

THE ABC-X MODEL OF FAMILY STRESS IN THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

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Throughout history, families have dealt with stress and crises. Hill's 1949 ABC-X model of family stress remains a useful tool for identifying the different components that affect how successfully families cope with stress. Paul's letter to the Philippians expands and illustrates this model. Therapists working with Christian families and individuals can use this model and Paul's epistle as a structure to help identify the type of stressor being experienced, explore family resources, and evaluate the individual's or family's meaning of the stressor, helping them to respond successfully to stress.

The study of family stress began in the 1930s as scholars investigated how individuals and their families coped with economic loss and other upheavals of the Great Depression, noting that some families adapted more successfully than others (Boss, 2002). Hill, as a result of studying families who dealt with the stress related to father absence during World War II, developed his ABC-X family crisis model in 1949 (Hill, 1958), which was one of the earliest theoretical explanations of how families vary in their responses to stress (Boss, 2002). Although subsequent theorists have expanded and reconfigured his model (e.g., Carter & McGoldrick, 1999; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Patterson, 2002), Hill's basic conceptualization remains a useful tool for identifying the components that determine how successfully a family manages stressful events. This model also provides a useful lens through which to interpret Paul's epistle to the Philippians, and conversely the epistle provides an opportunity to illustrate the model.

BACKGROUND OF FAMILY STRESS RESEARCH

This article will adopt Boss's (2002) definition of stress as a condition where the demands of one's

environment exceed one's resources, causing a decline in coping ability, and her definition of family as "a continuing system of interacting persons bound together by processes of shared rituals and rules even more than by shared biology" (p. 18). These combined definitions thus view family stress as a condition where the demands of the environment exceed the individual and collective resources of the family, causing a disturbance in the family system (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 2003).

Stress is a normal part of family experience, in light of the inevitability that the family will grow and develop, causing change to occur within the family system (Boss, 2002). This change, which can be either positive or negative, is essentially equivalent to family stress (McKenry & Price, 2005). The impact of change on the family depends upon how adequately a family either manages or adapts to stress and how effectively the family's resources allow them to cope (Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005; McKenry & Price, 2005). Generally, family stress becomes problematic when the level of stress causes a disturbance within the family system or its individual family members (Boss, 2002; McKenry & Price, 2005).

Copper and Dewe (2004) state that stress often negatively affects an individual's physical health and psychological well-being in addition to causing a negative impact on the individual's family-life and work-life, such as an increase in sick leave, burn-out, insurance costs, and even premature death. These costs not only affect the stressed individual but also the family and surrounding community. Because stress is so detrimental to society, Copper and Dewe (2004) believe that studying stress is our "moral responsibility" (p. 118).

THE ABC-X MODEL

Hill's (1958) model of family stress helps to explain why some families "sink" or fall into crisis when dealing with stress while other families "swim" or cope. His model consists of three variables, A, B, and C, which interact to bring about a product, X

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(Boss, 2002). The framework for the ABC-X model is as follows, "A (the event) interacting with B (the family's crisis-meeting resources) interacting with C (the definition the family makes of the event) produces X (the crisis)" (Hill, 1958, p. 141).

Stressor Events (The A Factor)

The stressor event is defined as an occurrence, positive or negative, that either changes or has the potential to change the family system (Boss, 2002; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; McKenry & Price, 2005). Any change in the family system can cause stress, including change in the family's values, roles, functions, and boundaries (McKenry & Price, 2005). Boss (2002) notes the amount of stress is related to the type of stressor event.

Stressor events are classified according to their source, type, duration, and density (Boss, 2002; Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005). First, the source of stressor events can be either internal or external. Internal stressor events start within the family and are controlled by the family, e.g., deciding to have a child. External events start outside the family and are not under the family's control, e.g., a hurricane or terrorism (Boss, 2002; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983).

