

**Pastoral counselling guidelines to address  
the negative effect of social media on the  
self-worth of believers**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Pastoral counselling guidelines to address the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers**

The tremendous growth of social networking sites (Facebook and Instagram) has fuelled questions amongst both social scientists, as well as general public about the antecedents, correlates, consequences and effects on self-worth when using these platforms.

Less attention has been given to self-worth as directed by God for finding Christian identity and methods of avoiding comparing the self to social media images. Scientific studies have established that unconditional self-acceptance and self-compassion are good indicators of finding the answer to “Who am I?”

This study has set itself the task of examining the causes, symptoms and results of low self-worth due to comparing the self to social media images. It further aims to study the phenomenon of God creating mankind in His image, as wonderful and fearful beings. It uses information from Scripture and literature studies to indicate or suggest counselling guidelines to address the negative effect of social media on self-worth of believers.

#### **Key words**

Social media

Self-worth

Self-esteem

Socially desirable response,

Social comparison

Well-being

Christian identity

## **OPSOMMING**

Pastorale beradings riglyne om die negatiewe effekte van sosiale media op die eiewaarde van gelowiges te adresseer.

Vergelyking van self aan sosiale media platforms (Facebook en Instagram) het vrae vanaf beide sosiale wetenskaplikes en die algemene publiek aangevuur rondom die voorlopers, korrelate, gevolge en effekte op eiewaarde wanneer sosiale platforms gebruik word.

Minder aandag word geskenk aan eiewaarde soos voorgeskryf deur God om 'n Christelike identiteit te kweek asook metodes ter voorkoming van vergelyking met sosiale media beelde. Wetenskaplike studies toon aan dat onvoorwaardelike selfaanvaarding en selfdeernis goeie aanwysers is om die antwoord te vind op die vraag "Wie is ek?"

Hierdie studie het ten doel om die oorsake, simptome en gevolge van lae selfbeeld as gevolg van die vergelyking van self aan sosiale media platforms te bestudeer. Dit het verder ten doel om God te bestudeer as die skepper wat die mens op 'n wonderbaarlike wyse na Sy beeld geskape het. Die studie gebruik inligting vanuit die Woord en literatuurstudie vir die aanbeveling en opstelling van praktiese pastorale beradings riglyne met die doel om die negatiewe effekte van sosiale media op die eiewaarde van gelowiges aan te spreek en behandel.

### **Sleutelwoorde**

Sosiale media

Selfwaarde

Selfbeeld

Sosiaal wenslike reaksie

Sosiale vergelyking

Welstand

Christelike identiteit

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

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#### 1. TITLE AND KEY WORDS

##### 1.1 Title

Pastoral guidelines concerning the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers

##### 1.2 Key words

Social media, self-worth, self-esteem, socially desirable response, social comparison, well-being, Christian identity.

#### 2. CONCEPT CLARIFICATION / DEFINITION OF TERMS

##### a. Self-worth

Self-worth is the way individuals evaluate their worth, competence and importance. It is often used in counselling literature under the same terms of self-concept and self-image (Collins, 2011:365). For Pelham and Swann (1989:677) it appears that a general sense of self-worth is determined by three distinct factors namely

- (a) Their positive and negative feelings about themselves,
- (b) Their specific beliefs about themselves, and
- (c) The way that they frame these beliefs.

Self-worth is thus an individuated self-concept; the way people value themselves and the sense of their unique identity differentiated from others (Brewer & Gardner, 1996:83). "Self-concept represents the person's conscious experiences regarding himself or herself" (Rapmund *et al.*, 2003:163). While above researchers examine self-esteem in terms of self-worth, Stets and Burke (2014:409) suggest that self-esteem has three dimensions: self-worth, self-efficacy and authenticity. These aspects include the motive to feel worthwhile and accepted, to see the self as valuable, and to find meaning, validity and consistency in life (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1986:37-46; Gecas, 1991:171-188; Swann & Bosson, 2010:589-

628). Biblical positive self-worth suggests humans have value because of their being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27, 9:6), loved by Him (1 Thessalonians 1:4, 1 John 4:10) and ordained by Him for a noble life (1 Corinthians 7:35) in the existing world.

### **b. Identity**

Cambridge online dictionary (2018) defines the word identity as “who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others”. Identity is also described as “an existential position, to an inner organization of needs, abilities and self-perceptions, as well as to a socio-political stance” (Marcia, 1980:109). Identity is a certain consciousness or sense or attitude of oneself in relation with the self, God, others and the world. A distinction can be made between self-identity and group identity.

Self-identity is the way someone assess him- or herself, or the consciousness someone has of him- or herself. Self-identity is deeply rooted to the inner core of a human being and is formed from conception through the whole of life. The formation involves different aspects in life, e.g. the social context or group that a person is born in or part of, different role divisions in society and personal aspects (Stets & Burke, 2014:412), sexual orientations, ideological stances and vocational directions (Marcia, 1980:110).

While self-identity is a more personal view of oneself, group identity is a “set of meanings that defines individuals in terms of the roles they occupy, the social categories or groups they belong to, and the individual characteristics that define them as unique persons” in a particular group (Stets & Burke, 2014:412). There are various kinds of group identities, e.g. to be a student (a role identity), a male or female (a social identity), a member of a certain denomination (religious identity), et cetera. Apart from the group identity a person is linked to, the person’s self-identity is a much deeper conviction or belief of whom they are, e.g. I am a good or bad student, a pretty female, et cetera. Group-identity is the degree to which an individual associates with a particular role.

Self-worth and identity (self and group) are closely linked and both have an effect on a person’s behaviour. Self-worth can be determined as the sum of self-identity and group identity. Self-worth (often used in counselling literature as synonym for self-concept and self-image) is the negative or positive attitude that individuals have of themselves and their performance within the different identity roles. For example, a person may think he or she performs badly in a specific identity role (for example athletics), but this perception will not

necessary influence their self-worth, because they know they are more than an athlete (Brewer, 1991:475; Gustafsson *et al.*, 2018:56-60).

### **c. Social media**

A definition of social media as per Merriam Webster online dictionary (2018) is as follows:

Forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos).

The different types of social media referred to in this study will be Facebook<sup>1</sup> and Instagram<sup>2</sup>, because currently it is the most popular platform people use. In recent years a significant number of studies focused on the relationship between social media and the effect it has on the users, e.g. the study of Appel *et al.* (2016) that focuses on Facebook use, self-esteem and well-being. Research has shown that the effect of social media on the users can be either positive, or negative influences (Kraut *et al.*, 1998:1017-1031; Rohall *et al.*, 2002:1-19; Huang, 2010:241-249; Kim & Lee, 2011:359-364; Kross *et al.*, 2013), while other studies found no significant influences (Gross *et al.*, 2002:75-90; Harman *et al.*, 2005:1-6).

## **3. BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

This study aims to formulate pastoral guidelines concerning the effect of social media on the self-worth of believers. People comparing themselves to ever-changing messages and images of social media lead towards an outward focus regarding their self-worth, resulting in mood swings between inferiority and superiority. According to Festinger<sup>3</sup>'s (1954:117-140) social comparison theory, people compare themselves to others because for many areas and characteristics, there is no objective benchmark to evaluate themselves against; making other people therefore highly informative (Wood, 1996:520-537). How people think and feel about themselves depend on the standard of comparison they use (Baron *et al.*, 2009:133). The notion that people are highly selective about the domains on which they put their self-worth were suggested more than a century ago by James (1890:45), who

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<sup>1</sup> Facebook is a popular free social networking website where registered users can create profiles, upload photos and videos, show information about themselves and communicate with others.

<sup>2</sup> Cambridge's online dictionary describe Instagram as "a social networking service for taking, changing and sharing photographs and videos".

<sup>3</sup> Festinger (1954) is a rather old source, but the researcher wishes to use this source because he was the founder of the social comparison theory, and it is still relevant today.

concludes that “our self-feeling in this world depends entirely on what we back ourselves to be and do”. Self-esteem therefore may depend for some on being attractive, loved, a good academic performer, et cetera. For others self-esteem may depend on being virtuous, powerful or self-reliant (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003:710). Seeking self-worth from comparing with social media messages and images contributes to a general feeling of being lost and not good enough. This is the nature of upward social comparison where an individual compares him/her- self to another who does better or is superior to them which in turn is inclined to threaten self-image (Baron *et al.*, 2009:133-134). According to Collins (2011:371-372) possible reasons for low (or threatened self-image) are among other unrealistic expectations, erroneous thinking and societal influences. When people set unrealistic high expectations (upward social comparison) they often doom themselves to failure and feelings of inferiority. Convictions of this sort is for instance the idea that people must adhere to others’ standards to be accepted, hold the idea that they have to be in control and perfect at all times, and the centre of their environment. Negative thinking patterns will be in the form of ‘no one likes me’ or ‘I’m not worthy’. Concerning societal influences, Collins (2011:372) explains that it has become the norm that self-worth is dependent on intelligence, outward appearance, upbringing, financial independence, power and performance. People are encouraged to manipulate one another, as well as their circumstances in order to obtain and maintain these symbols of success. It is generally accepted that possession of these symbols will increase a person’s self-worth. Davies (1991:290) goes on to say that a basic human need is to feel worthy in other persons’ opinions.

According to Collins (2011:364), an estimate of 95% of people feels unfit and inferior due to unhealthy comparisons being drawn between real life and a ‘perfect’ world portrayed through social media. Society today lives online and their online lives have become an extension of their offline lives. Behaviour agrees with the individual’s self-perception, therefore the self plays an important role in behaviour since it usually fits in with a sense of who they are (Grobler *et al.*, 2003:28). According to Rogers (1987:507), “Most of the ways of behaving which are adopted by the organism are those which are consistent with the concept of self”.

