



**ASSOCIATION FOR BIBLICAL
COUNSELLING AND EDUCATION**

**BIBLE BASED
COUNSELLING**
Course 1
SEMESTER 1

WEEK 13

5. STUDY SCHEDULE FOR SEMESTER 1

The schedule provides guidelines for the maximum time to be spent on studying the material. Each student is unique, and this also applies to their circumstances. You may study in your own way and at your own pace. It is, however, in your own interest to study all the material and assignments thoroughly. The word, **Textbook** refers to Chapters 1 – 6 on this CD.

13	Chapter 3	3.3.4	Perspective of the counsellee	Textbook
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<p style="text-align: center;">Week 13</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Unit (Chapter) 3</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sub--Unit 3.3.4</p>
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Learning Outcome:

After studying this chapter, you should be able to distinguish whether you are seeing and experiencing a situation through your lens of experience or through the lens of God's Word. You should also understand better what it means in practice to live out of God's presence. The implications this has for the counselling situation will also become clear.

Assignment for self-study:

In order to better understand what it means to look at a situation through God's lens, you are requested to do the following Bible study first.

Practically it means that if someone really wants to understand what it means to look through God's lens, it is important for him to understand **who God really is, who I really am for God and who really is god.** Keep these broad principles in mind while studying the "Parable of the Compassionate Father (Prodigal Son)".

BIBLE STUDY: THE PARABLE OF THE COMPASSIONATE FATHER

Read through **Luke 15 : 11–24** the passage first and then answer the following questions:

1. Which verse in this passage made the deepest impression on you? Why?
2. This passage focuses on two persons in particular, viz. The **father** and the **son**. What do we learn about
 - The father?
 - The son?
3. According to verse 12, did the son make a request or demand to the father? Why?
4. Which deed made the biggest impression on you? Underline one and motivate your answer.
 - The prodigal son when he got up
 - The prodigal son when he confessed
 - The father when he ran
 - The father when he embraced his son
5. This passage sketches the "conversion" of the prodigal son. In this conversion the following elements are evident. Which verse describes each and how is it formulated?
 - Realization of sin
 - Repentance for sin
 - Desire for change
 - Movement to the father
 - Confession to the father
6. What do you think is the biggest stumbling block on the road to confession? Underline one and motivate your answer.
 - No realization of sin
 - No repentance for sin

- No desire to break with sin
7. What would you say is the deepest spiritual lesson of this passage?
8. This passage sketches the “conversion” of the prodigal son. In this conversion the following elements are evident. Which verse describes each and how is it formulated?
- Realization of sin
 - Repentance for sin
 - Desire for change
 - Movement to the father
 - Confession to the father
9. What do you think is the biggest stumbling block on the road to confession? Underline one and motivate your answer.
- No realization of sin
 - No repentance for sin
 - No desire to break with sin
10. What would you say is the deepest spiritual lesson of this passage?
11. What is the most important lesson that this passage has taught you?
- The pleasures of this world are short-lived
 - Conversion is the only route to true happiness and freedom
 - Jesus loves me however unfaithful I was
 - There is forgiveness for me however far I have fallen
 - The love of the Father is an incomprehensible, limitless wonder
12. Why do some people prefer to call this “The parable of the good/waiting Father”?
13. Now use this parable to explain the key principles of “awareness”. How does this parable help us to understand the following better?
- Who God really
 - Who I really am for God
 - Who really is god
14. Which new counselling principles and principles of life did you learn?

It doesn't matter what made a particular impression on you, but make sure that you become thoroughly aware of God's incomprehensible and unconditional love. The Omnipotent allows Himself be compared to an earthly father who runs towards a son who lived with pigs and embraces him ardently.

This is a prelude to Golgotha. The very reason why the father sent His son to this world was to take our impurities on Him. This prelude to Golgotha communicates to us that no depth is too deep for Him. The greater the depth, the greater the miracle that He can achieve.

