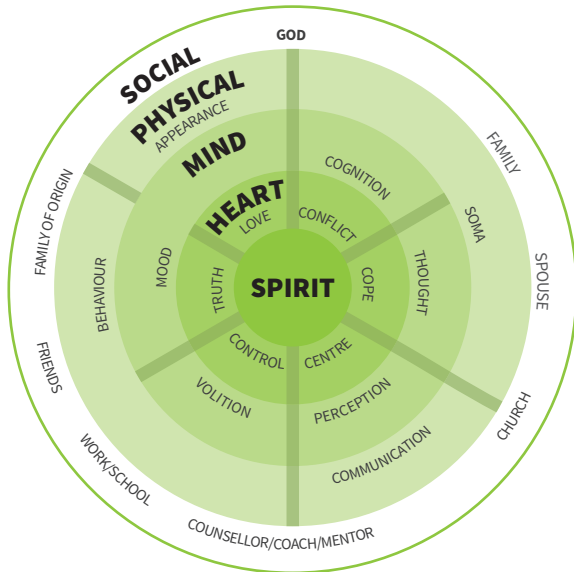


# The Circle



## SOCIAL CIRCLE (OUTER CIRCLE)

The outer circle is our social layer – our social life. This is our public face in church life, with friends, with work, with school, with acquaintances and with colleagues. This is where we have chats at the school gate, in your lunch hour at work, with university friends, at church over morning tea and in any relationship we have in the outside world. This is the place where we live, the place we work, and have friendships. This is the circle that is clear to anyone, our ‘game face’.

## PHYSICAL CIRCLE

There are four aspects to our physical circle: appearance, behaviour, communication and health (SOMA). Everything inside of us comes out physically in one of these four things. If we shut down one of these four aspects, it will come out in the other ways. For example, if we shut down communication, it may work its way out in behaviour. You will see this all the time with small children who don’t have well-developed communication skills, but who make their feelings known in their behaviour. The same is true of adults who shut down communication.

### APPEARANCE

It’s also true that we communicate in non-verbal ways much more than what we say. It’s hard to fake non-verbal communication. The way we present ourselves may be a manifestation of how we see ourselves – on the one hand, we know that it’s superficial but we often place a lot of effort into this. It’s common, particularly in our culture, to place great value on outer beauty or for men, having a muscular physique, for example. But if you put emphasis on your physical appearance and base your identity on this, it’s a fragile foundation. If, on the other hand, we have God as the centre of our identity, the prospect of being seen without makeup won’t terrify us.

### BEHAVIOUR

Behaviour tells us what’s inside. That’s why in the Bible, James asks us to show our faith as well as speak of it. If there is inner turmoil inside someone, they will show it in their behaviour. Jesus talks about how our actions are the fruit of what’s inside. If we are besieged with self-loathing, pain, and despair, we may not tell anyone about it – but our behaviour will reflect what we’re feeling. If we are confident in God’s love and so, content and joyful, we will behave accordingly. That’s why it’s important to understand that judging behaviour is not particularly helpful, without understanding what’s really going on underneath for that person. Jesus’ example went beyond behaviour to find the root of the problem. Finding out what’s really going on for someone will often explain their behaviour – which is why Connecting and Understanding are the two most important steps.

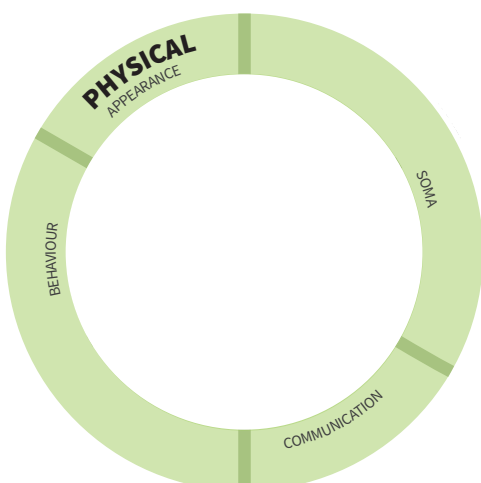
### COMMUNICATION

The best way to communicate is to talk it out. We are very good at not talking and pretending everything is fine, but there is power in words and what we say to each other. When there is healthy vulnerability and understanding, a relationship can completely change.

## THE CIRCLE

The shape of the circle relates to the Understanding step. The circles provide a depth gauge so you can see how deep a relationship is, or see how deep a group is, and perhaps to even see inside yourself more deeply.

