A Meditation on Our Message

In Col. 3:12-17 the Word of God beseeches us to make the world a better place for all.

“As God’s chosen people”

As pastoral counsellors we have been appointed by God to live as conduits of the Father’s love and grace in this world. We have to serve and care for those around us, thinking constantly about God’s love for us and the terrible price He had to pay on the cross to buy our freedom. Pentecost reminds us to live in the way that Jesus (and His Spirit) would minister if He was in our shoes.

“Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience”

St Paul reminds us to be involved in other people’s lives and to always be compassionate towards the people we meet in daily life - to live in constant harmony with them.

The world desires the heartfelt care they experience from us, so freely share all the goodness you have freely received.

As we experience God’s love in our daily lives, we are being transformed from a critical spirit to one of love and appreciation, from revengefulness to forgiveness and to a life of infinite patience.

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts”

This new life is the manifestation of God’s love that everyone desires. The peace God gives must flow through us to others. Peace is the result of forgiveness – of others and of ourselves.

Living in this Godly peace is our calling, even when not returned in kind.

Inner peace is impossible without daily forgiveness, as the hurt of our grievances and hatred so easily blot out our peace and joy.

Dwell on all the goodness that God blesses us with and your life will reflect inner peace and joy.

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly”

Christ must dwell in us in His fullness. Ours is not an impoverished gospel of only those things we like – rather our lives should be aligned with the unblemished truth of the abundance of God’s Word.

Christ’s nature should become our nature. Remember that as pastoral counsellors we are the representatives of Jesus in this world.

People experience the reality of God from our way of life and our behaviour.

Make sure that people, seeing your example, will desire to become children of God.

May your words, thoughts and deeds be acceptable to God.

May it be the conduit for the grace and healing of God’s kingdom that comes ever closer to the needy world..

- Dr Tertius Erasmus
Spirituality and Mental Health

Dr Colin Finucane (Pastoral Counsellor at Vista Clinic) and Dr Jerrie Bezuidenhout (Psychiatrist in private practice and at Vista Clinic) presented at the SAAP Open Day Seminar of 5 June 2015 on the topic of Spirituality and Mental Health.

Mental health issues are on the increase. The World Health Organization has predicted that by the year 2020, next to heart disease, mood and anxiety disorders will be the second most debilitating illness in the world. Research shows the importance of the treatment of the “whole” person – the biological, psychological, spiritual and social dimensions.

An illness can seriously impact your social functioning. When you suffer from a physical illness, such as bronchitis, and you are burning with fever, you have little desire for social interaction!

At emotional level, you are also more than likely “feeling like death warmed up”. I (Colin) remember, when I lay in ICU because of a pulmonary embolism, how anxious I was feeling. Physical illnesses profoundly impact our emotional state of mind. Furthermore, you more than likely have no desire to go to church, read your Bible or get down on your knees to pray. Physical problems impact every other aspect of our lives.

What is also very important for us to keep in mind when counselling those who have mental health issues: just as with heart problems, cancer, or chronic pain, mental illness profoundly impacts a person’s spiritual wellbeing. Those struggling with mental health issues may have feelings of spiritual isolation, with a sense of God forsaking or disapproving of them.

I think of the words of David in Psalm 13:2 & 3: “How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? … Look on me and answer, LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death”.

It would appear that David is very depressed and in verse one he questions: “How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” In his state of emotional turmoil he has a sense of God forsakeness.

"People who are experiencing high levels of depressive symptoms may find a lack of pleasure in former religious involvements, which may over time erode their public and even private engagements with their religious faith" (Smith, Pol, & McCullough; 2003).

People suffering from depression can have symptoms that resemble spiritual problems. They can experience guilt feelings that is not founded in reality and this coupled with the negative thinking can look like spiritual problems.

The physical changes in the brain changes their thinking to the extent that spiritual problems that were resolved in the past can present as if it has never been resolved. Trying to help them then resolve these problems, can lead to more harm than help. Helping the person to be careful with themselves during a depressive phase, is a practical way of living out God’s grace and love to a fellow Christian.

Mental health diseases can put emotions at the forefront of a person’s life and keep them from living out their spiritual life as they did before. This is important to remember in context of the denomination the person is in.