Evidence from research shows a relationship between body image dissatisfaction in women and the internalisation of media images portraying both an unattainable and unhealthy ideal of being thin (Cattarin *et al.*, 2000:220-239; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997:701-721; Hamilton *et al.*, 2007:397-402; Stice *et al.*, 1998:195-205; Thompson *et al.*, 2004:293-304).

According to Louw (2011:463,471) a woman's self-esteem forms a vital part of her physical image and that "a negative or neurotic self-esteem is often the result of a negative body image". Contributing to women's increasing body image concerns is the emphasis on thinness by especially the Western culture, which is intensified by the portrayal of the perfect female figure through social media (Biro *et al.*, 2006:501-507; Tiggemann, 2002:91-98). According to Godow (1982:296), "The body is primary symbol of self in which feelings of personal worth, security and accomplishment are rooted". Although the above is also applicable to men, it has been argued that women's self-esteem are substantially lower than men's self-esteem. There are several theories regarding possible reasons for women's lower self-esteem (real or assumed), e.g. different values that are given to gender roles in society. Men are more assertive and women more communal in their general behaviour, different treatment at school, peer pressure and interactions, pressure on women for being judged based on their physical appearances, et cetera (Wood & Eagly, 2012:55-123; Kling *et al.*, 1999:470-500). Studies on gender differences and particularly on the satisfaction with physical appearance, show that women are more prone to body dissatisfaction compared to men (Jones & Crawford, 2006: 257–269; Kling *et al.*, 1999:47-500).

Louw (2011:463) argues that there is an intimate link between people's self-esteem and their body, going on to say the body is more than a just an instrument through which people live but rather to be seen as "an expression and manifestation of their self". The self includes all perceptions (conception) of a person that are derived from all experiences encountered throughout the lifespan, meaning all experiences form part of who a person is. The image people hold about their bodies form part of their identity therefore physical acceptance forms an essential part of self-acceptance (Louw, 2011:463). Self-identity is identification with the self, strong self-identification shows a level of knowing who people are and feeling satisfied with whom they are. Self-identity thus has a cognitive component (knowledge about oneself), as well as an emotional component (being content with oneself) (Grieve *et al.*, 2005:273).

Although the use of media has become a very common activity since the digital revolution, it has been transformed into '*new media*' with innovative means to broadcast, propagate, and influence (Klisanin, 2010:1119-1125). Being surrounded by social media, people fall into a spiral of comparing the self to models that they are exposed to in both the real world and social media leading to self-exploration that serves to build or break self-perceptions

(Festinger, 1954:130). Studies comparing exposure to social media presenting the thin ideal with exposure to content that does not present a human model show that contact with social media presenting thinness as the ultimate body shape and essential to social/personal success and happiness lead to the increase of body dissatisfaction, lower mood and low self-worth (Bessenof, 2006:239-251). Apart from this, research has shown that there has been an alarming worldwide increase in overweight, obesity and other eating disorders, predominately among adolescents (Lobstein *et al.*, 2004:22.). Holstrom (2004:196-217) argues that the underlying factor of these eating disorders can be negative self-perceptions of appearance, body shape, weight and the drive to being thin. Girls from as early as the level of school entry live in and are aware of a culture in which social media transmit body ideals that negatively influence the development of self-worth. Online communication carry over to offline identity and with focus on self-disclosure in social media severely impacts the formation of self-worth (Trepte & Reinecke, 2013:1102.) Consequences of online self-disclosure have social effects which include self-worth, identity, emotional health and well-being (Greene *et al.*, 2006:409-427; Kernis, 2003:1-26; Kernis & Goldman, 2006:283-357). A broad selection of literature shows that high self-esteem or alternatively avoiding low self-esteem is an essential contributor to health and well-being (DuBois & Flay, 2004:415-420). Lightsey *et al.* (2006:72-80) describe self-esteem as an “affectively laden assessment of one’s overall self-worth”.

Researchers recognise both genetic and biological aspects as factors explaining self-worth and self-perceptions of appearance, as well as the important role of social and cultural influences (Eyal & Te’eni-Harari, 2013:135). Fogle *et al.* (2002:373-392) and Mischel and Shoda (1995:246) acknowledge the fact that personality is biologically rooted and relatively stable, but goes on to argue that the expression thereof can be modified through social and cognitive processes. Recent years show an increase in the number of studies looking at media and media influence on its audience members concerning body shape, weight, personal and psychological indicators such as body image, self-worth and the drive for thinness (Eyal & Te’eni-Harari, 2013:129-141). These studies (Eyal & Te’eni-Harari, 2013:129-141) contribute to the literature by examining the relationship between social media exposure and self-worth among audiences young and old.

To date there is plentiful research indicating that social media are being used by youth and undergraduate college students with the purpose of exploring their multiple identities and

establishing relationships (Boyd, 2014; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009:119-140; Greenhow *et al.*, 2009:246-259). Dean (2004:11) explains the impact of social media on adolescents referring to adolescents as “the human condition on steroids”. Meaning the current traditions of the global culture (electronic media) become the experience of contemporary youth. Before social media came into play, the adolescents developing their identity or sense of self were borrowed from and anchored in the established and identity-bearing selfhood of social institutions and significant others such as families, schools and religious communities. Several researchers on the developmental phase of humans to name a few, Erikson (1963:35), Sroufe (1978:50-57), Vygotsky (1978:84) and Louw (2005:65) emphasise that an individual’s sense of emotional well-being or self-worth is strongly nurtured and shaped by early affective experiences e.g. family and significant others. What they describe as identity-bearing institutions became noticeably weaker as the new institution electronic media started to make fragmentation look normal (Dean, 2004: 12). Children translate early social experiences into a basic sense of pride or shame, and this growing sense of worthiness serves as the foundation of self-esteem as well as influencing the way children will perceive themselves and the world as adults (Rosenberg, 1986:107-135). Today social media seems to challenge Erikson’s notion of an integrated identity, while at the same time stressing his original insight that adolescents indeed internalise their historical moment, which is exactly why personal integration evades so many adolescents in the contemporary culture (Dean, 2004:13).

The focus of this study is important as human beings find themselves in a world focusing on external images creating a general feeling of emptiness in people. Living in a consumer world, people become fragmented in an attempt to become the images they see, forgetting their Godly identity. As indicated in the literature review a lot of research has been done on the effects of social media but there is a lack of research on the pastoral care to individuals having difficulty with low self-esteem as a result of social media. The contribution of the study will be to move to optimal functioning and fulfilment of inner potentials by learning and understanding what God’s standards are for people, turning away from a base of self-worth derived from comparing self to messages streamed through social media. People are driven to self-enhance, motivated to favourably regard themselves along culturally valued characteristics (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010:17-36). Beneath the internalisation of social media lies a chronic sense of discontent of whom people are, that in turn leads to low self-

worth. This low self-worth manifests as never being happy with how they look or feel and therefore giving up on godly habits (such as worship, prayer, communion with fellow Christians, sacred reading of the Bible (*lectio divina*)) that can make a difference in the way people portray themselves.

Although, there are many positive views and results due to social media, the disposition of online socialisation that results in a growing sense of not being good enough that leads to negative self-esteem, cannot be ignored anymore. Recognising the powerful role of social media shaping society, perceptions of identity and self-worth call for a transformational mind-set. The primary interest of this study is to enable pastoral counsellors to help believers to shift their focus from comparing self with the images portrayed on social media, to develop self-worth based on Scriptures. A part of people's identity is their experience of personal worth, value and acceptance. Insecurity, self-rejection, low self-esteem and even self-hatred are on an increase world-wide. "Identity formation requires a self-ideal to strive towards" and during this process, the self-concept must become part of the reality of the person's uniqueness (Louw, 2011:464). According to Nouwen (2006:26), the questions 'who am I?' and 'whom do I belong to?' resurface again and again throughout life. Strydom (2010:498) argues that this question occurs even among believers, and mentions that "all healing, self-acceptance and building a healthy self-esteem start with being restored back into a love relationship with God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ".

For change to happen a sense of stability and continuity is needed. Nouwen (2006:28) challenges and encourages people "to look more deeply at the way God sees them—beloved, accepted, affirmed and worthy of salvation". In Jeremiah 1:5 God's acceptance and approval are evident, a reminder that people are the sons and daughters of God. It is the knowledge that God accepts and approves of humans that will bring them to accept and approve of the self (Jeremiah 1:5, Ephesians 1:4, 6). Heuertz (2017:16) is convinced that the overriding question that plagues humanity has to do with identity. 'Who am I?' is the fundamental question that compels humans to search for meaning. The basis of self-worth and self-acceptance is knowing that God completely accepts and approves of human beings through Jesus Christ.

## **4. RESEARCH QUESTION AND FURTHER QUESTIONS**

### **4.1 Research question**

The question to be answered by this research is: What pastoral counselling guidelines can be formulated to address the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers?

### **4.2 Further questions that arise from the research question are:**

The following subsidiary questions emerge from the main research question:

- a. What can be learnt regarding the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers?
- b. Why does social media have such an effect on the self-worth of believers?
- c. What does Scripture teach regarding the self-worth of believers?
- d. What pastoral guidelines can be formulated in order to enable pastoral caregivers to help believers find inner healing from the negative effect of social media on their self-worth and help them to grow to their full identity given by God?

## **5. RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

### **5.1 Aim**

The main aim of this research is to formulate pastoral guidelines that will enable pastoral caregivers to help believers find healing from the negative effect social media had on their self-worth.