Second, Boss (2002) suggests three types of stressor events: 1) normative or nonnormative, 2) ambiguous or clear, and 3) volitional or nonvolitional. Normative events are predictable because they are cultural expectations or are a part of the developing family, e.g., a child starts school or a grandparent dies (McKenry & Price, 2005). Normative stressor events rarely lead to crisis because most families are able to predict and prepare for the changes that will take place whereas nonnormative events are highly stressful because of their lack of predictability. Examples of nonnormative stressor events are the loss of a job or a car accident (Boss, 2002; McKenry & Price, 2005).

Ambiguous stressor events are those for which the family is unable to clarify what is happening, to whom, and for how long. When the facts surrounding an event are clear and the family can define the situation, the family usually is better able to adapt (Boss, 2002).

Volitional events are those that the family willingly makes happen and therefore subject to the family's control. For example, moving to take a better job is a volitional stressor event. Nonvolitional events are those external events over which the family has no control, as in a natural disaster or a factory lay-off

(Boss, 2002; Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005). Researchers have concluded that nonnormative, ambiguous, and nonvolitional types of events are more likely to increase the family's stress level, making the family more vulnerable to crisis (Boss, 2002; Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005; McKenry & Price, 2005).

Third, duration refers to either chronic or acute stressor events. Chronic events persist over time, often because the situation is resistant to change, such as Parkinson's disease or poverty. A chronic stressor often leads to a crisis since the family probably will experience additional stressors throughout its duration, causing more strain on resources. Acute stressor events, in contrast, usually have short, predictable durations and thus are easier to cope with (Boss, 2002).

Finally, stressor events also can be classified by their density (Boss, 2002; Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005), which describes whether they are experienced in isolation or together with other events. Events that accumulate or occur at or about the same time (increased density) create stress pileup (Boss, 2002; McKenry & Price, 2005). Stress pileup rather than any one isolated stressor event is more likely to increase family stress, decrease the family's coping abilities, and cause a family crisis (Boss, 2002).

Resources (The B Factor)

The family's resources are those assets that help the family prevent or buffer an event from causing a crisis state (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983) and assist the family in problem solving to enhance the family's coping strategies (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989). Family stress literature highlights three potential sources for family resources: the individual members, the collective family, and the community. Individual resources include intelligence, education and acquired skills, personality characteristics, physical and psychological health, self-esteem, and allocation of time (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989; McKenry & Price, 2005).

Research has consistently found the collective family's resources to be significant in handling stress (Hill, 1958; Hobfoll & Spielberger, 2003; Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989). One important family resource is family cohesion, which is the interconnectedness of family members through the sharing of interests, values, affection, and support (Madden-Derdich & Herzog,

2005; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983). Madden-Derdich & Herzog (2005) note that non-cohesive families are more reactive to stress, frequently blaming and showing hostility to one another. Hawley and DeHann (1996) state that cohesion increases family resiliency, helping the family to overcome stress.

Another prominent collective family resource is adaptability, also known as flexibility. Adaptability is defined as the family's ability to remain stable or, when needed, change with stressful demands (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 2003). Families that refuse to change (rigid families) have an increased risk of experiencing stress, dysfunction, and eventual crisis (Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005) while those who are able to adapt their coping strategies, patterns of functioning, and meanings to specific stressor events are more resilient to crisis (Hawley & DeHann, 1996; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, & Allen, 1997). DeFrain and Asay (2007) suggest that one aspect of flexibility is spiritual well-being.

A third significant family resource is effective communication (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989), the family's ability to exchange both content and emotions between one another in a manner which the other person understands (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 2003). This family resource is important because it helps the family coordinate their resources and efforts to cope with the demands the stressor event has placed on the family (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989). McCubbin et al. (1997) state that communication is only a resource for the family if they use the affirming pattern of communication, which conveys mutual support, compared to the incendiary pattern, which tends to exacerbate the situation through disagreement, yelling, and harsh words.