A manic patient can express unrealistic feelings of warmth or closeness to God and this can cause a lot of problems in a conservative church, while anxious, worried or negative emotions in a charismatic church can be seen as a spiritual crisis. Effective treatment gets the mood disorders under control and the person is more able to live out their spiritual life as before.

The question of medication versus faith is an ongoing debate at present. The interesting thing is that we are not debating the use of spectacles versus faith anymore and accept that they help and do not interfere with our faith. The real issue that we need to look at is our overall dependency as a being. We are dependent on food, water, clothing, shelter, other people and God. The changes in how we are as a being is bringing these new questions to the front of debates and we need to help each other understand the complexity of our being and our world.

People who have suffered a lot of trauma in their past can transfer feel-
ings from an old relationship into a current one. A
man transfers his feelings of rejection from his
mother onto a female counsellor and then acts in
anger or clings to avoid the possible rejection. The
counsellor can then counter transfer their own emo-
tions onto this therapeutic relationship. If not iden-
tified, these two actions can be very destructive in a
therapeutic or pastor - church member relationship.
Complex and chronic problems have to be treated
very carefully.

At the same time spiritual issues such as unresolved
grief, oppressive guilt, prolonged anger, excessive
worrying, paralysing doubt or having an attitude of
“un-forgiveness” may also have serious conse-
quen ces for mental health. A person’s “God-
view”—authoritative, benevolent, critical/punitive,
and disengaged/absent—also influences how spiri-
tuality may impact mental health for good or bad.

Sadly, for too many, their mental health condition
is regarded as an indication of a poor relationship
with God as in the case with Job’s friend’s view of
his situation. The mental health issue is simply at-
tributed to a lack of faith, a punishment from God
or that they are in need of deliverance from an op-
pressive demon. Often they are advised not to take
medication, as would be in the case of HIV illness.

For many their illness has affected their ability to
function productively and may have alienated them
from others and from God. They long for a sense of
belonging, a faith community who will respect
them as a person with abilities, hopes and dreams.

Just as with David, in Psalm 13:5 & 6 in faith goes
on to say: “But I trust in your unfailing love; my
heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the
LORD’s praise, for he has been good to me”.

Religion may affect mental health by providing a
resource for explaining and resolving problematic

It may provide a basis for a sense of meaning and
direction (Jeremiah 29:11), gives potentially alien-
ating events meaning (Genesis 45:8-11) or give
personal identity (1 John 3:1). In summary Angela
Charles states is well:

“For those who struggle with depression, a
healthy level of conviction can sometimes reach
an unhealthy level of guilt without the help of
supportive mentors and religious leaders to
[help] sort out the [religious] teachings and ex-
plain how they apply to each individual. Spirit-
ual growth can either be enhanced or hindered
depending on how each person deals with these
feelings.” (Charles, 2012.)

As counsellors, with compassion, empathy and
wisdom, we are the eyes, ears and hands of the
Lord touching the lives of hurting broken people.
Let us always treat their stories with respect and
dignity, ministering the compassion of the Lord to
them in their time of greatest need.

References

<http://www.soyouwanna.com/depression-spiritual-

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A Very Informative Afternoon

By Past Henk van Zyl

The afternoon Open Day Seminar on Friday 5 June
2015 was a refreshingly informative event. The
program was well organized with clear directives of
the purpose and expected outcome for those attend-
ing. The catering, setup and food were absolutely
divine. Seeing the familiar faces of old acquaint-
ances was as much a pleasure as meeting newcomers.

The guest speakers spoke with passion and depth
on their areas of expertise, offering a balanced and
practical approach. While the presentations on the
specialist fields could become quite technical,
complex and academic, it was presented in an easy
to understand format. The interwoven and compli-
mentary way that doctors Bezuidenhout and Finu-
cane alternated each other throughout their joint
session, brought a rich and multifaceted view of
how to be able to effectively care for an individual
in crisis.

Doctor Meyer’s session on “Scripture and/versus
Psychology/Neurobiology” and the very relatable
story of her struggles and experiences inspired us to
share her compassion for those in emotional trauma
and hurt. The science behind how our brains de-
vlop, function and learn was brought across in a
comedic manner, which combated any boredom
and made listening a pleasure.