### **5.2 Objectives**

To order to answer to the main aim of the study, the following objectives are set:

- a. To determine what can be learnt regarding the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers.
- b. To distinguish why social media has such an effect on the self-worth of believers.
- c. To identify principles from Scripture regarding the self-worth of believers.

- d. To formulate pastoral guidelines in order to enable pastoral caregivers to help believers find inner healing from the negative effect of social media on their self-worth and help them to grow to their full identity given by God?

## **6. CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT**

The central theoretical argument of this study is that if a believer's self-worth and identity are based on Biblical principles, they will find healing from the negative effect social-media had on their self-worth.

## **7. RESEARCH METHOD AND METHODOLOGY**

### **7.1 Methodology**

The epistemology of the study is from a practical theological perspective.

Practical theology is concerned with certain actions, the situation in which they are performed, critical evaluation of such actions and possible modifications to them. The focal point of the subject is the encounter between God and human beings (Heyns & Pieterse, 1991:38).

Practical theology has developed greatly over the past two centuries. Moving from a space where practical theology was confined to the religious actions of the clergy and the Christian church, to an inclusive church recognising the interests of ordinary people and their religious quality and experiences of life, bringing about social renewal (Heyns & Pieterse, 1991:83). Important developments to be noted during the twentieth century are that Christians' position and contribution became a subject of discussion. Furthermore, people were noticed in their historical contexts, and the methods and findings of other operational sciences and the effect it has on people were starting to be taken in consideration (Heyns & Pieterse, 1991:89). The focus of practical theology falls on religious actions that enable people to hear the Word accurately and to further help them with the understanding, accepting and representing of it in their everyday lives (Heyns & Pieterse, 1991:10).

Osmer (2008:11), following the legacy of how Practical Theology has developed through the last century, suggests a specific model for practical theology and his focus on people's actions, as well as the context in which these actions take place, motivated the researcher to choose this particular model of interpretation for the study. Two characteristics of the model stood out that motivated the researcher to make this decision:

Firstly, Osmer's use of the hermeneutical circle helps to clarify the relationship between the four tasks. The fact that the four tasks are distinct but interrelated allows the researcher to move progressively within the model as insights emerge (Osmer, 2008:11).

Secondly, Osmer's four questions set within the four tasks, will assist the researcher to logically gather information for the literature study while addressing the research questions.

## **7.2 Practical theological interpretation**

The work of Browning (1983), Gerkin (1997) and Van der Ven (1988) has greatly impacted Osmer (2008:viii) and thus contributed to his understanding of practical theology. Embracing Gerkin's (1997) model of pastoral leadership (the pastor as interpretive guide), Osmer's (2008:viii) primary objective is equipping leaders to become effective interpretive guides through their teachings of engaging in practical theological interpretation of episodes, situations and contexts by means of the four tasks. The aim of the four questions is to explore the purpose to guide interpretation and response to episodes (single events), situations (broader patterns of events or relationships), and contexts (social and natural systems in which situations unfold) (Osmer, 2008:12). In each question lies a core task that forms the basic structure of practical theological interpretation. Osmer (2008:10-11) holds the belief that scholarship is not neutral and objective, but hermeneutical which is an interpretive experience that is effected by our preunderstanding. "All interpretation begins with preunderstandings that come to us from the past" (Osmer, 2008:22). He supports Gadamer's (1975) five-stage description of hermeneutical experiences (preunderstanding, being brought up short<sup>4</sup>, dialogical interplay, fusion of horizons, and application). A brief discussion of Osmer's proposed model of practical theology is as follow:

- The Descriptive-empirical task asks, 'What is going on?' The task here is to gather information in order to better understand particular episodes, situations and the context in which it takes place. This information helps to observe patterns and dynamics in certain circumstances or contexts. At the heart of this task lies a spirituality of presence: "it's a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations" (Osmer, 2008:34). This attending is in the form of "priestly listening" that is reflected through the quality of attentiveness given

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<sup>4</sup> The experience of "being brought up short" is the foundation on which people and congregations question their preunderstandings. It is then in this setting that the interpretive leader applies the four tasks of practical theological interpretation with the purpose to determine God's will.

to people and events in their everyday lives within the presence of God (Osmer, 2008:33-34).

- The Interpretive task asks, 'Why is this going on?' and seeks reasons for the occurrence observed in the descriptive task. The purpose of this task is to identify the issues embedded within the episodes, situations and contexts observed, and further enter into a dialogue with arts and sciences to assist in making sense of the issue. An important dimension of Christian spirituality is loving God with the mind. A spirituality of "sagely wisdom" is characterised by three qualities: thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgment (Osmer, 2008:82). Wise judgement relates to Aristotle's idea of *phronesis*. "It involves discerning the right course of action in particular circumstances, through understanding the circumstances rightly, the moral ends of action, and the effective means to achieve these ends." (Osmer, 2008:84)
- The Normative task asks, 'What ought to be going on?' Normative questions developed from the viewpoints of theology, ethics and other fields (Osmer, 2011:2). The spirituality of "prophetic discernment" goes beyond simply absorbing the content of God's word, it search for God's will for present realities, involving "both divine disclosure and the human shaping of God's word" (Osmer, 2008:134-135). Practices of discernment are crucial to the work of the interpretative leader, because it offers a disciplined way to seek "God's guidance and sort out what ought to be done in particular episodes, situations and contexts" (Osmer, 2008:138). Three methods are used to discern God's word for the present, namely theological interpretation, ethical reflection and good practice.
- The Pragmatic task asks, 'How might we respond?' Here action steps that will effect and impact current conditions are determined. Undertaking specific responses seeking to shape the episode, situation or context in directions that are desirable (Osmer, 2011:2). The "spirituality of servant leadership" is to lead others to deep change "in ways that more fully embody the servanthood of Christ" (Osmer, 2008:192).

Attention will be given to theoretical interpretation which is the ability to draw on theories of the arts and sciences (Osmer, 2008:83) where each can profit from the companionship of the other (Clouse, 1997:38). The task of cross-disciplinary work is to bring “two or more fields into conversation with one another” and includes the selection of dialogue partners and how they relate to theology (Osmer, 2011:3). The purpose is to identify the most relevant sub-discipline(s) to answer the research question. Due to the theme of this study, different psychological theories will also be approached with wise judgment, and the researcher will keep in mind that human knowledge is fallible, and that perfect wisdom only belongs to God (Osmer, 2008:84). Therefore, although the researcher will work cross-disciplinary, the Scripture is taken as the authoritative source. Two possible sub-disciplines have been identified for the purposes of this study. Out of the four major psychology fields (psychoanalysis, learning psychology (behaviourism), cognitive psychology, and humanistic psychology) – the researcher identified cognitive psychology and psychodynamic psychotherapy as the possible sub-disciplines.

A short discussion follows to determine to what extent cognitive psychology finds support from Biblical teachings. Cognitive psychology focuses on the intellectual abilities of humans, perceiving them as conscious and observing, capable of making meaning of the world, and understanding self and others (Clouse, 1997:42). Forerunners in this field worth mentioning but not elaborated on are Beck’s cognitive therapy, Piaget’s stages of cognitive development, Kohlberg’s six-stage theory of cognitive-developmental morality, and Fowler’s six stage theory of faith development parallels.

The therapy that this research resonates with most and will elaborate on, is firstly the rational emotive behavioural therapy (REBT). Ellis (1977a:2-42), the creator of REBT, places the focus on helping people to question their irrational beliefs and cognitions, as well as responding more effectively to problems they are faced with; supporting a positive way of living and life in general while striving to help people achieve lasting change, suffer less emotional stress and thereby come into more joy (Ellis, 2017:272). A key element to the change process is the individual’s willingness to be mindful, reflecting on his or her thinking and taking appropriate actions. “Awareness is a key element in the change process” (Ellis, 2017:276). The basis of REBT is that events or circumstances do not create humans’ emotional experiences and reactions, it is rather what they tell themselves about it. Choosing to think healthily and rationally about unlikable circumstances can create healthy

and often life-enhancing emotions. On the other hand, thinking in irrational ways in response to adversity could create unhealthy emotions (Ellis, 2017:273). REBT emphasises that with awareness comes choices. People can thus choose to experience happiness and contentment, or to be unhappy. They can choose to monitor thinking patterns, recognising when thoughts are irrational and then disputing and replacing such beliefs. It distinguishes clearly between rational and irrational thinking. Rational thinking creates healthy emotions and behaviours, including preferences not demands, encouraging flexibility and healthy perspectives and prescribing patience (Ellis & Ellis, 2011:130). In short, unconditional acceptance, non-damning of self, others and life, and to rate behaviours and not the self. In contrast irrational thinking creates negative (even debilitating) emotions and behaviours leading to damnation of self, others and life when things don't go as desired, rating the worth of self, others and life (Ellis, 2017:273). Irrational thinking in not getting what people want or don't want creates unhealthy emotions, for instance anxiety, depression, rage, guilt, shame and jealousy. In response to the same circumstances, rational thinking patterns on the other hand, create 'healthy negative emotions' for instance concern, sadness, healthy anger and regret (Ellis & Ellis, 2011:135).