Community resources also are effective in helping families deal with stress. These resources are defined as those resources available from outside the family unit, such as religious institutions, government agencies, and social support (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989; McKenry & Price, 2005). Of all the community resources, social support is viewed as a primary buffer for preventing family breakdown due to stress (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989; McCubbin et al., 1997). McCubbin and Patterson (1983) define social support as interpersonal communication with others outside of the family system. This social support provides families with three forms of support: emotional (the family learns they are cared for), esteem (the family increases their self-worth and value), and network (the family feels they

belong) (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; McKenry & Price, 2005). The application of community resources to the Book of Philippians will not be addressed in this article.

Meanings (The C Factor)

Noting the variability in family responses, Hill (1958) described the centrality of how the family appraises the situation:

It has always puzzled observers that some families ride out the vicissitudes of floods and disasters without apparent disorganization, whereas most families are at least temporarily paralyzed by such catastrophes. The key appears to be at the "meaning" dimension. Stressors become crises in line with the definition the family makes of the event. (p. 141)

People, including families, are continually trying to understand and form meanings about the world they live in (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 2003). These meanings, also known as the family's perception, appraisal, or assessment of a stressor event, are interpretations and views that the family has collectively formed while interacting with one another (Boss, 2002; Patterson & Garwick, 2003). In addition, Hill (1958) suggested that the meaning a family assigns to an event is influenced by three key factors: the family's value system, previous definitions used, and previous experiences in handling crises.

Patterson (2002) suggested that families construct meanings about (1) the stressor, (2) family identity, and (3) their worldview. Some situations become sources of stress only because they are perceived by the family to be stressful. For example, a house fire might be considered catastrophic by one family, while another family might see it as a temporary setback followed by an opportunity to build a new, better home. One family defines the event as an opportunity for growth while the other family defines the event as hopeless (McKenry & Price, 2005). Further, if the family is oriented toward mastery, viewing itself as able to overcome any challenge, the stress of an event is less likely to lead to maladaptation. If they view the world as a random or unfriendly place, a stressor will likely be more overwhelming than for a family that believes the world has been created by a benevolent, purposeful God (McCubbin et al., 1997). Patterson and Garwick (2003) also state that optimism along with religiousness positively affects the emotional well-being of the family, in turn helping them to effectively cope with the stressful situation.

Families who are capable of defining an event positively and are optimistic are more likely to cope

and adapt to the situation (Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005; McKenry & Price, 2005). Reframing, that is, altering the perception of a problem or situation, involves clarification of the issues in the situation, reduction of the emotional burdens due to the stressor event, and encouragement to persevere through the event (McKenry & Price, 2005). This coping strategy is especially useful when the event itself cannot be changed but the families' perceptions and meanings can be (Boss, 2002). Once reframing has occurred, behavioral and emotional changes will follow, helping the family to further manage and resolve the family's stress (Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005).

Outcomes (The X Factor)

Outcomes to stress occur on a continuum, from maladaptation on the negative end to bonadaptation on the positive end, depending on the interaction of the event, the family's resources, and the meaning the family ascribes to the circumstances. Lavee, McCubbin, and Patterson (1985) define maladaptation as a continued imbalance between the accumulated stressors and the family's capability of meeting those demands. Typically, the family "falls apart," physical, psychological, and/or spiritual health deteriorates, and family members lose their sense of well-being. When a stressor event weakens resources and family members can no longer perform their roles, the family enters a state of crisis (Hill, 1958).

In contrast, bonadaptation is defined as a minimal discrepancy between the demands the family faces and the capability to meet those demands. A bonadaptive family maintains or strengthens its family integrity, and its members have a sense of well-being (Lavee et al., 1985). Bonadaptation is a concept closely related to family resiliency (Hawley & DeHann, 1996), which McCubbin et al. (1997) defines as the family's ability to maintain established, functioning patterns after experiencing a stressor event and as the ability to quickly "bounce back" from stressor events such as trauma or transitional events that require a change in the family's functioning patterns.