I have learned much and know that I will be able to
apply it as well. I highly recommend these events to
any social worker, counsellor, psychologist or lay
person who has an interest in continuing with their
professional development.
Integrating Scripture Truths and Scientific Proofs in Christian Counselling

Dr Hanlie Meyer (Counselling Psychologist in private practice) presented at the SAAP Open Day Seminar of 5 June 2015 on this topic.

As Christian counsellors we have the responsibility to avail ourselves of the latest scientific evidence regarding counselling techniques that are evidence based. There are various ways in which one could approach this momentous and extremely important undertaking. This article represents my personal approach. It is not intended to be compared to or discredit any other approach.

The process I use is the result of an intense personal journey of healing, inspired by my frustration about my own brokenness and the treatment of resistant anxiety, self-judgement, abasement and warped convictions about God plaguing my clients - despite all the knowledge contained in the Scriptures, which I knew so well and quoted with so much passion and persistence!

I was raised in a wonderful, conservative, Afrikaans farm-household. My parents were dedicated churchgoers – Christians who knew the Word of God - but they still suffered from a lot of anxiety that apparently led to bouts of depression. I could not understand how it is possible that one could know so much about God, believe so wholeheartedly in the sacrificial death of Christ and yet be so anxious and fearful about God’s provision or lack thereof.

I also had the same experience: such intense conviction about the reality of the triune God, Jesus our Saviour and the Holy Spirit indwelling us – yet such intense anxiety with depression ensuing from being overwhelmed by the paralysing self-analysis as an effort to get a grip on my anxiety!

No amount of Scripture reading, praying, attending church services, reading commentaries and even “traditional” inner healing prayers could ward off the ever present anxiety with ensuing depression and self-blame.

A few of the questions that constantly burned in me are:

- Why did the feelings of not being loved by God as a Father turn into a conviction – but the conviction of God being a father did not turn into a feeling?
- Why did the good feelings based on solid knowledge delivered in well-prepared sermons not “stick”?
- Why did I always feel I had to perform to earn God’s love – despite the knowledge that it is not necessary?

I learned over the years that these burning issues also filled the minds and hearts of my clients and I was paralysed by the knowledge that I could not reach their hearts, just as much as my own heart was unbelieving! Then I discovered the wonderful world of the brain…

Neurobiological findings confirming Scripture

The first breakthrough came when I started reading research from various sources on attachment and attunement: how do we learn to love?

The emotional control system learns in relationships, visible and “tactile” examples, stories and love, rather than through rational prescribed truth and didactic teaching. How does this happen?

Our bond with others (attachment) is the build-
ing block for emotional stability and our ability to live in relationships. A few subcortical structures and their interaction seem to play a vital role in this process:

- **Nucleus accumbens** – the pain and pleasure centre of the brain. It lights up when we bond with others.

- If there is no response, we experience pain, rejection, feel discarded, alone and “unwanted/unloved”.

- The next control centre in line is the **amygdala** which has to evaluate the experience as safe, unsafe or scary. This evaluation is totally subjective and permanent once it has been made.

- The third centre of control is the **cingulate cortex**, situated just above the **corpus callosum**. This area provides an important interface between the cortical and subcortical areas – it helps us to interpret our environment, helps to orientate ourselves therein and guides us towards the proper emotional response.

- The highest centre of control is the **orbital medial prefrontal cortex** (ompfc). This area integrates information from external and internal sources and enables us to interpret complicated social information and synchronize it with our own emotions. This is how “attachment” patterns are formed and autobiographical memories created.

- With the correct early development, the ompfc can then control the emotional areas, guide our choices, initiate creativity and even improve our immune systems.

**Babies express themselves through instinct and emotion**

Sensitive and “attuned” caregiver-child interaction improves the child’s emotional security, sense of self and cognitive development and helps regulate the autonomic nervous system - this allows important control systems to develop. In the absence of this: depression and/or anxiety develops.

**A baby’s brain only develops in interaction with another (mature) brain.**

Early relationships form the basis of every aspect of internal and external functioning throughout our entire lives. Without healthy early attachment, later life is characterized by infantile dependency needs that weren’t satisfied and the inner world is filled with internalized objects with which intense emotional relationships exist. Early relationships form this internal world and these patterns are maintained throughout life. Our reactions are thus constantly governed by an emotional inner reality which stays immature! This renders the individual more or less powerless to respond to mature relationship invitations/demands.

