

## Developing a Sound Mind (Part 3)

### 15. Inexact Labelling

Inexact labelling is where the affective reaction is proportional to the descriptive labelling of the event rather than to the actual intensity of a traumatic situation. For example, someone bumps into you at the mall by mistake and you swear at them and call them something derogatory. This is an extreme interpretation of what they did to you. They were maybe being a bit clumsy or unaware but they are not a “complete idiot”. Sometimes we have extreme reactions yet we do the very thing we have just reacted to. I saw it the other day when my son removed the plug for my printer.

#### James 1:19-21

<sup>19</sup> *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,* <sup>20</sup> *because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.* <sup>21</sup> *Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you*

**Be careful of trying to control people by shaming them with your angry crooked witty remarks.**

Ben Zander the great conductor shares a powerful story with regards to the power of our words and reactions.

### 16. Primacy and Recency Effect

The primacy effect is the beginning; you remember it because that is where you started. The recency effect is the finish; you remember the end the best.

So yes, first impressions matter but the recency effect tends to be stronger, especially if the primacy experience was a while back (e.g. with a long list).

We have a tendency to be greatly influenced by first experiences, positive recent experiences or negative recent experiences. This is why people are very fickle in their opinions of other people based on what they have experienced most recently. I often see this when I show people pictures of celebrities when I am teaching on personal branding.

This is also related to the Availability Heuristic. This is also known as availability bias. The availability bias is a mental short-cut that people take when assessing a situation, making a decision or judgement on a matter. There is the assumption that this alternative has weight because it was top of mind and recalled first. As a result the person does not spend time examining alternatives. The result of this is that new opinions are biased towards the latest news. The predominant view pre-1960s was that human beings were rational actors in the field of human judgment. We now understand that after reading several news reports about car thefts you might end up thinking that car theft is more common in your area. Think of how we are greatly influenced by the media with regards to this. You watch a Carte Blanche programme about dirty water and you become hyper vigilant even if the programme is not about your region.

**How long does it take for you to get worried about something? Is it one phone call or one news report?**

**When you hear some news, to what extent do you conduct your own research on the matter before making decisions?**

**Whose words and opinion do you trust?**

**Do not judge a person or situation by your most recent experience of it.**

If Jesus was like that, He would have disqualified Peter when he denied Him, yet soon after that He used Peter at Pentecost. One moment He is saying to Peter “Get thee behind me Satan” yet shortly after that He is affirming Peter’s revelation of the Christ. Perhaps the last month of your marriage has been difficult but it’s not the whole story.

#### Ps 112:6-7 (Berean Study Bible)

<sup>6</sup> *Surely he will never be shaken; the righteous man will be remembered forever.* <sup>7</sup> *He will not fear bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the LORD.*

## 17. Social Comparison

You are unique. Do not compare yourself with others, rather compare yourself with your potential. I need to ask myself, what's my potential and then maximize on it. The people around you are running a different race. (e.g. Tracy doing triathlon with du-athletes). According to some studies, as much as 10 percent of our thoughts involve comparisons of some kind. We tend to compare along the lines of money, attractiveness, quality of marriage, and success. We also make comparisons with regards to relational proximity. Sometimes we assume people are closer to each other than they really are, often based on value equivalents of closeness (they hug, they laugh together etc). We even use our children's achievements in this comparison game. Someone can be asking you how your child did just to evaluate how theirs did. When your self-esteem is low the consequences of upward comparison can be severe (guilt, extreme dissatisfaction, eating disorders, shame and self-loathing).

It is possible to make many social comparisons that are not unhealthy at all. You can say, "I am taller than him" etc. It is the meaning we attach to comparison that is a problem. It has been found that comparing ourselves unfavourably with people is sometimes linked to depression, envy and jealousy. They say that generally speaking men look at women and women look at women when people are out and about. What's often happening? Evaluation. Some women will only have friends that are more plain looking than them just to feel good about themselves. When you are around more successful people does it empower and enhance you or do you have self-deprecating thoughts?

Social comparisons we make are often biased which is a cognitive distortion. For example you can evaluate yourself as very unsocial only because the people you are comparing yourself with are only the most social people. It's important to be aware of such biases.

