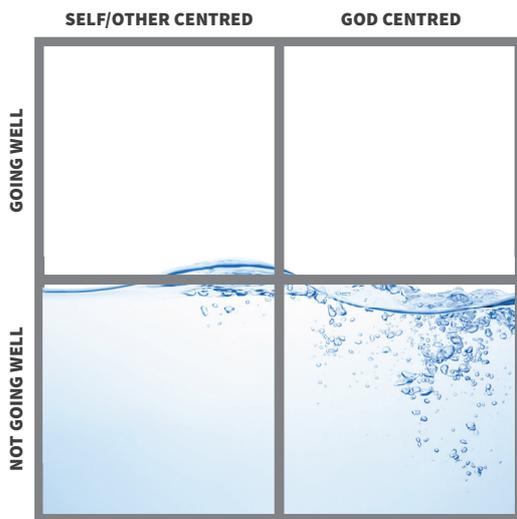


The Square + The Cross



As the circles respond to the question, how are you? The shape of the square responds to the question, where are you? The shape of the cross asks you the question: where are you with God?

This shape corresponds to the Response step. It asks you the questions: Where are you now? Where do you want to go? Similarly, the cross asks: where are you now with God? Where do you want to go with God?

To answer these questions, you have to know where you're at, and where you need to head to. It bridges the gap between understanding and response. For a Christian, one of the most important aspects of life is to become more like Jesus. We're always on a journey toward that as our end goal, and we will hopefully make steps towards this throughout our lives.

On the square shape, this means that we are constantly striving to move to the right of the square – towards Jesus. On the cross shape, this means acknowledging whether we're above the water line or below the water line, and understanding that in various aspects of your life, you might be both.

For a non-Christian, the right side of the square doesn't exist. All they have is the left side of the shape, which is either self-centered, or it's others-centered. Narcissism and altruism are as left-sided as each other, although the consequences of altruism are much better obviously. For a non-Christian, these are the only options ("or a mixture of narcissism and altruism").

For Christians, we would choose God-centred over being self-centered or even others-centred.

TOP LEFT QUADRANT

The top left quadrant is the succeeding self/others-centered life. The definition of this is putting down or letting down others for an individual (or their group) to stay up in this space. It will look different in a range of contexts. At work, this might present itself as betraying the confidence of a colleague or stealing a colleague's idea for a new project. In couples where there is hurt in a relationship, it's like two drowning people and one person using the other to survive. You might experience or inflict verbal abuse, the silent treatment or name-calling if this dynamic is happening in your relationship.

This is typical of the average human being – selfish, not thinking of others, and not reaching down to help others. It might surprise you to realise that in the Bible, those in the top left quadrant were the religious Pharisees. Jesus didn't walk the steps of connecting and understanding with them, other than Nicodemus and the Zacchaeus, both of whom were willing to come out of this top left quadrant. He already knew what they were like – that their hearts were hard. It is difficult for a top left person to be reached unless they come down. There is danger that being in the top left quadrant hardens our hearts to the needs of others and certainly against God. A top left person cannot move towards the right of the shape without coming home to God, through his forgiveness, love, and acceptance, which are ours in Jesus.

THE SQUARE

The square shape divides us into two possible dimensions of change: one where we can be – either above the waterline (flourishing, succeeding) or below the waterline (struggling, difficulty). The other dimension is where we can be – either on the left (self-centred) or on the right (God centred).

Depending on which part of your life you're focusing on, in practice you can be anywhere on either of these two dimensions of change. You might be both at times: suffering in some contexts and succeeding in others. Likewise, you might be allowing God to be central in parts of your life while in other parts of your life you are self-centred or what the Bible calls, living from your sinful nature.

BOTTOM LEFT QUADRANT

The bottom left quadrant is the self-centered, struggling life. This typically looks like letting what can be normal experiences of despair, being lost and isolation becoming central and dominant in our lives. It is in this space where you are trying to cope on your own, without God, with normal troubles, for example in marriage, the loss of a job, a chronic illness, a disability, the frailty that comes with ageing, sexuality issues, infertility, the loss of a loved one and many other situations.

One of the worst situations is where the person is in the bottom left quadrant because of the behavior of a top left quadrant person or system. Examples of this include an abusive relationship or sexual abuse in a family or church. The top left quadrant person is getting what they need at the cost of the other.

Addiction is commonly experienced in this bottom left quadrant. A person who is struggling to fill a need or a void is promised satisfaction in the form of food, drugs, alcohol or porn. Instead of filling a need, it destroys a person's life.

BOTTOM RIGHT QUADRANT

The bottom right quadrant is described as a God-centred, suffering life. What does this typically look like? This is a person dealing with the same issues as the bottom left quadrant person – marriage troubles, job loss, illness, disability, and so on – but the difference is that their identity and stability is not defined by their circumstances.