Within the shape of the circle are five concentric circles.

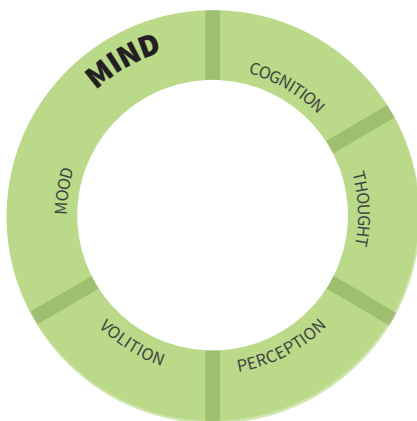


## HEALTH (SOMA)

Our sleep (or lack thereof), exercise (or lack thereof), consumption of food and drinks, and sexual health (good or not) are all part of keeping ourselves physically healthy. God created these and takes them seriously. God created us knowing that we needed sleep, good food, an active lifestyle and a healthy sexual life. But sin has corrupted these good things, and some of them can become very destructive when used in a bad way. We can go to extremes when our inside is not going well – either not looking after ourselves or being obsessive about health. When things aren't going well inside, our health is affected and neither extreme is good for us.

If we have a disability or chronic ill health, our behaviour will be affected. Being in constant pain, for example, is exhausting and frustrating. Another example is the physical consequence of low neurotransmitters, like depression, this will affect our behaviour and communication.

## MIND CIRCLE



While many of us concentrate on our physical being, our mind is just as important. In Romans, Paul tells Christians to be “renewed in your minds”. In other words, to have a healthy mind, you need to have a God-centred mind. This means we choose what comes in through the door of our mind, which is our perception. Our perception comes to us through our senses. With any of these parts of us, these can be God-centred or self/other-centred.

## FEELINGS

Feelings (mood) are connected to the volition petrol tank, which gives us our energy and motivation. Depression or illness can deplete the petrol tank. Our feelings can be good and bad, and often fluctuate. If you are currently having a hard time, you may feel sad, angry or scared. Recognizing these feelings is vital when you need to control them. You can be real about what you're feeling. Our feelings are not our god; they're a window into our heart.

On the other hand, if you're doing well now, you may be feeling love, happiness and contentment. Either way, our feelings do not have to control us. Galatians 5 talks about the fruit of the Spirit with no caveats. You don't have fruits of the Spirit only when things are going well. You can show the fruits of the spirit even when you're having a hard time. How? By understanding and responding well

to your feelings, allowing God's Spirit to flow through from the inside out. Even if parts of our lives are shattered, you can sing with sincerity: it is well with my soul.

When you are going through suffering, you don't have to struggle with those feelings alone. It's an opportunity to look inside your heart to see what's going on, and take your heart to God. The heart can throw petrol onto the fire or water to extinguish it. We don't like to look that deeply inside ourselves – it's downright scary in there! Allow someone else in to talk with you about what's really going on. Allow God to shape you through this time.

## THINKING

This includes our intellect, and also what we think. How we think applies not just to individuals, but also to groups and relationships. The Psalmist cried out to God: “Try me and know my thoughts.” This gives us an indication of how important the way we think is. Thoughts are a door into the heart. Thinking is powerful. The mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. (Romans 8:6).

We must bring our thought life to God. We must recognize our thoughts and surrender them to God so that He might control them. We can be real about the thoughts we have but not react poorly to them. Just because you're thinking them doesn't make them true! Thoughts can be like kites, and we have so many, and the strings are so long, our kites can get out of control and tangled up. Reel the kites in to take control of your thoughts and stop the what-if thoughts. Don't allow the strings to get long and tangled. That's why being mindful about what's happening now, in the present, can help reduce the “what ifs” of the future and at the same time bring the kite shaped thought bubbles close to us, so that we are able to have greater control over our thinking.

There's a reason that Jesus told us to worry about today, not tomorrow. He knows that our worry and fear will ultimately control us, and he offers us freedom from that. Trusting in Jesus allows us to consider the future but not worry about it.

When we let our thoughts control us, everything can be bright or dark. What we feed our mind with – what we look at, what we listen to, ruminating over particular thoughts – will affect us. Outside influences will affect the way we think, just as feeding our minds with God's word will also affect us. Sometimes it doesn't matter where the thoughts come from. Our thoughts may be true, but they may not be true. Connecting with and understanding yourself is to know that thoughts come from all over the place, may be true or not true and may be good or bad. Be real about them, don't react poorly to them. Take them to God. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians to take every thought captive and make it obey Christ.