The nervous system scans the external environment to prevent overload and only takes in information for which it has been prepared by its own unique internal patterns, formed from birth. The experiences are encoded directly in the circuits and can be “triggered” by incidents in the present moment. The true reality is filtered by emotions and past learning. Emotions thus constantly regulate our experience of reality.

Healthy development of ‘attachment’ relationships leads to the child’s brain taking over the regulation of emotions in order to self-regulate. This regulation is developed through brain-interaction, not verbally or on a cognitive level. These non-verbal perceptions and interpretations encoded in the right hemisphere form the context for verbal communication. It includes the interpretation of tone of voice, facial expression and body language.

This encoding and interaction between the adult brain and baby/child brain forms **attachment templates.**

The neuronal networks thus contain models or ‘templates’ of how relationships work, based on the prototypes of relationships formed in early childhood.

*To be continued*
Looking Back or Looking Forward: Litigation or Mediation.

Mediation and the South African Legal System

By Andrew Scholtz

Since March 2014, mediation has become an integral part of the South African legal process, with the publication of the “Amendment of the Rules Regulating the Conduct of the Proceedings of the Magistrates’ Courts of South Africa” in Government Gazette Number 37448 on 18 March 2014. Since that date, Court-Annexed Mediation has been piloted in specific Magistrates’ Courts in Gauteng and the North West Province and will soon be rolled out to Magistrates’ Courts throughout South Africa.

Litigation

Traditionally, parties in dispute have sought the assistance of lawyers to launch adversarial legal proceedings against each other in the form of litigation – in other words, the parties seek the assistance of a lawyer to take their matter to court in order for an arbitrator, magistrate or judge to decide on the merits of their dispute. This antagonistic process has a number of drawbacks as mechanism for resolving disputes. In the first instance, the process is an adversarial one – in other words, it pits one party against the other and is confrontational by nature. In the second instance, their demands for justice typically involve a backward-looking process of accounting that seeks to assign accountability for wrongdoing, which forms the basis for determining punishment to be metered out to the “perpetrator” in the form of reparations paid to the “victim”.

Furthermore, the control of this adversarial dispute settlement process is removed from the hands of the parties themselves as their “case” is moulded by their lawyers to fit “the law”; presented to an arbitrator, magistrate or judge; and, a winner and loser is declared – based on the law and the lawyer’s ability to argue a particular point of law.

Unfortunately this process does little to resolve the actual dispute. The “loser” will generally not accept the findings of the arbitrator, magistrate or judge and take the matter on appeal – or, at the very least, find a way to get back at the “winner”.

And all of this costs money.

Mediation

Mediation, on the other hand, is a forward-looking endeavour which aims to build positive bonds between the parties in dispute. While mediation acknowledges everything that occurred in the past to cause the dispute, the process also focuses the parties’ attention on the future as they jointly carve out a settlement agreement that is unique to their particular set of circumstances. While mediation does take place within the shadow of the law, the outcome (in the form of a settlement agreement) is not bound by the same legal constraints that bind arbitrators, magistrates and judges.

On the face of it one may well ask why building positive bonds between the parties is important; after all they are “at war” and need a referee, not a counsellor. In the first place, a settlement that the parties craft themselves is more likely to be honoured by the parties after the agreement has been signed. In addition, the preservation of the relationship between the parties, albeit in an altered state, may be an important outcome to both parties – even if they are not cognizant of the fact until later.

By definition, mediation is the intervention into a dispute or negotiation of a qualified and accredited third party who is acceptable to both parties and is impartial and neutral; who has no authoritative decision-making power to assist disputing parties to voluntarily reach their own mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute.

Mediation in Family Matters

Let us consider divorce in light of the above. The sad reality is that the majority of marriages today end in divorce. The reasons for this are myriad; and lie outside of this particular article. Fact is almost two-thirds of children in South Africa grow up in single-parent families. The process of getting divorced is an intensely emotional one, where accusations and recriminations abound. More often than not well-meaning family and friends suddenly become experts in divorce law or let their feelings towards the other party be known in no uncertain terms.

