) The test comes when it becomes apparent that I may not get it. When something or someone gets between me and the object of my desire, I act as though the obstacle is the source of my anger, but James 4 says it's not. Anger comes from the fear of not getting what I want. (Name the obstacle.)
- 3) And so I shouldn't blame someone for "making me angry." I have to acknowledge that I get angry because someone or something has gotten between me and what I want. The source of anger is my desire being challenged.

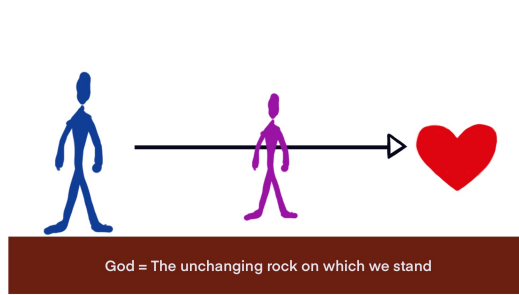
It may be a good desire (a peaceful day, work accomplished, a loving marriage, obedient children, etc.). But any desire can become an idol of the heart if it has grown too big. The size of my outrage should clue me in to how much the desire of my heart has grown out of proportion.

The old nature would battle it out with the obstacle in order to obtain the desired thing.

The new nature, however, would use this opportunity to acknowledge God and his purpose for this moment as more important than my desire.

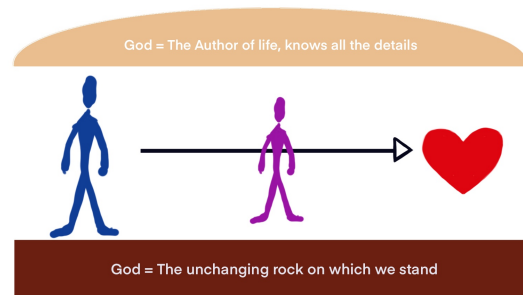


3) And then my true colors show. I become angry with the one I see as an obstacle to my desire.



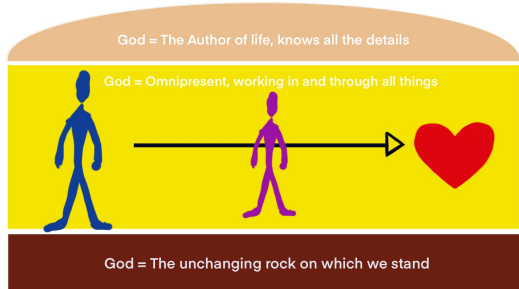
4) Faith in God's character and love stabilizes us in these moments when our old nature wants to take over.

4) My new nature recognizes that God is here and cares about my response to this situation. He can be seen in three ways: he is the firm foundation on which I stand, the rock that doesn't shift or change. And so whatever I'm going through, I need not be shaken. God is near. Philippians 4:5-7



5) This moment is within God's sovereign plan.

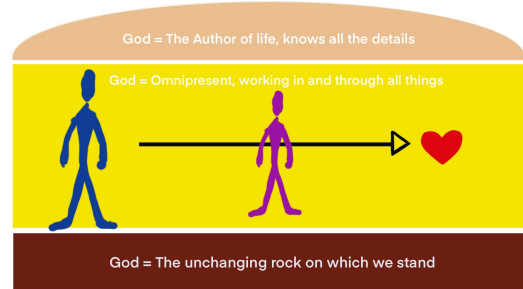
5) He is also the Alpha and Omega, knowing the beginning and end. He knows every day of my life, every word on my lips. He is not surprised by this situation. I have to acknowledge that God may have put that obstacle (which is probably a person I'm supposed to care about) in my way in order to expose my idolatry. Psalm 139



6) God is working on every element of this moment.

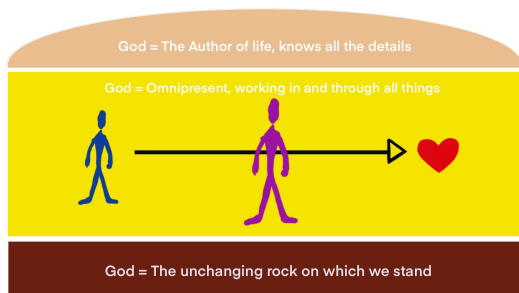
6) He is also the all knowing, ever present God, at work in every aspect of this situation.

I need to examine the elements of the situation that pertain to me. Philippians 2:12-14



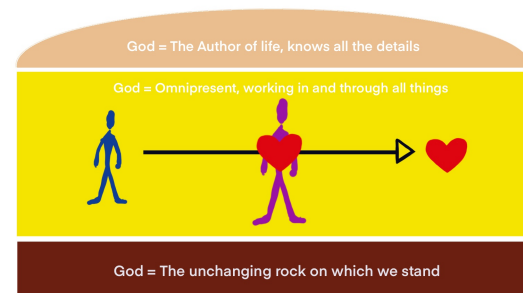
7) I must examine the desire of my heart.

7) I have to realize that the desire of my heart has grown bigger than it should be. Clearly, at this moment this thing is more important to me than God himself (which is why James uses adultery language in verse 4; I have committed spiritual adultery). I attempt to shrink my desire to an appropriate size.



8) I must humble myself before the Lord.