THE ABC-X MODEL IN THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Almost two millennia before Hill's (1958) ABC-X model of family stress, the apostle Paul presaged Hill's model in his exhortation to the Philippians: "Do

not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6, 7, NIV¹). Although the ABC-X model is expanded throughout the epistle, each component can be identified in this brief admonition: A (stressor event) = anything that might induce anxiety; B (resources) = present requests to God by prayer and petition; C (perception) = thanksgiving; X (outcome) = peace of God.

The Philippian Church Conceptualized as Family

A family model of stress seems appropriate for the Philippians in light of the imagery Paul uses throughout his epistle. Frequently Paul addresses the Philippians as "brothers" (1:12, 3:1, 3:13, 3:17, 4:1, 4:8) and refers to other Christians in the same way (1:14, 2:25; 4:21). He also refers to the Philippians as "children of God" (2:15).

Paul's conceptualization of the church as a family is even more overt in other writings. For example, he told the Galatians, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the *family*² of believers" (6:10). He also described the Ephesians as "members of God's *household*" (2:19). Frequently Paul addressed recipients of his other epistles as children of God (e.g., Romans 8:16-21; Ephesians 5:1) and also considered them his own children (1 Corinthians 4:14; 2 Corinthians 6:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11).

Paul also uses expressions of affection for the Philippians that are reminiscent of family relationships. Early in the epistle to the Philippians he told the church,

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. (1:7-8)

Near the end of his letter, he reiterated the strong affection he had for the Philippians, addressing them as "my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown" (4:1).

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²Italics added.

Stressors Identified in the Book of Philippians (The A Factor)

Family Systems Theory suggests that a change in any member or subsystem of the system affects the entire system (Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005; McKenry & Price, 2005). Stressors identified in the Epistle to the Philippians are directed to the church family as a whole as well as to individuals and other subsystems. Thus, much of Paul's discussion relates to his own experiences that affect his relationship with the Philippians. He begins the letter describing events in his own life because, he said, "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel" (1:12). He also refers to stressor events focused on individuals such as Epaphroditus and dyads such as Euodia and Syntyche.

Events do not have to be perceived as negative to evoke stress (Boss, 2002; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; McKenry & Price, 2005). Paul's letter deals with stressors that can be considered positive, negative, or both positive and negative. For example, he describes his (negative) experience of being in chains and further facing opposition from those who suppose "they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains" (1:17). He then reframes this negative experience in a positive light: "The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice" (1:18).

The events Paul cites in his epistle illustrate each of the three types in Boss's (2002) classification of stressor events. An example of an external stressor event is Paul's admonition to contend for the gospel "without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you" (1:28). He further warns them, "Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh" (3:2). An example of an internal stressor event would be the apparent conflict between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2). Examples of nonnormative stressor events include Paul's imprisonment (1:12-14) and the illness of Epaphroditus (2:27).

Paul usually does not explicitly characterize all stressors in the epistle as volitional or nonvolitional, and some events might have an element of both. For example, Paul implies that his imprisonment was not directly his choice but rather was the expected consequence of his public ministry of "defending and confirming the gospel" (1:7). Some stressor events seem more clearly nonvolitional, such as the illness of Epaphroditus (2:27) and the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche (4:2).

Ambiguity can be seen in Paul's response to the preaching others are doing while he is imprisoned:

Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. (1:14-18)

Paul's anticipation of death, generally recognized as one of the most stressful events for a family (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 2003), demonstrates similar ambiguity: "I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body" (1:23-24).

Resources Acknowledged in Philippians (The B Factor)

Paul affirms that all resources for dealing with stress ultimately come from God (4:6), whether in the form of divine intervention to change circumstances or the indwelling presence of Christ by the Holy Spirit (1:19). In addition to calling attention to divine resources available to the church family, he also identifies resources mediated by the collective church family as well as characteristics of individual members.

Examples of individual resources—which in turn become resources of the larger family system—can be found throughout the epistle. Paul's resources include his background and experience (3:4-5), flexibility (4:12-13), courage (1:20), and persistence (3:12-14). Timothy demonstrated empathy and faithfulness (2:20-22), and Epaphroditus was willing to sacrifice for others (2:30).