Into this volatile mix come the lawyers – should the parties decide to litigate their divorce – and, for the most part, the lawyers do little to improve the situation. When the dust finally settles and everyone has had their day in court, the relationship between the parties is at an all-time low – and nothing has really been resolved, except that the marriage that they had entered into has been legally dissolved. Worst of all, the children have been used – and continue to
be used – as pawns in a war of attrition between the parents.

Mediation, on the other hand, takes cognizance of the fact that people involved in divorce are in a highly charged space emotionally. However, the role of the mediator is to bring all his or her skills to bear on the situation to focus the attention of the parties on the future, while acknowledging their past and what brought them to this point.

Most importantly, mediation focuses the attention of the disputing couple on their children and on the fact that they have to develop a relationship between them, albeit an altered one, that takes cognizance of the fact that they both have the right to exercise their parental responsibilities and rights in respect of their children – often for many years into the future.

A mediated settlement agreement in a divorce, in which children are involved, lays the foundation for the establishment of a relationship between the parents of the children which takes into account the fact that, as parents, they will be jointly involved in making decisions affecting their children, in the best interests of the children, until their children are, as young adults, able to fend for themselves.

**Mediation’s Long-Term Impact**

There are a number of interesting statistics and results of research as far as mediation in family matters is concerned. For example, it has been shown conclusively that the greatest impact on children, as far as divorce is concerned, is not the divorce itself, but the level of conflict between the parents during the post-divorce raising of their children.

If conflict levels between parents remain high, the children are adversely affected. When parents deal with their joint responsibilities towards the children constructively, the impact on the development of their children is positive.

Another interesting statistic indicates that negotiated settlement agreements are more sustainable and that non-resident parents are likely to see more of their children when a settlement agreement is obtained through mediation.

Given the adversarial nature of litigation and the conciliatory nature of mediation, it is more likely that mediation will set the tone for a more constructive relationship between the parents with respect to the raising of their children, particularly if the mediator employs transformative and therapeutic mediation techniques when helping the parties to come to agreement.

Andrew Scholtz is a qualified mediator, accredited by the South African Association of Mediators, the African Centre for Dispute Settlement and the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (UK). He practices in Polokwane in association with Family Justice and can be contacted as follows: 076 079 0214 or andrew@familyjustice.co.za.

http://www.saap.za.net
Choosing a Qualification

Within a professionalised dispensation, objective criteria are used for assessing member competencies. Ensure that the qualification and institution you select comply with the Higher Education Act, aligned with the following requirements:

- All private higher education institutions need to be registered with the Department of Higher Education. Any credible campus must be able to show you a certificate to that effect, which details the campus, provider and qualifications.

- All higher education qualifications need to be accredited by the Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education. They must appear on the abovementioned certificate to be accredited.

- All qualifications must be registered on the NQF by SAQA and students should ask for the SAQA NQF identity numbers.

(see http://www.acts.co.za/higher-education-act-1997/index.html)
News from the SAAP Executive

Professionalisation process

We have been informed that we will receive the company registration for the proposed professional body soon. While waiting, we are finalising and fine-tuning the documents SAQA requires. This includes a document describing training needs, expected competencies and scope of practice for each designation of the new professional body. As soon as we receive the company registration number from CIPC, we will submit our detailed application again. So please keep praying and holding thumbs that our application will eventually be successful and approved, without “unnecessary” technicalities or stumbling blocks. Please also pray for the steering committee dealing with the governing documents - for insight, wisdom and patience.

Annual fees

Quite a number of our registered members have not remitted payment of their 2015 annual SAAP fees, although invoices were issued in February and March already. These fees are SAAP’s only source of income and in our application for recognition as a professional body, we need to deliver proof of sound bookkeeping and a healthy financial state. PLEASE contact Marieke (SAAP Secretary) if (a) you have not received an electronic invoice and/or statement so far this year; (b) you are experiencing financial challenges; or (c) you wish to resign from SAAP.

AGM and Conference

Due to circumstances Executive has decided to postpone the 2015 SAAP Conference and AGM to early 2016. We will still abide by the SAAP Constitution, the Company Law and the Income Tax Law, if we hold our AGM by the end of March next year. We will definitely keep you updated!

SAAP CONTACT DETAILS

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<tr>
<th>SAAP Secretary:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marieke Willers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:admin@saap.za.net">admin@saap.za.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO Box 704, Newlands, Pretoria, 0049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell phone: 082 600 6578</td>
</tr>
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