Our intellect also includes how well we do at school and university and what job we have. Remember that God created our intellect, too. Do we use our intellect for God, or for ourselves?

What do our thoughts or feelings say about ourselves? They're windows into the heart, the way we use our minds and the way we are feeling.

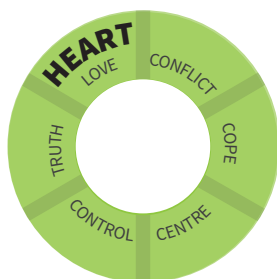
## HEART CIRCLE

Our hearts are almost the deepest parts of ourselves. Knowing someone's heart is the deepest way you can know someone. In this part of ourselves, we are all very similar, regardless of age, gender, culture or anything else. What are our hearts made up of?

Our core self and a rotating door – we take information through our senses which then goes into our mind and can then go into our heart - and we let out of the same door, especially in the way we cope, which may be helpful or unhelpful.

Our core self is broken up into four selves. As an example, Jesus had high levels of the first 3, and was God-centred.

### SELF ESTEEM



Self-esteem comes from experiencing love from others, particularly from our parents as children. The ultimate source of this love comes from God, if we are willing to accept it. When we have low self-esteem, we are more vulnerable to shame, loneliness and self-destruction. An example of this is a young person who self-harms, because they believe themselves to be bad and shameful, and the harm is what they deserve.

### SELF IDENTITY

Self-identity is about knowing who you are. When we have a confused self-identity, chaos reigns. You may become confused about your place in the world. You may have blurred boundaries or no boundaries at all. You may be more vulnerable to allowing things and people into your life that you don't feel clear about – and why you may not recognize a predator. You may allow people to treat you badly and feel irrationally guilty. Jesus offers us, through his death and forgiveness, a true sense of self-identity as children of God, and a secure place in the world.

### SELF CONTROL

Self-control is having control of feelings, thoughts and behaviour. If you have low self-control, you may blame other people for your own shortcomings. Sometimes people with low self-control take control over others to remedy the feeling of being out of control. People who feel out of control will feel either despair or blame. The extremes of these manifest themselves in chaos or being overly controlling. Self-control, just like the other core selves, is marred by sin. It is referenced in the Bible as a fruit of the Spirit. The freedom we find in God gives us a sense of control and hope, rather than despair.

## SELF/OTHER-CENTREDNESS VS GOD-CENTREDNESS

Self/other-centredness is another way of referring to our sinful nature. The only person in history to have thoroughly defeated self/other-centredness was Jesus. When we come to Christ for the first time, not only are we born again, but we also receive a death certificate - death to our self/other-centredness. We don't have to continue to live in a self/other-centred way – we now have a choice: self/other-centred or God-centred lives. Our self/other-centredness can affect every part of us – our thoughts, feelings and actions. The only way to deal with this is to acknowledge our self/other-centredness and to know this died with Jesus. All we have to do is believe it and then live it out.

Self/other-centredness is toxic and particularly so in marriage and other close relationships. When someone's self-centredness dominates the other elements of self, that person becomes destructive to other people.

Sanctification happens at these deep levels of our heart because that's where the outward flow comes. Everyone has these four sectors of their heart and in this way, we are universally the same.

The other aspect of the heart is the revolving door. If my heart is full of pain, shame, guilt, confusion and chaos – I will not show you my heart. I'm going to close the door and fake it. This is also the way we cope. Or we might flee – I won't go to church or small group, where they might see through me.

Jesus was real about his emotions. He wept when Lazarus died. We know that he felt anger and compassion. We know that he felt terrible grief in garden of Gethsemane, knowing he was going to die. It's good to be real about your emotions and to face them – not to cover them up or push them down.

## SPIRIT CIRCLE



The spirit layer: This is the void in our hearts that we feel or ignore until we know Jesus. In the non-Christian, there's nothing there and their life is centred in the other circles. When we are a Christian, we are connected to Jesus. God is in us at the centre of our heart and life, no matter the circumstance. We are also connected to the presence of God, in whom we find rest, and our place is with Christ, regardless of anything we do. We find our purpose in God, in that we become more like Jesus, and we enjoy the limitless provision of God - unfailing love, forgiveness, freedom, and fullness. It is from this layer that we change our bodies, minds and hearts to become more like Jesus. Without God in our hearts, we try to fill it with other things. God is our central axis, our central well, our central spring. If we are feeding off the central well, nothing bad can come up out of ourselves.