**Be careful of trying to keep up with the Jones without knowing the Jones' story.**

**What drives your tendency towards making social comparisons?**

**Often those with higher status can be hypervigilant with regards to competition as they have more to lose.**

**Downward comparisons tend to occur in cases where individuals had experienced a threat to their self-esteem and these produced more favourable self-evaluations.**

**Competitiveness increases as proximity to a standard of performance increases.**

**Gal 6:4 – 5**

*<sup>4</sup> Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, <sup>5</sup> for each one should carry their own load.*

**Gal 6:4-5 (NLT)**

*<sup>4</sup> Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else. <sup>5</sup> For we are each responsible for our own conduct.*

**2 Cor 10:12**

*We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.*

Classify = to count yourself among. This is where you are trying to be in the "in-group" or measure yourself to see how close you are. E.g. "I am now in the EXCO eating special lunch in the executive boardroom."

In an upward social comparison, people want to believe themselves to be part of the elite or superior, and make comparisons highlighting the similarities between themselves and the comparison group, unlike a downward social comparison, where similarities between individuals or groups are disassociated. (Martin & Wheeler, 2002)

Aspinwall and Taylor found that upward social comparisons were good in circumstances where the individuals making the comparisons had high self-esteem, because these types of comparisons provided them with more motivation and hope than downward social comparisons. However, if these individuals had experienced a recent threat or setback to their self-esteem, they reported that upward comparisons resulted in a more negative effect than downward comparisons.

Even for people with low self-esteem, these downward social comparisons do improve their negative mood and allow them to feel hope and motivation for their future.

Grandiosity is a core trait of many individuals high in narcissism. But seeing themselves as superior also requires seeing everyone else as beneath them.

A common social comparison is: **Different Equals Bad**

I coached someone whose behavioural preference came out on the opposite end of the rest of the team. This person saw this in a very negative way. I said to her that maybe this is why they had hired her. Maybe they were looking for someone different. She confirmed this to be true a few days later after checking with her boss. We are citizens of heaven. We are supposed to be different in a beautiful way. It's important to be comfortable with your uniqueness. Sadly, we often assume that they will like us if we are the same as them, but sometimes opposites attract. Sometimes you people are drawn to you because they see the difference.

**Why do you compare yourself with the world?**

**Phil 3:20**

*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,*

**John 17:15 – 17 (Berean Study Bible)**

*<sup>15</sup> I am not asking that You take them out of the world, but that You keep them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup> They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. <sup>17</sup> Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.*

I am a Citizen of Heaven. This is part of your kingdom identity. What is Citizenship? What are the benefits of citizenship?

Certain Jobs; Grants; Awards; National Colours (privilege of representing your nation); Access to other nations

Are you aware of the benefits of your Kingdom Citizenship? When you are, you will stop comparing yourself with others.

**2 Cor 10:18**

*For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.*

Are you using the world's standards or God's standards to measure yourself?

How have you been affected emotionally based on the standard of measurement you have chosen to use?

According to Thorton and Arrowood, self-evaluation is one of the functions of social comparison.

For self-evaluation, people tend to choose a comparison target that is similar to themselves. Specifically, they are most interested in choosing a target who shares some distinctive characteristic with themselves.

Downward social comparison is a defensive tendency that is used as a means of self-evaluation.

Research has suggested that social comparisons with others who are better off or superior, or upward comparisons, can lower self-regard, whereas downward comparisons can elevate self-regard.

**18. I am the only one**

I remember in one of my seminars a lady describing herself as "by herself" in the department she works in. This was based on her ethnicity and possibly gender. I had to challenge her to find common ground with those she viewed as outsiders. Often we think we are "by ourselves" because of our perception of in and out groups.

Often when people get depressed as they go through difficult challenges, a common misbelief is that they are the only ones going through this. In scripture one of the encouragements we are given is that the persecutions we face are being faced by our brothers throughout the world. The consequence of believing that you are the only one suffering is that no one else understands. From there you can move to extreme self-pity, unfair judgments and envy. When you are facing certain challenges it is important to remind yourself that this is not the first time that this has happened to someone and that others have overcome the same kind of thing.

### **1 Kings 18:20 – 22**

<sup>20</sup> So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. <sup>21</sup> Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing. <sup>22</sup> Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets."

### **1 Kings 19:10**

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

He repeats this again in verse 14 showing us that he was ruminating. This can often result in depression.

**Do you often feel like you are the only one giving or praying or loving?**

**Often such thoughts are a reflection of pride and lack of social awareness, leading to self-pity and self-righteousness.**

### **1 Kings 19:18**

Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

### **Acts 18:10 – 11**

<sup>10</sup> For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city." <sup>11</sup> So Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

God is reminding you that you are not alone. There are many likeminded people that are standing with you and are for you.