The Christian version of Rational Emotive Therapy (CRET) can be found in work of Johnson (1993), Johnson *et al.* (1994) and Jones (1989). The purpose of CRET is to reduce depression, negative thinking and general pathology in Christian clients (Clouse, 1997:43). The difference between CRET and RET is that CRET uses the Bible as paradigm, rather than human reason to guide the individual to truth (Johnson, 1993:256). Evidence from two psychotherapy outcome studies that evaluated the clinical efficacy of a Christian version of RET done by Johnson *et al.* (1994:130-140) and Johnson and Ridley (1992:220-229) indicates that RET and CRET were equally effective for depressed intrinsically religious Christian clients. Findings showed both RET and CRET were effective treatments for depression, automatic negative thoughts, irrational thinking and general pathology (Johnson & Ridley, 1992:221; Johnson, 1993:255). A Biblical perspective of this theory can be found in Scriptures, such as Romans 12:2 and Ephesians 4:23 where Paul calls for the renewing of the mind; encourages believers to learn and live according to Scripture (II Timothy 3:15); urges believers to think on certain things (Philippians 4:8); to have 'the mind of Christ' (I Corinthians 2:16); attend to sound doctrine (I Timothy 4:1-06). Proverbs 23:7 (AMP) sum it up 'For as he thinks in his heart, so is he'. People's lives and tendencies are

seen as holistic, reminding people that thoughts, feelings and behaviours are interconnected. Healthy thinking patterns will flow over to consequent emotions and follow-on actions will promote life experiences. From this discussion, the overlapping of RET and CRET is evident, and could therefore be accommodated in a religious belief system and therefore used effectively in this particular study.

The second sub-discipline to be discussed is from Erik Erikson, the most influential theorist on identity during the past two decades (Marcia, 1980:109). Erikson's (1963) eight life cycle stages of psychosocial development is a sequence of stages, each characterised by a core developmental task. It's a comprehensive theory of both the processes of how an individual develops throughout the life cycles, as well as a theory of identity formation and the process of establishing a coherent sense of self (Knight, 2017:1048). Curiosity about the ways people develop and become adults within a society is what steered Erikson in conceptualising a stage theory of human growth (Myers, 2016:61). Erikson highlights developmental change throughout the lifespan with an identification of eight stages of development, starting with personal awareness continuing through seven more stages framing the appearance of the 'I' over a lifespan (from infancy through to adulthood and old age). The term 'identity' used by Erikson, makes reference to a certain aspect of the self that provides "the quality of unity and purpose of the self" (McAdams, 1995:385). Four stages occur during childhood and three during adulthood with adolescence (identity versus identity confusion) at the centre (Myers, 2016:61). Each of these stages entails a unique developmental task presenting the developing individual with a crisis to be resolved (Graves & Larkin, 2006:63). The theory begins with personal awareness:

Each person is a centre of awareness in a universe of communicable experiences, a centre so numinous that it amounts to a sense of being alive, and more, of being the vital condition of existence (Erikson, 1980: 467-468).

The word numinous where carefully chosen describing the centre of who 'I' am as numinous light, a brilliant core transferring a luminosity of awareness. Although this core is inborn, Erikson acknowledges the importance of intergenerational communicated social behaviours and the matters associated with the individual's contextual and personal location. The term 'psychosocial' is often used to define Erikson's work which means body, mind and the societal context from the dynamic convergence of an individual's becoming: their psychosocial development. The new born meets these three (body, mind, societal context)

within the mother-child relationship where they start to experience how much or little 'I' am able to trust/mistrust their worldly context (Myers, 2016:61,66). These early social experiences translate into a basic sense of pride or shame, a sense of worthiness that can serve as the foundation of self-esteem, as well as influence the way they will see themselves and their worlds as adults (Pelham & Swann, 1989:672). For Erikson this relationship between mother and child launches the model for all upcoming relationships, including the human-divine relation.

Erikson's theory on developmental stages partly resulted in crossing disciplinary boundaries beyond the discipline of psychoanalysis into a lasting association with sociology, history, anthropology and theology. As a psychoanalyst he seemed especially interested in theology while theorising an intergenerational understanding of identity (Myers, 2016:60). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century he was the theorist most helpful in joining "the border at which psychology meets theology" (Hoare, 2002:5).

The central theoretical argument of this study is that a believer's identity, which is based on Biblical principles, will promote self-worth in spite of body-ideal messages conveyed through social media. This study will propose that a believer's self-worth, based on Biblical principles, will come about through the changing of thoughts; from thoughts focused on worldly (comparing the self with social media) to Scriptural thoughts. Roberts (1987:821) mentions that an important aspect of Ellis's RET theory is the promotion of self-acceptance in the client. According to Jones (1989:113), Ellis' position on self-acceptance is that humans must not evaluate themselves (either positively or negatively) based on, for instance, their behaviours and performances. Sharkey (1981:152) claims that the essence of a 'liberal Christian' view of God, is that God's endeavour for humans are "the absolute and unconditional acceptance of a fallible self". Therefore, acceptance by God is not based upon human beings' actions or characters, but on Christ alone (Jones, 1989:113). Jones (1989:113) mentions that Christians ought to remember that:

A legalistic mind-set that bases our value and acceptance on meeting the standards of God's law or our own idiosyncratic standards, is antithetical to Christian faith and human well-being.

Erik Erikson's psychosocial development will further assist the pastoral counsellor in the understanding of the inner critic, a cardinal component of the subconscious that ensures that people remain tied to the false self (identity), until healing is found. The

researcher notices that this study can utilise the thought aspects of RET, and in the same way significantly benefit from the identity process formation of Erik Erikson's psychosocial development model.

### **7.3 The four tasks**

When writing about creating space, Miller-McLemore (2011:1) explains that humans are deeply formed by the spaces they inhabit. These spaces are designed by society, technology and political manoeuvring, such as their homes, birthplaces, churches and educational institutions. She goes on to say that because humans are finite, they need and occupy space, but this need creates anxiety and because of this anxiety they try to control their space. With the focus on determining the effect of social media on believers' self-worth, the space to be investigated is social media in the form of Instagram and Facebook. The second space that will be given attention to is theology, where possible answers will be looked at in ways to help believers grow to their full identity given by God. This will be done by working through Osmer's (2008) four questions/tasks which are as follows:

- a. The first task focuses on the descriptive-empirical task by asking the question, 'What is the effect of social media on the self-worth of believers?' Research will be conducted through a critical comparative literature study by looking at scientific articles, books, media articles, etc. The aim is to look at the negative effect that social media have on the self-worth of believers.
- b. The second task focuses on the interpretive task by asking the question, 'Why does social media have such an effect on the self-worth of believers?' In order to answer this task, the researcher will engage with the mentioned relevant literature. The researcher will also look at the works of Nouwen and Keating.
- c. The third task of the study focuses on Osmer's normative task by asking the question, 'What does Scripture teach regarding the self-worth of believers?' Here a theological reflection by means of proper exegesis of relevant Scriptures, according to the model of Stuart (2009) will be conducted. Stuart's (2009:68) model of exegesis is a process of six steps namely, text and translation, literary-historical context, form and structure, grammatical and lexical data, biblical and theological context, and application. Exegesis on the following texts will be done: on creation (Psalm 139:13-16, Genesis 1:26, Jeremiah 1:5), renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23, 1

Corinthians 14:20, Proverbs 18:21, Mathew 12:34), new self (Colossians 3:10, Luke 3:22). Normatively the main task for this study will be to build self-worth on biblical guidelines regarding a believer's identity in God. This question will be answered with Nouwen's (1975) guidelines for spiritual growth. There are three movements of the spiritual life: moving from loneliness to solitude, from hostility to hospitality, and from illusion to prayer.

- d. The fourth task of the study focuses on the pragmatic task: 'What pastoral guidelines can be formulated in order to help believers grow to their full identity given by God?' This part of the study will incorporate and process the conclusions of the previous three tasks with the intention to formulate pastoral guidelines in order to help believers grow to their full identity given by God. The pragmatic task involves deep inner change, where self-worth will be fundamentally altered through changing thoughts and attitude towards a biblical mind-set.

## **8. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study will be a critical comparative review of literature from a sample of texts in order to come to a wider understanding of the effect of social media on believers' self-worth in order to help them grow to their full identity given by God. The selection of sources as found on the databases of the NWU library will be used in the literature study (documents, journals and texts) and will be motivated by theoretical considerations (Mouton, 2011:180). The databases search was done with the following keywords: social media, body-image, self-esteem, socially desirable response, social comparison, well-being, and Christian identity.

## **9. ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study consists of a literature study making the ethical risk minimal. The researchers involved in the study completed the ethical training and comply with the guidelines of NWU. The researchers have the necessary education and capacity to conduct the literature research, will withhold from plagiarism and use the Harvard reference method to acknowledge sources used. The researchers undertake to adhere to the ethical requirements as set out in the NWU's ethical application form. The letter for ethical clearance is attached as an addendum.

## **10. CLASSIFICATION OF CHAPTERS**

The chapters are structured as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction.

Chapter 2: Descriptive critical and comparative literature study on the effects of social media on the self-worth of believers.

Chapter 3: Interpretative aspects on why social media has such an effect on the self-worth.

Chapter 4: Normative principles regarding spiritual practices concerning the self-worth of believers.

Chapter 5: Pastoral guidelines to help believers grow to their full identity given by God.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2

### DESCRIPTIVE CRITICAL AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE STUDY ON THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE SELF-WORTH OF BELIEVERS.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Chapter two is part of the descriptive-empirical task of the model of Osmer and asks the question 'What is going on?' The task here is to gather information in order to better understand particular episodes, situations and the context in which they take place. This information helps to observe patterns and dynamics in certain circumstances or contexts. At the heart of this task lies a spirituality of presence: "it's a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and congregations" (Osmer, 2008:34). This attending is in the form of "priestly listening" that is reflected through the quality of attentiveness given to people and events in their everyday lives within the presence of God (Osmer, 2008:33-34).