Important family resources include cohesion, adaptability, and communication. Cohesion, the interconnectedness of family members through the sharing of interests, values, affection, and support (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), is referred to frequently. As noted earlier, Paul frequently expressed his affection for the church in Philippi; he also recognized the love and concern they had demonstrated toward him (e.g., 4:10, 14). Other examples of cohesion include Paul's acknowledgement of shared values. For example, Paul spoke of their "partnership in

the gospel from the first day until now" (1:5), telling them, "whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me" (1:7).

Paul also affirmed his confidence that the Philippians would stand firm in sharing sufferings (1:27-30). He reminded them of a shared set of virtues they should think about and actions they should put into practice (4:8-9), and he referred to shared spiritual experiences: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion ..." (2:1). This idea of mutual support is expressed by Paul's willingness to sacrifice his own desires for the sake of the Philippians (1:21-27) as well as by the faithfulness of the Philippians to send Paul financial aid repeatedly when he was in need (4:15-16). In addition to their financial support, Paul expressed his belief that their prayers would help lead to his deliverance (1:19). Paul also described how individual members of the church in Philippi had "contended at [his] side" and called them "fellow workers" (4:3). Whereas non-cohesive families are noted for frequent blame and hostility (Madden-Derdich & Herzog, 2005), Paul exhorts the Philippians to demonstrate traits such as gentleness (4:5), unity (2:2), and humility (2:3).

Adaptability, another family resource, refers to the ability to be stable or to change as appropriate under the circumstances (Hobfoll & Spielberger, 2003). Paul refers to the stability of the Philippians in phrases such as "standing firm" (1:27; 4:1). He also prays that they will be discerning in uncertain times (1:10) and affirms his confidence that they will be able to respond appropriately when suffering comes (1:27-30). Perhaps the best example of adaptability in the epistle is Paul's testimony of his own experience:

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (4:12-13)

He also displays flexibility in his response when "some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill" (1:15).

Affirming communication is another primary family resource for dealing with stress (McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989). While the epistle in its entirety serves as the most obvious demonstration of Paul's use of this resource, other examples can be noted in

the text. Paul anticipated that he would receive news of the Philippians after Timothy had arrived there, and he observed that they already were aware of how Timothy had served Paul faithfully (2:19, 22). Also, the Philippians had received communication about the illness of Epaphroditus, and he had heard about their concern (2:26). Paul also refers to the communication between him and the Philippians regarding his times of need (4:10).

Meaning of Stressor Events in the Book of Philippians (The C Factor)

The meaning a family ascribes to an event is pivotal in determining whether their response to the stressor event is bonadaptive or maladaptive (Hill, 1958). Patterson (2002) suggested three domains for which a family constructs meaning when confronting a stressor event: (1) the stressor, (2) family identity, and (3) their worldview. One of the most efficacious strategies for constructing the meaning of the stressor is reframing, whereby the family finds a positive interpretation of what seems to be a negative event (McKenry & Price, 2005). A clear example of this process is found in Paul's response to his imprisonment. He noted that his being in chains had prompted others to "speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly" (1:14). Although some individuals actually preached Christ in the hopes of stirring up trouble for Paul, his response was, "But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice" (1:18).

Paul's epistle suggests the construction of a family identity that includes a sense of mastery. Perhaps the most explicit example of this philosophy is his declaration, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (4:13). He also expressed his expectation of the Philippian believers,

... whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you (1:27-28).

Patterson and Garwick (2003) suggest that a family worldview that responds to stress efficaciously tends to include optimism and religiousness. Paul's expressions of optimism can be found throughout this epistle. Concerning the spiritual development of the believers at Philippi, he wrote, "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ

Jesus" (1:6). In regard to the effectiveness of his continued ministry, he wrote,

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me. (1:25-26)

He also promised the Philippians, "... my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (4:19).