Now use the following assignment for self-study to assist you in discovering the remaining learning points of 3.3.4 (old study guide 1.4)

Assignment for self-study:

1. Calmly and thoroughly read through 3.3.4 (1.4) in one sitting. Try to understand why confrontation in Biblical counselling is essentially self-confrontational. What is man confronted with when he comes into the presence of God?
2. What is the difference between a meaningful and an non-meaningful relationship on the following four levels:
 - With myself (the principle of awareness may help you here)
 - With the Lord
 - With my fellow-man
 - With my environment (inter alia, my job)?
3. Think about examples in your own life when you almost lost your head like Asaph in Psalm 73. What had carried you through those situations? How will you act if you land in such a situation again, in the light of the material you have studied? What kind of counselling will you give people with similar problems who come to you for help?

CHAPTER 3: METHOD OF COUNSELLING

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The core focus here is that the counsellee should be guided towards thinking in a Biblical manner. The counsellee needs our understanding and sympathy. Frequently this person needs the counsellor to guide him/her in such a way that his/her thinking will be changed. The counsellor should therefore create a space in which God himself can bring about change (compare Romans 12:2-3). In order to hold on to the clear statements which God made – right in the middle of my experience – means that I must consciously accept the Bible as the foundation of my interpretation of my life: I need to interpret my experience through the lens of the Bible.

In practical terms this means that what happens to me has a profound influence on how I view myself, God, fellow human beings and my environment. Under these circumstances it is so important to learn to look through the correct lenses at these matters. The “spectacles” or “lenses” that I wear (or my perspective) when things happen to me in the end determine whether it will be a learning experience or a catastrophe.

Let’s remind ourselves that we are dealing with the confrontation phase here. We are in essence busy guiding the counsellee towards a meaningful relationship at four levels:

- his/her view of him/herself;
- his/her view of and relationship with God;
- his/her view of, attitude towards and relationship with other people;
- his/her view of and attitude towards his/her life circumstances.

A meaningful relationship is one in which a person who is motivated by the love of the Lord (as previously discussed) live and react under all circumstances in such a way that God will be glorified and that others will be built up. In this way the person will also be built up him/herself and would also discover the deepest meaning of being human.

Consider the following: When I have a friend and my main motivation is really that he/she should make me feel good about myself, then I am not involved in a meaningful relationship. I am using this person to fill my love cup – and the better he/she accomplishes this, the better I feel about myself. The main purpose of the friendship is then to satisfy my own selfish desires. My security and worth depend on the actions of the other in such a relationship. What I am really saying is that the Holy Spirit should take a back seat. I cannot really feel safe and secure simply because of what Jesus did

for my – something else also has to happen. People should act in a “correct” way towards me. Unless this happens I remain an unhappy person and I frequently wonder whether anything on earth makes sense.

This does not overlook the basic human needs for acceptance and recognition. These needs are rather put in the correct perspective. There is nothing wrong in choosing friends because they are good to you and because they play an important role in your development as human being. God has an open model, a “both ... and ...” model. God determines a person’s worth. He provides us with other people to see this worth. Recognition by other people can therefore be constructive in this sense.

It is therefore important to determine at its deepest level what the foundation of your life is: that your worth and security is determined by what you are in Christ. The counsellor should guide the counsellee towards understanding that there is a God who loves him/her unconditionally. There is no need to change or to achieve in order to earn this love – he/she should only be true to who he/she is. This love can also not be lost, because it is given through grace.

This discussion can best be summarized by the following phrase. The principles expressed here put the heart and essence of our existence as human beings in a nutshell:

“We were created in the image of God to glorify Him by serving others – but we became self-serving and self-protecting.”

Let’s return to the lens (or perspective) with which we look at what is happening to us.

When I experience negative events and I only wear the lens of my experience then I will experience strange and negative emotions. This will have a determining influence on my thinking, words and actions. I will not necessarily have a positive view of myself. I will probably develop a problem with God and other people – and life will not make sense to me anymore.

Let’s use Frank as an example to illustrate these dynamics. Frank was in a financial crisis. After seeing his banking statement on that dark day, he did not see any light for the rest of the month. He was within R70,00 of his limit and the month had only just started.

While the lift of the building in which he was working descended on that evening, there was no joy left in Frank's life. He did not like himself at all. He also clearly explained to himself how terrible it is if a husband cannot take care of his wife and his four sons. The meaning of his own life was placed on the scales and he cursed the day of his birth like Job. At that moment he started doubting God and his ability to really provide. In fact, he had seen the evidence for this belief in black and white. Suddenly every person became a threat and he was quite aggressive when driving home in his car.....