The question that needs to be answered is 'What can be learnt regarding the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers?' and the research will be conducted through a critical comparative literature study by looking at scientific articles, books, media articles, *et cetera*. Before the focus can be placed on guidelines for the pastoral counsellor to help the believer grow into an identity given by God, it is important to firstly understand the concept 'self-worth' and the effect of social media on self-worth.

This chapter looks to provide an insight into the abundance of research literature, measures, and definitions available in the field of self-esteem. Firstly, its origins from both a theoretical and contemporary perspective, are considered. Under the contemporary perspective falls three significant self-esteem theories: Self-Determination Theory, Sociometer Theory and Terror Management Theory. For the purpose of this study focus will be on two of the three theories: Self Determination Theory (SDT) and Sociometer Theory (ST).

Secondly, the development of self-esteem: reflected process, social comparisons, and self-attributions will be discussed.

Thirdly, focus will be placed on three definitions of self-esteem: global self-esteem, feelings of self-worth, and self-evaluations.

Fourthly, the characteristics of self-worth: low self-esteem, and high self-esteem will be up for evaluation.

The chapter ends with four major influencers of self-esteem namely: parenting factors, gender, cultural orientation and social media.

## **2.1 HISTORICAL ROOTS AND THEORIES OF SELF-ESTEEM**

Currently, self-esteem may be more important for people and the society they live in than ever before, especially regarding what is typically described as “self-regulation” and “quality of life” (Mruk, 2006:2). Understanding self-worth is important for learning about humankind, such as, who they are as unique individuals and how they fare in life in terms of the meanings of their actions, short- and long-term goals, relationships with others, as well as the direction in which their lives may be heading (Mruk, 2006:3). In order to come to an understanding of self-worth and learning about humankind it is necessary to start at the beginning which are the historical roots of self-worth from both a theoretical and contemporary perspective.

### **2.1.1 Historical roots**

The discussion of self-esteem will start by looking at a broad origin of the theory formation of the theme.

#### *A. James: Formula for self-esteem*

More than a century ago James (1890), also referred to as the creator of the self-esteem movement (Leary *et al.*, 1995: 518–530; Hewitt, 2005: 135-148; Mruk, 2006:1), was the first to introduce the topic of self-esteem. His well-respected formula of self-esteem is as follows:

$$\text{Self-esteem} = \frac{\text{Success}}{\text{Pretensions}}$$

Figure 1: James’s Formula for Self-Esteem. Source: Nayler, 2010.

The two elements, pretensions (feeling good about the self), and success (how well we actually do) are inseparable. People can feel better about themselves by succeeding in the world as well as by valuing the levels of their hopes and expectations (Seligman, 1995:30).

After James, self-esteem retreated from the academic stage, only to be taken up by psychodynamic theorists and clinicians such as Adler (1927) and Horney (1937). A wave of interest in self-esteem occurred in the mid-1960s also referred to as the “Cambrian Explosion”. Coopersmith (1959) were one of the leading figures of self-esteem looking at self-esteem from a learning theory perspective, while Rogers (1951) explored self-esteem from a humanistic perspective.

*B. Coopersmith’s self-esteem theory*

Coopersmith’s (1967) self-evaluation scale measures children’s self-esteem followed by assessing the parents on their raising practices for those children with high self-esteem determining that the roots of higher self-esteem lay in clear rules and limits imposed by the parents (Seligman *et al.*, 1996:32). Parental styles and the influence thereof on self-esteem will be discussed in more detail in this chapter. Coopersmith (1967:4-5) defines self-esteem as “a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself” based on what he or she learned about him- or herself in their relationship with their parents. Around the same time Rosenberg (1965) developed a 10-item, easy to administer self-esteem survey that also became the “gold standard” for research on self-esteem.

*C. Rosenberg’s self-esteem as worthiness*

Rosenberg (1965) introduced an alternative way of defining self-esteem leading to the development of the next major school in the field. His definition is also the most commonly used at present, defining self-esteem as a particular type of attitude based on the perception of a feeling about one’s worth, in other words one’s character or value as a person. The unique characteristic of defining self-esteem as such is that it is seen mainly as affective in nature. In this case, self-esteem is based on a particular feeling, one of being worthy. From this point of view, self-esteem is the result of something else, namely a process of evaluation, suggesting that self-esteem plays a passive role in behaviour (Mruk, 2013:15).

*D. Braden’s two-factor approach*

Finally, during this period of development, Branden (1969) introduced self-esteem through his two-factor approach. He may have been the first to define self-esteem in terms of a relationship between competence and worth or worthiness, pointing out that competence and worthiness connect in regard to self-esteem (Mruk, 2013:19). “Self-esteem has two interrelated aspects: it entails a sense of personal efficacy and a sense of personal worth. It

is the integrated sum of self-confidence and self-respect. It is the conviction that one is competent to live and worthy of living” (Branden, 1969:110). From this point of view, it is possible to claim that humans have a deep-seated need to feel worthy and this goal is achievable by acting competently when making decisions, especially those involving facing challenges of life. In this case, competence means “facing reality directly and then making rational decisions” (Mruk, 2013:18). Branden further stipulates that rational decisions are based personally significant goals, life affirming, and do not compromise a person’s integrity either in intention or performance (Mruk, 2013:18).

The first research on self-esteem advanced on the opinion of one of three conceptualisations, each treated independently of one another. Firstly, self-esteem has been studied as an outcome. Scholars holding this opinion place focus on processes producing or inhibiting self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967; Harter, 1993; Peterson & Rollins, 1987; Rosenberg, 1979). Self-esteem has secondly been studied as a self-motive, observing people’s trend to behave in ways that will maintain or increase positive evaluations of the self: among the scholars in this area are Kaplan (1975) and Tesser (1988). Finally, self-esteem has been studied as a buffer for the self thus being a safeguard from harmful experiences: to name a few scholars, Longmore and DeMaris (1997); Pearlin and Schooler (1978); Steele *et al.* (1993) and Thoits (1994).

With a broad explanation on the origins of self-esteem’s roots the study will progress to the theories of self-esteem.

### **2.1.2 Theories of self-esteem**

Moving to more contemporary work on self-esteem this section will discuss theories of self-worth. Theories standing in agreement that self-esteem is not pursued for its own sake but instead serves a more significant function is: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Sociometer Theory (ST).

#### *A. Self-Determination theory (SDT)*

Developed by the scholars, Ryan and Deci SDT reflects on intrinsic developmental processes where motivations toward competence, connectedness, and integration form the foci. It further places focus on things that people find interesting; look at why people value certain things and why they join certain groups; the way they internalise social practices and

reasons they develop insecurities and maladaptive patterns (Ryan & Deci, 2000b: 68–78). They explain proactive and positive behaviour as well as self-destructive and other-destructive trends (Deci & Ryan, 2000a: 319-338). The theory disputes that people are most alive, motivated, and vital when basic psychological needs have been satisfied. Human beings associate with and feel attached to companions, groups, and countries when needs are satisfied, on the other hand when basic needs are dissatisfied they will feel unmotivated, rigid, and alienated. Therefore, relationships, groups, and cultures that provide support and opportunities to fulfil basic needs add to well-being (Chirkov *et al.*, 2003: 97–110; La Guardia *et al.*, 2000: 367–384). SDT deals with existential issues by stipulating psychological and social conditions and activities that support or upset healthy psychological development and self-integration. Basic psychological needs are defined as nutrients essential for growth, integrity, and well-being – identifying only three, namely relatedness<sup>5</sup>, competence<sup>6</sup> and autonomy<sup>7</sup>.

When social conditions and personal goals satisfy these basic needs, personal growth, vitality and well-being will be improved (Ryan & Deci, 2000a: 319–338). According to SDT, these three needs are intrinsic to human nature. People are thus born with an intrinsic motivation for exploration, absorbing and mastering their surroundings and high self-esteem is reported when these needs are in balance. Intrinsic motivations stand dependent on conditions that are challenging, foster a sense of competence and allow people to self-organise or regulate their activities, and foster a sense of autonomy. The theory expanded to relatedness to understand intrinsic social motivation together with the assimilation of extrinsically motivated social and cultural regulations. Relatedness is important for understanding internalisation which is the process by which people take on ambient cultural practices and values. What's more, relatedness is such a basic psychological need that people will frequently sacrifice needs for autonomy and competence to maintain relationships with unsurprising negative consequences on integrated functioning and well-being (Assor, Roth & Deci, 2004: 47–88).

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<sup>5</sup> Relatedness: the need to have close and secure personal connections whilst still respecting autonomy and facilitating competence.

<sup>6</sup> Competence: the need to feel confident in doing what the person is doing.

<sup>7</sup> Autonomy: the need to choose what the individual is doing, being the driver of their own life.