Paul's optimism was rooted in his faith in a powerful, benevolent God, and he affirmed that he valued his relationship with God above everything else and focused his energies on spiritual development:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. ... Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (3:7-8, 13-14)

Paul's worldview is evident throughout his letter to the Philippians. For example, he declared that the spiritual development of the believers was not through their efforts alone: "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (2:13). He frequently referred to prayer (e.g., 1:3-4, 9, 19), and he suggested to the Philippians that the way to avoid anxiety was "... in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (4:6).

Anticipated Outcomes for the Philippians (The X Factor)

As suggested in the discussion of optimism, Paul described a number of positive outcomes that he expected the Philippians and himself to experience, including spiritual maturity for the Philippians (1:6), effective dissemination of his message during imprisonment (1:18), his own deliverance (1:19), his soon visit to Philippi (1:24), revelation of the Savior and transformation of the believers' bodies "to be like his glorious body" (3:21), and divine provision for his and the Philippians' material needs (4:19). Regarding the Philippians' freedom from anxiety, Paul affirmed, "and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (4:7).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Hill's (1958) ABC-X model has helped therapists, researchers, and educators conceptualize how

characteristics of families and their environment interact to explain how families respond to challenging events in unique ways. Illustrating these principles through events and interactions in the book of Philippians has potential for multiple applications for practitioners who work with Christians.

For example, the concepts can be used in psychoeducation. The first author has presented the Philippians ABC-X model before church congregations of various sizes and from various denominations as a heuristic device for explaining the principles in the book of Philippians. In each case, individuals have indicated that the presentation helped them better understand both the book of Philippians and appropriate ways of dealing with stressor events they were experiencing.

In a therapeutic context, the Philippians ABC-X model provides a structure through which a practitioner can help a family identify stressor event(s), explore possible resources (spiritual, psychological, social, and material), and evaluate the meaning they attribute to the stressor(s) and to their resources. The counselor could introduce the concepts by indicating to the client that some individuals have found the book of Philippians helpful when dealing with stressful situations. Although the Philippians ABC-X model could enhance multiple therapeutic approaches, the intervention model described by Madden-Derdich and Herzog (2005) illustrates particularly well how a therapist could apply examples from the book of Philippians when working with Christians. Madden-Derdich and Herzog (2005) used the ABC-X model as a

... foundation from which to (a) address the importance of the assessment and classification of the type of stressor event prior to treatment or intervention, (b) review the family processes and family characteristics most often identified as protective factors or beneficial resources in managing stress, and (c) discuss the implications of these processes and characteristics for clinical assessment and intervention with families experiencing stress or crisis.... (pp. 403-404)

Boss (2002) suggests that therapeutic assessment or intervention should follow comprehensive consideration of the type of stressor. As a part of facilitating client ownership of the therapeutic process, the therapist can use illustrations from the book of Philippians to help clients better understand what type of stressor(s) they are dealing with.

When using a strengths approach to therapy, the practitioner can use the Philippians ABC-X model to illustrate some of the kinds of potential resources

available to the family, whether based in the individual, family, or community. Of course, this model particularly highlights spiritual resources.

An assumption in cognitively focused intervention strategies, including structural and strategic models of family therapy, is that when family members alter the way they perceive a specific stressor, emotional and behavioral change will follow (Madden-Derdich and Herzog, 2005). The Philippians ABC-X model provides multiple illustrations for a therapeutic reframe, helping the family view the problem differently in order to encourage more proactive and productive behaviors. Similarly, the experiences of Paul and the Philippians also can help to normalize stressful events, making it easier for families to recognize that problems are both common and surmountable.

Although the formal study of how individuals and families adapt to stress is fairly recent (Copper & Dewe, 2004), the Book of Philippians illustrates strategies for responding to adversity that have been used for centuries. For the theologian, Hill's (1958) ABC-X family crisis model provides a different lens through which to study the book of Philippians. For the psychologist, the Book of Philippians provides a tool for helping families deal with stress.

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