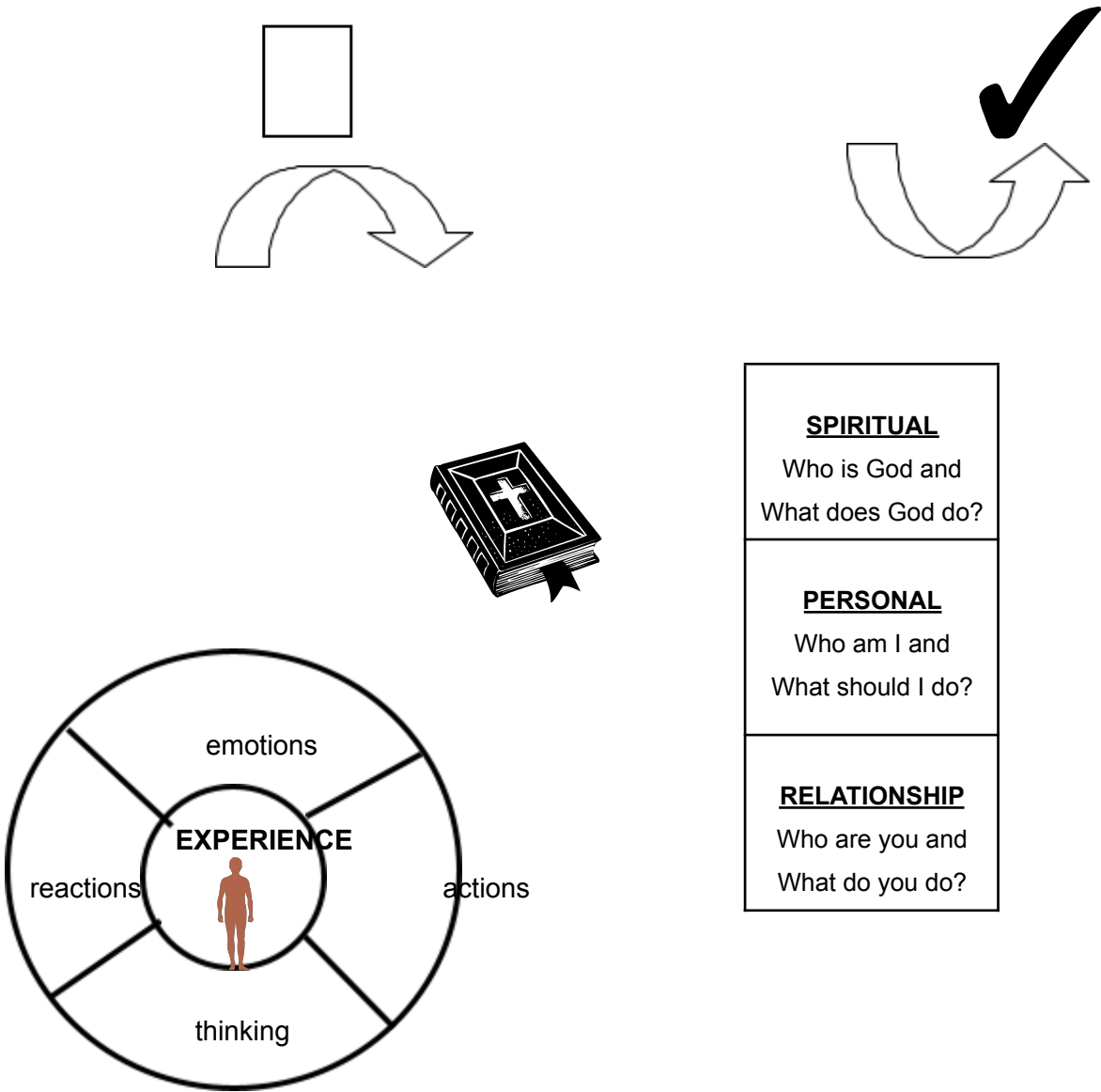
The fact that his experience was the determining factor led to his loss of perspective and he could not enter into a meaningful relationship with himself, God, his fellow human beings and his environment, including his work.