They're defined by God, rather than their struggles. A good example of this is the famous King of Israel, King David, who wrote many of the Psalms in the Bible. In the Psalms, we see King David going through lots of human struggles but always going to God for strength, freedom and forgiveness. Job is another famous example of a person who went through lots of struggle and suffering and tragedy – he continually got his strength from God. But his friends saw him struggling and thought that it was because of his sin. They made the mistake of believing that if you are flourishing, God must be blessing you. The corollary of this is that if you are struggling, that God is punishing you – that you belong in the bottom left quadrant. We know that this is unequivocally untrue.

YOU MIGHT BE IN ALL QUADRANTS AT ONCE

It's unlikely that all points of our lives will be in one quadrant – although it's possible. It's more likely that you'll be in several quadrants at once, for your work life to be flourishing while your personal life is suffering, for example. It's possible to look

We are wrong when we think that when we're struggling, that it's because we are sinning. One of our prevailing thoughts is "God why have you done this to me?"

The bottom right person is not immune to suffering, grief, pain, loss or sadness. The difference is that during this time, this person relies on God. They continue to make God their priority, remembering to hang onto the hope that God offers.

Although you may feel tempted to focus on primarily moving from suffering to succeeding, life doesn't always work this way. It's important to know that the transformation from left to the right (towards God) is more important than bottom to top. Remember also that it's often during suffering that we turn back to God, so left to right transformation is often greatest when we're below the waterline, when we feel most helpless, when we have no choice but to trust God.

Let's be clear: everyone will face suffering at some point in their life.

TOP RIGHT QUADRANT

The top right quadrant is the God-centred flourishing life. Perhaps this is the life we all aspire to, but can't seem to get to! The reality is that often there are parts of our lives – perhaps our work life or our family life – that is in this quadrant, even if other parts of our lives are elsewhere in the shape.

What does God-centred flourishing look like? Paul wrote in Romans: In all circumstances, I have learnt to find joy. The hymnist wrote: It is well with my soul. God-centred flourishing occurs when your focus on God is stronger than your present circumstances.

A person who is in this quadrant is characterised by a focus on godliness and contentment. This person will often display the fruit of the Spirit. They are generous and caring. They forgive others. They are kind and gentle. They display grace to those around them. They have self-control and faithfully serve God. They will come into messy situations and lives to lift other people up. They'll get mud on their boots and dirt on their hands as they help to lift up those who are struggling.

financially successful but be suffering from anxiety. You might have terrific relationships with your spouse and children while you are struggling to cope with your elderly father, who is suffering from dementia.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PETER AND JUDAS

The square and the cross are not static shapes. Throughout your life, you might experience all four parts of the quadrant and you'll certainly experience both suffering and success. How does your heart respond to the circumstances of life?

Peter and Judas are good examples of two men who betrayed Jesus. Judas is the disciple who betrayed Jesus to the authorities for thirty pieces of silver, while Peter denied knowing who Jesus was as Jesus faced his trial. Both men failed Jesus. What's the difference between Peter and Judas?

Peter repented of his sin, while Judas didn't. Peter came back to the bottom right quadrant, and Judas fell from the top left quadrant, letting Jesus down, but himself ending up in the bottom left quadrant. The outcomes for both are stark: Judas took his own life, while Peter became an apostle who spread the gospel and was a passionate follower of Jesus. This shows you just how powerful your response to your life's circumstances is.

WHAT ABOUT JESUS?

Jesus was living in the top right quadrant, in the most perfect form. He came down to lift us up, putting himself in the bottom right quadrant for our sake. Jesus was not immune from suffering throughout his life on earth. In the garden of Gethsemane, his emotional anguish was so great that he suffered physical symptoms. What did he do during this time? He sought God's presence, spending time in prayer. He also asked his disciples to be with him because he needed love and care. He was forsaken by his disciples and went to the cross, where he suffered unimaginable agony. Upon the cross, Jesus experienced the wrath of his Father on our behalf, which was utterly undeserved. His agony is displayed: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Jesus' example for us is that he was totally God-centred and obedient to God's will even though it included suffering. This means that for us, God's will may take and use our suffering for good, that we become more like Jesus.

1. BORN AGAIN

2. CONTINUALLY REPENT OF OUR SIN AND COME BACK TO THE CROSS

3. SANCTIFICATION - BECOME MORE LIKE JESUS

HOW DO WE MOVE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT (TOWARDS GOD CENTREDNESS)?

If you want to move from the left to the right, towards God, you won't get there by going to church more or being a better Christian. It won't happen by our own efforts.

It's through our relationship with Jesus – being grafted into the vine, drinking from the source of living water, having Jesus as our foundation. We are brought from the left to the right when we become Christians, when we are born again, justified by what Jesus did for us at the cross. Moving further to the right after this point is known as sanctification – becoming more like Jesus. This will occur for the rest of our lives.

Part of the sanctification process is coming back to the cross, coming back to Jesus, through repentance. We will never be at the point in our lives when we no longer need the cross. No matter where you are in the quadrant right now, you need to continually come back to Jesus, to continue becoming more like him.

Being aware of where we're at and where we'd like to be allows us to be authentic. No more fake smiles! It also allows us to be strong in the face of adversity, because we live focused on God, rather than other people or our circumstances.

It allows us to live intentionally, rather than reactively.