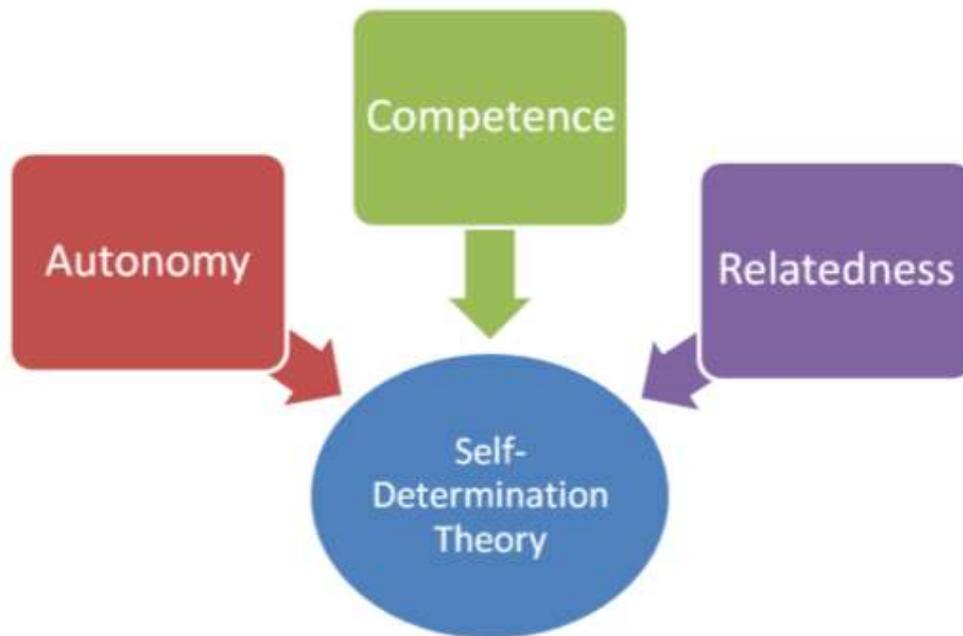


Figure 2: Ryan and Deci's model of Self-Determination Theory. Source: Nayler (2010).

### *B. Sociometer Theory*

Leary's and Downs' (Leary *et al.*, 1995:518-530) sociometer theory shows how feelings of self-worth help to direct social behaviour, much as an emotional compass helping to find socially functional paths (Mruk, 2013:16). It is a prominent theory suggesting that a person's self-worth primarily comes from the feedback received from others. A minimum level of social inclusion or belonging is vital for people to reproduce and survive with self-esteem functioning as a sociometer (Leary *et al.*, 1995: 518–530). Exclusion from a single meaningful relationship will affect the self-esteem more negatively than a positive impact of being included in numerous but less meaningful relationships (Leary, 1990: 221-229). People's sociometers further have an added complexity of being concerned about their inclusive status within groups that may be seen negatively or not worthwhile, all adding up to the building or shrinking of self-esteem (Baumeister & Tice, 1990: 165-195). A person's mood can be used as the best evidence of self-esteem changes (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991: 895-910) on one side in the form of feelings of pride and high self-esteem, and on the other side shame with low self-esteem (Scheff, Retzinger & Ryan, 1989: 165-199) which is in turn translated as different levels of anxiety (Spivey, 1989).

ST explains certain defensive forms of self-esteem suggesting "that self-esteem functions to defend people from falling prey to social exclusion" (Ryan & Deci, 2004:476). SDT is in

agreement that threats to the basic needs of the self can encourage defensive processes, for instance a willingness to impose values or maintain own worth by demeaning others. SDT further also suggest the healthy development of self is more “about the unfolding of intrinsic growth tendencies than about flights from anxiety”. Inclination to autonomy, competence, and relatedness, when amply supported, stimulate feelings of significance and worth (Ryan & Deci, 2004:476). Ryan and Deci (2004:476) are in agreement with Leary and Baumeister (2000:1–62) that self-esteem is integrally related to the basic need of relatedness, however, they disagree with relatedness being the primary and only need that self-esteem reflects. Pyszczynski *et al.* (2004: 425-429) call attention to the fact that self-esteem is more than simply being accepted by others and add that people further need to feel competent and volitional, and that the absence of either will damage the self-esteem. “Acceptance, without autonomy, represents alienation. Relatedness without competence represents amotivation and helplessness” (Ryan & Deci, 2004:476). Ryan and Deci (2004:476) conclude that single-need theories do not provide sufficient explanations of the needed “ingredients of self-worth”.

Self-esteem remains to be one of the earliest and most frequently researched concepts, referring mostly to a person’s overall positive evaluation of the self (Gecas, 1982:1-33; Rosenberg, 1990:593-624; Rosenberg *et al.*, 1995:141-156). As seen in the discussion under historical roots it is compiled of two distinct dimensions namely competence and worth. The competence (efficacy-based self-esteem) dimension indicates the degree to which people perceive themselves as capable and effective; while the worth (worth-based self-esteem) dimension indicates the degree to which people feel they are of value (Cast & Burke, 2002:1042).

## **2.2 DEVELOPMENT OF SELF ESTEEM**

While the first scholars on self-esteem researched the three dimensions (outcome, self-motive and buffer) extensively, hardly any research has been done to combine the three streams into an integrated model. This integration process was only started by Ervin and Stryker’s (2001:29-55) discussion on the links between self-esteem, identity salience and identity commitment. Work done by Cast and Burke (2002:1041-1068) attempt to combine the views on self-esteem by placing focus on the important role of self-esteem as an outcome of the self-verification process within groups. “Self-verification occurs when

meanings in the social situation match or confirm meanings in an identity” (Cast & Burke, 2002:1042).

With the concept of self being a central concept within symbolic interactionism since the early writings of Mead (1934), Cooley (1902) and James (1890), it is currently undergoing a rebirth in contemporary culture. Much of this revitalisation of interest is in self-phenomena such as, self-awareness, self-esteem, self-image and self-evaluation. As a result, the self-concept has become visible in areas and traditions that were previously considered unknown grounds. In the following section the three processes of development of self-esteem will be discussed.

### **2.2.1 Reflected appraisals**

The dominant proposition of the reflected appraisals process is that people come to understand and form an opinion of the self through their own understanding of the perception which others may hold of them (Gecas, 1982:5). The theory is grounded on Cooley’s (1902) influential concept of the “looking-glass self” and Mead’s theory (1934) that self-concept develops through the process of role-taking. This process is the cornerstone of the symbolic interaction viewpoint on self-concept formation. Self-conceptions reflect people’s perceptions of the judgments of others, especially significant others in their environment. However, there are inconsistencies between self-concepts and the appraisals of others suggesting that the appraisals of others are not accurately perceived, and if and when it is accurately perceived, it may not be believed (Felson, 1980:223-233). Several possible reasons exist for this disparity. The honest feedback from others is one reason, especially in cases where feedback is negative. Another possible reason is that feedback from significant others may be suspect. An example is parents and teachers seeking to boost self-esteem in children tend to overemphasise the importance of praise in the effort to develop self-esteem in young children (Gecas, 1982:1-33; Kenny & DePaulo, 1993:145-161). While praise and encouragement are important factors for developing a strong self-esteem (Rosenburg, 1973: 829-860), effective performance at activities that children value, seems to be a more important reason being that they constitute more trustworthy proof of competence and worth. In fact, Baumeister *et al.* (2003:1-44) imply that society is doing more damage by not awarding praise to performance, and by giving praise out when not earned. Finally, the self-esteem motive has a misleading effect on all three processes of development of self-esteem. To the extent that the self-esteem motive is active, people will

be more likely to selectively perceive and remember favourable feedback while discrediting or ignoring critical feedback from others. For these reasons it must be emphasised that the reflective appraisal process mainly functions through people's perceptions of the appraisal of others.

### **2.2.2 Social comparison**

The second process that is important to the development of self-esteem and understanding the effects of social media is social comparison. It is the process of weighing own abilities and virtues by comparing it to those of others (Gecas, 1982:6). According to Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison, the main function of comparisons is reality-testing. This process is most likely to appear in situations where knowledge about some aspect of the self is vague or uncertain. People compare themselves to others because for many areas and characteristics, there is no objective benchmark to evaluate themselves against; making other people therefore highly informative (Festinger, 1954:117-140; Wood, 1996:520-537).

Comparing the self with others takes two forms, according to Festinger (1954:117) namely, social comparison of ability and social comparison of opinion. Comparing achievements and performance to determine how well one is doing in relation to others, is social comparison of ability. This comparison is essentially judgmental and competitive (Festinger, 1954:117-141; Gibbons & Buunk, 1999:129–142; Suls *et al.*, 2002:159–163). In the digital age the process of social comparison of ability is particularly relevant as social networking sites, such as Facebook and Instagram provide abundant comparison opportunities (Vogel *et al.*, 2014:206), allowing people to easily access other peoples' online lives (Yang *et al.*, 2018). How people think and feel about themselves depend on the standard of comparison they use (Baron *et al.*, 2009:133). Non-judgmental and competitive comparison is social comparison of opinion which entails comparison of thoughts, attitudes, values and beliefs (Festinger, 1954:117-141; Suls *et al.*, 2002:159–163).

Additionally, people further tend to compare performance in an upward or downward comparison. For the purpose of this study focus will be on upward social comparison because it explains the effect of social media on self-worth the best. The nature of upward social comparison is where an individual compares self to another who does better or is superior to them, which in turn are inclined to threaten self-image (Baron *et al.*, 2009:133-

134; Vogel *et al.*, 2014:206). Upward social comparison can be beneficial in cases where it inspires people to improve themselves in a positive way (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997:91-103), but more often it causes feelings of inadequacy with poorer self-evaluations, and experiences of negative affect resulting in an unclear sense of the self (Butzer & Kuiper, 2006:167–176; Vartanian & Dey, 2013:495–500). When people set unrealistic high expectations they often doom themselves to failure and feelings of inferiority. Convictions of this sort is for instance the ideas that people must adhere to others' standards to be accepted, that they have to be in control and perfect at all times, and the centre of their environment. Negative thinking patterns will be in the form of 'no one likes me' or 'I'm not worthy' (Collins, 2011:371-372). Vogel *et al.* (2014:206-222) show that participants who frequently use Facebook were associated with lower trait self-esteem, "and this was mediated by greater exposure to upward social comparisons on social media". For this reason it is important to understand the potential contribution of social media (social networking sites) to upward social comparisons and the consequences thereof on the well-being of people, given the obvious role of social media in modern daily communication together with the self-presentation biases they entail (Vogel *et al.*, 2014:208). Social media users can portray their personal characteristics, like successes, personalities and emotions through pictures and posts that can make them targets of upward or downward comparison to others (Vogel *et al.*, 2014:207). Individuals who compare themselves to others who perform poorly are downward social comparisons. The reason for this comparison is to enhance self-images.