That evening in his quiet time God spoke to Frank through Matthew 28:8-20. He gained peace in the realisation that God would provide him with the means he needed to serve God. He looked at his situation through the perspective of Scripture. He saw God in his situation. The greatness of God put his own problem in perspective.

The Word of God describes the dynamics of what happened and what did not happen in James 1:5-6:

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. But when he asks, he must not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

The dynamics of this discussion is summarized in the next diagram:



Practical choice and Agenda for Living

Fig. 17

One's practical choices and agenda for living at the deepest level are determined and directed according to one's starting point, that is, based on whether you simply look through the lens of experience. The ideal is to use a double lens: looking through the lens of Scripture and through the lens of your experience at any person or thing.

However, this is not always such an easy matter. Even the most dedicated believers have struggled at times to look at their circumstances through the lens of Scripture. Gaining perspective means to look at yourself and your total situation through the eyes of God.

A classical example is Asaph's struggle in Psalm 73. We read in verse 1 that Asaph was a believer who truly believed that God is good. This is the source from which he lived. The next verses depict how the lens of his experiences contributed towards the start of his doubt and almost losing direction:

But as for me, my feet almost slipped;
I had nearly lost my foothold.
For I envied the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. (verses 2-3).

Up to verse 14 he continues in this way and battles with himself and God. When he looks at the wicked people and see their prosperity, he wonders whether it is worth believing. Verses 13 and 14 summarizes Asaph's intensive internal battle:

Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure;
in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.
All day long I have been plagued;
I have been punished every morning.

According to Asaph there is no difference between the believer and the unbeliever. Unbelievers live just as they want to and it seems as if nothing happens to them. It even seems as if they receive honour for their unfaithful deeds:

Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
and their tongues take possession of the earth.
Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance.
They say: "How can God know?
Does the Most High have knowledge?"
This is what the wicked are like –
always carefree, they increase in wealth. (verses 9-12).

For the purpose of our discussion it is important to note that Asaph's experience is here the determining factor to him. He wears the lens of his experience. His view of himself, God and life in general is determined by his experience of the apparent prosperity of the

wicked. This is why he loses direction. All his thinking is controlled by what he sees around him.

His situation can be compared to that of Peter who walked on water (Matthew 14:22-33). Peter suddenly saw the strength of the wind and became fearful – and sank. The reason he sank was that his eyes were on the wind and the waves in the crisis situation and not on Jesus. For a moment he forgot who God really is and who he really is to God.

Asaph was, in a manner of speaking, busy to sink for the very same reason. Things went wrong and simultaneously the reality of God and the God of reality disappeared in the background.

From verse 15 he slowly starts regaining his perspective, and his thinking starts to become in line with God's thinking:

If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed your children.
When I tried to understand all this,
It was oppressive to me.
Till

The word "till" introduces the most important verse in this whole Psalm:

Till I entered the sanctuary of God;
Then I understood their final destiny.

Entering "the sanctuary of God" means coming into the presence of God. The moment Asaph again experiences the presence of God, his perspective and the meaning of life returns. Suddenly he again realizes that God is the same, yesterday, today and till eternity, and that He never lost control and will never lose control. In his unique way God is always in charge of whatever happens.

The moment he realizes who God really is, there is security in terms of his past and his future:

Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.
You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory (verses 23-24).

That his past and future is secure in God, forms the firm foundation for his certainty and the meaning of his life in the present. His deepest meaning is embedded in the reality of the person of God:

Whom have I in heaven but you?

And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (verse 25)

Even though he may be worn-out in body and spirit, God remains his strength (verse 26). As he immerses himself in the presence of God, his perspective on himself and his circumstances deepens. He chooses to look through the lens of God and to be in his presence:

Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
But as for me, it is good to be near God.
I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds. (verses 27-28)

We should realize that no human being is necessarily living in the presence of God every minute of his/her life. The counsellee actually asks for help because he “almost” start doubting the reality of this presence. People will say that it feels to them as if God is not present in their lives. It is as if they pray against the ceiling.

The counsellor’s task is to guide the counsellee until he/she experience this presence again. Psalm 73 explains that the road back to God’s presence is not simple. It also becomes clear that real perspective and meaning only become a reality in the presence of God.