8) Next, I have to shrink my concept of self. I had become my own god, and that just won't fly now that I'm aware of God Almighty in this moment. James 4 says that God gives me the grace to humble myself before him. As I shrink myself down to size, my perspective changes radically.



9) I must respond to the "obstacle" with wisdom.

9) Now I'm able to see the "obstacle" for what it really is. I see how it/him/her fits in this scene, and I ask God for wisdom to respond with love and compassion. This may mean I gently say, "not now, Gramsie is working," to my granddaughter who wants to play. But whatever my response, it will be in view of how God wants me to understand the entire scene.

STEWARDSHIP OF SELF | THE AMOEBA PRINCIPLE

THE OLD NATURE

The old nature has a "me first" attitude that is aggressively defensive. But there is a flip side to it: the old nature is also a people pleasing machine, motivated to do "good" in order to gain the feeling of worth and fine reputation that it desperately wants. Both sides of this old nature coin is ultimately selfish and without humility.

James 3:14, 16; Psalm 119:36

THE BIBLICAL TEACHING

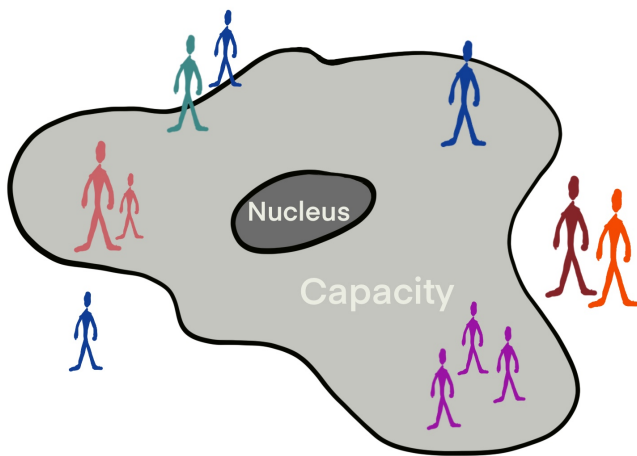
We are God's workmanship, made for good works that he has prepared for us. We are not super human saviors able to respond to the needs of every person we know. We are actually vulnerable and weak, needing care and rest. We are able to do great things, but only through the strength of Christ, in his timing, for his purpose.

Ephesians 2:8-10; Mark 6:30-32

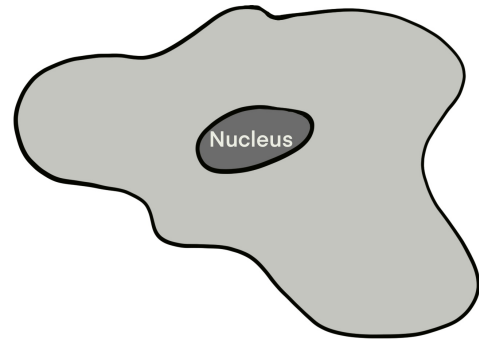
THE NEW NATURE

Attempting to be servants, we sometimes get the impression that caring for ourselves is selfish. But as godly wisdom grows, so does humility. We must be responsible for ourselves so we are able to serve others well. We require rest and maintenance, and God blesses us with what we need in order to fulfill his purposes. As we show ourselves to be good stewards of the lives God has given us, we are teaching others to do likewise.

2 Corinthians 12:9; Psalm 127:2; 1 Timothy 5:24-25



2) God works through our limitations, glorifying himself in the works he gives us.



1) We are limited creatures with needs that must be attended to so that we have a capacity to serve.

THIS MODEL

We have a lot in common with the simple one-celled amoeba. It has a nucleus that requires a certain amount of care in order to remain alive. It also has a flexible, fluid outer self that moves and changes according to its own needs and the external environment.

1) Our lives are not stagnant. We have different responsibilities in each season of life. Our personal needs change over time, family life changes, and the situations in which we find ourselves change as well.

God calls us to good stewardship of ourselves and our households. This is our primary calling and the place our serving skills grow.

Proverbs 31:10-31; 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 12; 5:3-8

2) God calls us to serve those outside our household as we are able. We are not all capable of the same amount of work or the same type of work. We are all gifted differently. And so we must not judge each other, but lovingly encourage.

Some of us need encouragement to care for ourselves and our households, and some need encouragement to extend their capacity and serve others more. But seasons change, and our capacity to serve changes. This can be difficult for us to see in another person. It is important to acknowledge that only the individual can discern the weight of his current load.

Galatians 6:1-5; 2 Corinthians 8:12-14;

Proverbs 22:4, 9; 24:3

May each of us be humble enough to flex with the changing ebb and flow of our own capacity, day to day, season to season.

To the glory of God.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

THE PRIESTLY LIFE

Created to Draw Near by Ed Welch

RELATIONSHIPS FOR GOD'S PURPOSES

When People Are Big and God Is Small by Ed Welch

Relationships, A Mess Worth Making by Tim Lane and Paul David Tripp

Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands by Paul David Tripp

COMMUNICATION

War of Words by Paul David Tripp

ANGER

Good and Angry by David Powlison

Resolving Everyday Conflict by Ken Sande and Kevin Johnson

PeaceMaking for Families by Ken Sande

The Peacemaker by Ken Sande

STEWARDSHIP OF SELF

What's Best Next by Matt Perman

Crazy Busy by Kevin DeYoung