As with reflected appraisals, the reality-testing that occurs by means of social comparison is biased by the self-esteem motive: people are inclined to seek out favourable comparisons and avoid or try to neutralise unfavourable comparisons by means of denial and excuses.

### **2.2.3 Self-attributions**

The third process, self-attributions, refers to people's tendency to make conclusions about what they are feeling and thinking from direct observation of one's behaviour and the consequences thereof. Bem's (1972:1-62) self-perception theory suggests that people acquire knowledge about themselves in the same way knowledge is acquired about others. Knowledge are learned by observing behaviour and coming to conclusions about internal dispositions and states (e.g. motives, attitudes and self-esteem). The Self-perception theory

falls under the more general attribution theory, which deals with the way people make casual attributions about their own, as well as other's behaviour. As seen in the previous two processes, again people are hardly neutral observers of what they see. Instead, researchers suggest that people's casual attributions tend to be self-serving, for instance, people are more likely to make internal casual attributions for their own successes and external attributions for failures (Gecas, 1982:8).

Although all three processes are important to the development and maintenance of self-esteem it fluctuates, thus one may be more relevant than the others at different stages or phases in life. It is furthermore clear that the self does not passively react to processes affected by it. Instead, it actively shapes and influence these processes in the interest of protecting the self-esteem as well as other self-motivations (Nayler, 2010). Cast and Burke (2002:1043) suggest that self-esteem further works as a sort of defence mechanism. In situations where people are unable to authenticate their identities the self-esteem that has been produced from previous successful works at self-verification will buffer or protect the individual from possible distress linked with a lack of self-verification, in that way preserving the threatened structural organisation (Burke, 1991:836-849; Burke, 1996:141-174).

Perceptions of what is accomplished or actual perceptions arise from the three above mentioned distinct processes that are linked to role performance within groups. The first two processes strongly relate to worth-based self-esteem rather than efficacy-based self-esteem (Gecas, 1982). Receiving self-verifying feedback from groups through reflected appraisals and social comparisons, feelings of acceptance and being valued by group members are reinforced which in turn build worth-based self-esteem (Burke & Stets, 1999:347-360). Efficacy-based self-esteem on the other hand is inclined to be the result of self-attribution.

### **2.3 DEFINING SELF-ESTEEM**

The term self-esteem is defined by different researchers in different ways. Brown and Marshall (2006:4-9) debate that the terms are theoretically distinct, with different developmental backgrounds and consequences, which will be elaborated on in the following section.

### 2.3.1 Three faces of self-esteem

To explain self-esteem Brown and Marshall (2006:5) use a fitting riddle: “What does everyone want, yet no one is entirely sure what it is, what it does, or where it can be found?” While there are more than one possible answer, self-esteem is one of them. Self-esteem has become firmly rooted in current culture over the past thirty years, campaigned as “the royal road to happiness and personal fulfillment”, as well as promoted as an answer to a selection of social problems (Brown & Marshall, 2006:5). There has been division among academics regarding self-esteem’s functions and benefits, despite the extensive usage in nonacademic circles. While there are some belief that high self-esteem is vital to human functioning and that it instills life with meaning (Pyszczynski *et al.*, 2004: 435-468), others claim that it is not only of little value but also can be a liability (Baumeister *et al.*, 2003:1-44; Baumeister *et al.*, 1996:5-33). In the centre of this continuum lie several opinions of an intermediary nature. Brown and Marshall (2006:5) are of the opinion that part of the confusion of defining self-esteem comes from disagreement around the concept itself. They highlight the term in three different ways:

#### A. *Global self-esteem (aka Trait self-esteem)*

Researchers call self-esteem that refers to a personality variable, global self-esteem or trait self-esteem. This represents the way people commonly feel about themselves and is relatively stable over time and situations. There is a wide range of depictions of global self-esteem, some researchers taking a cognitive approach assuming it is a decision people make about their worth as an individual (Coopersmith, 1959; Crocker & Park, 2004:392-414; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001:593-623). Others see it as an emotional process defining global self-esteem as feelings of affection for self not originally from rational and judgmental processes (Brown, 1993:27-58; Brown & Marshall, 2001:575-584). Brown and Marshall (2006:5) explain that regardless of how global self-esteem is defined, fact is it has been shown to be stable right through adulthood, with a credible genetic component related to temperament and neuroticism (Neiss, Sedikes & Stevenson, 2002:1-17).

#### B. *Feelings of self-worth (aka State self-esteem)*

When people talk about experiences that “threaten self-esteem” or “boost self-esteem” it refers to self-evaluative emotion reactions to valence events. An example, a person might

say her or his self-esteem was over-the-top after getting a lot of likes on a posted image on social media or a person may say his or her self-esteem plummeted after comparing the self to models on social media. Brown and Marshall (2006:5) follow James (1890) by referring to these self-evaluative emotional reactions as feelings of self-worth. On the positive side, feeling proud or pleased with the self, or on the negative side humiliated and ashamed of the self are examples of what Brown and Marshall (2006:5) refer to as feelings of self-worth. The term state self-esteem is used by several researchers to refer to emotions, otherwise called feelings, of self-worth. Trait self-esteem in turn refers to the way people generally feel about the self (Pyszczynski & Cox, 2004:425-429). These terms imply an equivalency between the two mentioned constructs, thereby suggesting the basic difference is that global self-esteem perseveres, while feelings of self-worth are fleeting. Researchers that do not agree with this argue that fleeting emotional reactions to positive and negative occasions do not provide a fitting analogue for how people normally feel about the self (Brown, 1993:27-58; Brown & Dutton, 1995:712-722).

### *C. Self-evaluations (aka Domain Specific self-esteem)*

The third self-esteem term is used to refer to the way people evaluate their assorted abilities and attributes. An example of self-evaluations, a scholar doubting his or her school abilities may be said to have low academic self-esteem and a person who considers the self as good in sport may be said to have high athletic self-esteem. Self-confidence and self-efficacy are also used to refer to these beliefs as many people link self-confidence with self-esteem. Brown and Marshall (2006:5) prefer to call these beliefs “self-evaluations or self-appraisals, as they refer to the way people evaluate or appraise their physical attributes, abilities and personality characteristics”. However, this is not a unanimous agreement, many scales assessing self-esteem include subscales measuring self-evaluations in multiple domains (Marsh, 1993:59-98). From this viewpoint people hold different levels of self-esteem in different areas, for instance, someone can have high athletic self-esteem but low artistic self-esteem, another low math self-esteem but high social self-esteem.

In the following section characteristics of self-esteem will be discussed by looking at both low and high self-esteem. This study suggests that worth-based self-esteem is most at risk when people are faced with perceiving or experiencing actual exclusion from social groups.

## **2.4 SELF-WORTH CHARACTERISTICS**

As seen in the above description, self-esteem (also known as self-worth) refers to the extent to which people accept, approve or value the self. It involves a degree of evaluation of either positive or negative views of the self (McLeod, 2008). These feelings could be positive leading to high self-worth, or negative leading to low self-worth. While in the process of protecting the self against negativity or distress as the situation is resolved (Thoits, 1994:143-159), self-esteem is being used up or diminished. In this way self-esteem is similar to a “reservoir of energy” (Cast & Burke, 2002:1043). Similar to any other resource, self-esteem has the capacity of being built up, but when it is used it will get less. Successful self-verification is a method to fill the reservoir of self-esteem and spent when the self-verification process is disrupted. Self-esteem is highly stable, like other traits of the self, but responsive to changes in social situations. In cases where these changes include persistent problems in self-verification, self-esteem will most likely decline even more as the energy reservoir is exhausted (Cast & Burke, 2002:1043). The example of reservoir depletion used in this study is low self-worth as a result of social media.

A brief discussion will follow on the effects of self-esteem’s reservoir when comparing the self with social media images, giving characteristics of both low self-worth (depleted reservoir) and high self-worth (satiated reservoir).

### **2.4.1 Low self-worth**

Low self-worth has been studied as one of the psychological features that people have when for instance excessively involved in social media (Bianchi & Phillips, 2005:39-51; Leung, 2008:93-113). A low self-esteem is associated with adverse outcomes, such as feeling more discouraged, unhappy, depressed, unfriendly, aggressive and fearful toward others, secluded and showing tendencies towards antisocial behaviour (Biro *et al.*, 2006:501). Bianchi and Phillips (2005:39-51) propose that individuals with low self-esteem are more inclined to search for online reassurance and are more likely to use the internet or social media inappropriately. Yen *et al.* (2014:1601-1608) affirm that the internet provides people with activities that give them more confidence and make them feel better about themselves, giving the impression that they have a higher self-esteem in the computer-generated world. Consequently, Seabra *et al.* (2017:775) are of the opinion that it is not internet addiction

itself that is damaging the self-esteem, but rather the emotions experienced as a result of internet addiction (i.e. sadness, irritability, distress, disguise and deceptive behaviour). They explain that this is the effect of people developing the impression that their online identity (self) is an improved image of the self in the real world. Harman *et al.* (2005:1-6) warn that creating an online identity can be dangerous, especially in the case of individuals with a low self-esteem; reason being it can lead to preoccupation with an ideal self, instead of learning to accept and love the (real) self. Consequences of online self-disclosure have social effects which include self-worth, identity, emotional health and well-being (Greene *et al.*, 2006:409-427, Kernis, 2003:1-26, Kernis & Goldman, 2006:283-357), missed opportunities and lack of spontaneity (Mruk, 2006:3). Feinstein *et al.* (2013: 161–170) note that given prior studies people making social comparisons on social media reported greater depressive symptoms as well as valuing their present self as being more discrepant from their ideal self (Haferkamp & Kramer, 2011: 309–314). Furthermore, people spending a lot of time on Facebook are inclined to have lower well-being (Kalpidou *et al.*, 2011:183-189; Mehdizadeh, 2010:357–364; Kross *et al.*, 2013).