Read Psalm 77 which describes in a fascinating way the struggle on the road to meaning in life and perspective through the lens of God. From verse 3 to 11 it sounds as if the author is digging himself a hole. He uses the typical language of dejection – especially the kind of dejection associated with a loss of meaning and direction in life. Self-pity is also part of the picture. People suffering from depression also feel that they can identify with this language – particularly when they are dejected:

I remembered you, O God, and I groaned;
I mused, and my spirit grew faint.
.....
My heart mused and my spirit inquired:
“Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favour again?
Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?
Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion? (read verses 3-11)

Verse 12 is a key verse and simultaneously the moment when the author starts looking through the lens of God at a time of intense struggle:

I will meditate on all your works

And consider your mighty deeds.
Your ways, O God, are holy.
What god is so great as our God? (read verses 12-15)

In the first eleven verses we see a searching human talking "about" God. He speaks about God in the third person. God is an impersonal "He": Read verses 8 and 9:

Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?

In verse 12 he starts talking "with" God. God is addressed in the second person: He is now a personal "you".

Once again, the road to the presence of God is not an easy one. We as counsellors are called to walk with this person and to try to see what he/she sees and try to feel what he/she feels. There should never be a judgemental attitude, because we have a God who understand that a person, even a believer, reaches a point where nothing makes sense and everything just becomes too much. The counsellor's task is to accompany this person until he/she has the perspective of Scripture and has the energy and desire to live. A person who has gone through the dark night of struggle and yearning for God's presence, then discovers a blessing and presence and perspective which can be described as "heavenly".

The turning point came when the psalmist started looking back at the great deeds that God performed in history. Several times God revealed and established Himself in the history of Israel as the God who could do what seemed humanly impossible. The soldiers of the mighty Pharaoh, for instance, died while the children of Israel walked on dry land through the sea. God can therefore make whatever seems impossible from a human point of view a reality. This is amongst others who God really is.

In Christ Jesus God accomplished the impossible: sinners like you and me can experience the ultimate impossibility – to receive eternal life. The most amazing fact is that the God whom we worship can do more than we see with the physical eye. He is really capable of creating life in a death situation based on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Acts 2:36 describes this miracle and potential for miracles in no uncertain terms:

Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

The name "Lord" indicates Him as the risen and therefore the victorious Master. He conquered death and the grave and has one purpose in mind and that is to be Lord of our lives. Every person discovers the deepest meaning in his life when he/she in the deepest sense glorify the Son of God. Jesus should really be the Lord, the Owner, the Provider of direction of his/her life. His reign should shine through in every aspect of life.

Accepting Jesus as Saviour is only the beginning of the road. It is essential that God's rule should be clear in all of life. The heart of the confrontation phase is for the counsellor to guide the counsellee on this road. The person should be accompanied until he/she sees the necessity and need for God's reign over all of his/her life. The counsellor's task is incomplete until he/she has assisted the counsellee to taste something of this truth.

There is a deep dependence on and glorification of the Father, because nothing happens that is not his will and without the active participation of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3b):

... nobody can say that Jesus is Lord except through the Holy Spirit.

When the counsellor sees the active involvement and presence of God in the life of a counsellee in the confrontation phase, he/she cannot but be aware of who God really is and who we really are to God. Everything is based on the undeserved grace of God.

A person who learns to adopt God's merciful perspective has the ability to discover meaning in situations that would normally look hopeless. He/she realizes that there is no depth from which God is unable to lift him/her. He/she knows that, even though it is incomprehensible, there is a God who is busy forming him/her for the day when Jesus will return on the clouds (1 Peter 1:6 and following).

The counsellor should guide the counsellee to really look through the lens of God's perspective. This means to learn how to look from above to below – and not vice versa. When we find ourselves on earth in the midst of chaos, it is hard to believe that God is really in control. The secret is to reach the top of the mountain. This is what it means to have God's perspective. Counsellees should be guided to this rest, peace and inner strength. Only then can they discover who God really is and who really is God. Then both counsellor and counsellee will be confronted by the reality of God and by the God of reality in the deepest sense of the Word. They will discover that God makes his Word a reality. He is able to do more than we can ever pray for or think through his powerful work performed in us (Ephesians 3:20).

On the way to this in depth confrontation there is a particular procedure to be followed by every individual if he/she really wants to learn how to live an abundant life under all circumstances.