Thus, low self-esteem tends to lead to: lack of confidence, wanting to look like someone else, concerned with what others think and pessimism.

#### **2.4.2 High self-worth**

Life being lived on the healthier end of the spectrum is associated with several positive outcomes, such as, showing a positive attitude towards the self as well as others. People are usually happier, more active, expressive, sociable, popular and healthy. They are also more likely to be confident and optimistic in their opinions and judgments, occupational success, social relationships, well-being, improved coping skills and generally benefitting from a higher quality of life (Biro *et al.*, 2006:501). High self-esteem has further been linked to a series of other components of positive mental health, such as a sense of mastery, autonomy, accurate perceptions of reality, a sense of optimism, interpersonal relatedness and responsible behaviour toward others (DuBois *et al.*, 2003:402-433). Studies done on self-concept clarity (SCC) in recent years link higher SCC with greater psychological adjustment (Campbell *et al.*, 1996:141-156) and well-being (Church *et al.*, 2014:695-712), better adjustment to stress (Ritchie *et al.*, 2011:493-508), better body image (Vartanian & Dey, 2013:495–500), as well as higher self-worth (Brandt & Vonk, 2006: 224–229).

Rosenberg, the “father” of self-esteem, describes high self-esteem as a feeling of “good enough” (Rosenberg, 1965:30-31). People with high self-esteem feel that they are “a person of worth”, respecting the self for what he or she is, without standing in awe of the self or expecting others to be in awe of him or her. Rosenberg (1989:31) uses a fitting term to describe people with high self-esteem, namely “self-acceptance, since this term implies that the individual knows what he is, is aware of his virtues and deficiencies, and accepts what he sees without regret”. It goes even further than acceptance of the self to wanting to improve the self, overcome deficiencies and grow. In contrast, low self-esteem implies self-rejection, self-dissatisfaction and self-contempt, showing a lack of respect for self being observed. This means “the self-picture is disagreeable” and people wish it otherwise. On the other hand, high self-esteem, as described by Rosenberg (1989:31), means that a person respects the self, considers themselves worthy without considering the self better or worse than others. It is not a feeling of perfection but recognises limitations and expresses the will to grow and improve. A broad selection of literature shows that high self-esteem or alternatively avoiding low self-esteem is an essential contributor to health and well-being (DuBois & Flay, 2004:415-420). Thus, high self-esteem tends to lead to confidence in own abilities, self-acceptance, not concerned with others’ opinions and optimism.

<b>Self-esteem</b>	
A positive view of the self will lead to:	A negative view of the self will lead to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Confidence in abilities</li> <li>○ Self-acceptance</li> <li>○ Not worrying about what others think</li> <li>○ Optimism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lack of confidence</li> <li>○ Want to be and/or look like someone else</li> <li>○ Always worrying what others might think</li> <li>○ Pessimism</li> </ul>

Table 1: The levels of self-esteem (Gbadamosi, 2018:85)

An example of a self-verification process regarding the effects of social media on self-worth is for instance, posting images on social media what the person perceives as a good standard to those images comparing the self to and receiving self-verifying feedback from the platform will make the person feel valued and accepted; thereby increasing worth-based

self-esteem. By not receiving satisfying (perceived or actual) self-verifying feedback will in turn lead to feelings of not good enough and rejection; reducing worth-based self-esteem. In this example self-esteem is gained and lost through self-verification processes.

To conclude the literature review on self-worth, the influences of self-esteem will be discussed complementing the overall picture of where self-esteem came from, what self-esteem is, how it operates and the influencing factors thereof.

## **2.5 INFLUENCES ON SELF ESTEEM**

Self-worth as a concept is difficult to define in a precisely and clearly way as it encompasses all of the following characteristics: it says something about humanity and how they live their lives; it is intensely personal and has to do with an abiding sense of worthiness as an individual; and / or experiencing the ability to solve problems competently (Mruk, 2006:3). It is furthermore a personal judgment of self, a sense of worth largely based on externally imposed conditions, it may depend for some on being attractive, loved, good academic performance, for others self-esteem may depend on being virtuous, powerful or self-reliant (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003:710).

Argyle (Belapurkar, 2016:2433-2439) believes that there are four major factors influencing the self-esteem: the reaction of others, comparison with others, social roles and identification. Reactions of others work as follow: in cases where people admire, flatter, attentively listen, agree with, and seek out the company of someone, that person will react by developing a positive self-esteem. The reaction to being avoided or neglected and hearing undesirable things about the self will in turn lead to a negative self-esteem.

Comparison with others has been discussed in chapter 2, section 1.2.2 under upward social comparison: when comparing to reference groups more successful, happier, richer, better looking than the self a negative self-image will develop. But people less successful will promote a positive self-image. Certain social roles come with prestige and promote self-esteem (e.g. a practitioner, model, and footballer). Other roles carry a stigma which will lower the self-image (e.g. unemployed, mental hospital patient). Lastly, named by Argyle (Belapurkar, 2016:2433-2439), is identification, people identify with the positions they occupy, roles they play and groups they belong to. Roles thus become part of the personality.

Elements that influence self-esteem, namely parental factors, gender, cultural orientation and social factors will now be discussed.

### **2.5.1 Parenting factor**

Modern-day belief is that self-worth is anchored in early childhood on the foundation of trust, unconditional love and security. Self-worth are impacted on as life proceeds by a combination of positive and negative evaluations. Family factors have been identified as one of the external influence factors on self-esteem. Parenting styles have been shown to be a significant predictor of developing self-esteem (Zakeri & Karimpour, 2011:758). Darling and Steinberg (1993:487-496) theorise that parenting styles are a collection of attitudes towards the child and communicated to the child. These attitudes in turn create the emotional climate in which parents express their behaviour toward the child. Steinberg *et al.* (1992:1266-1281) identify three parenting styles, namely:

- Acceptance-involvement is the quantity attentiveness and responsiveness of parents. Parent qualities include being warm, firm, involved and sensitive to the child's changing and growing needs, while setting realistic standards with clear rules (Berk, 2009:569-573). It is shown that the effect of an involved parent stimulates the development of high self-esteem in children (Zakeri & Karimpour, 2011:761) and it is consequently the most successful approach.
- Psychological autonomy-granting parenting style indicates parents' tolerance towards the child's opinions, using a democratic discipline in parent-child relationship without pushing the child to adhere to the rules (Berk, 2009:569-573). Together with the acceptance-involvement the effects of the psychological autonomy-granting style also prove to be a positive predictor of self-esteem (Zakeri & Karimpour, 2011:761).
- Behavioural strictness-supervision is when parents enforce absolute standards to shape, control and evaluate the child's behaviours and attitudes (Baumrind, 1996:405-414). The child is not allowed to express opinions with little opportunity to think for themselves about situations or employing reasoning (Knight *et al.*, 2000: 229–240; Berk, 2009:569-573). The behavioural strictness-supervision style, according to Zakeri and Karimpour (2011:761), shows a negative predictor for self-esteem.

Dehart, Pelham and Tennen (2006:1-17) also examined the relationship between parenting styles and self-esteem. The results present that individuals coming from caring parenting behaviour showed higher self-esteem and individuals who reported overprotective parents would have lower self-esteem. According to Scholte, Van Lieshout and Van Aken (2001: 71-94), supportive parenting is positively related to self-esteem concluding that self-esteem and parenting styles or parental behaviours are undeniably linked. The controlling parents too often take the child's decision making process away from them by making their decisions for them leaving the child with a sense of inadequacy. Lastly, the behavioural strictness-supervision parent who repeatedly disapproves and insults is linked to low self-esteem (Kernis, 2002: 57-88; Pomerantz & Eaton, 2000:140-167). Children subjected to this parenting style are in constant need of reassurance, and often rely on peers to affirm their self-worth becoming a risk factor for adjusting to difficulties such as, aggression, antisocial behaviour and delinquency (Donnellan *et al.*, 2005:328-335). In contrast and also undermining the development of self-esteem is the psychological autonomy-granting overly tolerant, indulgent parent that is linked to unrealistically high self-esteem. These children develop an overblown self-image and tend to lash out at challenges, likely to have adjustment problems for example, meanness and aggression (Hughes, Cavell & Grossman, 1997:75-94).

As seen in the acceptance-involvement parenting style, children and adolescents with warm and accepting parents which provide reasonable expectations for mature behaviour while engaging in positive problem-solving feel particularly good about themselves (Zakeri & Karimpour, 2011:761; Carlson *et al.*, 2000: 44-67; Rudy & Grusec, 2006: 68-78; Wilkinson, 2004:479-493). This kind of warm and positive parenting style affirms to young people that they are accepted as competent and worthwhile. Backed up with firm, but appropriate expectations accompanied by explanations further help the child make sensible choices and evaluate the self against realistic standards (Berk, 2009:458). It has been confirmed that children do not benefit from compliments that have no basis in real attainment, such as "You're terrific" (Mruk, 2013:13-29). The better way to instil positive, secure self-image is by encouraging children to strive for worthwhile goals. Achievements of this type foster self-esteem which then contribute to efforts and gains in performance (Gest, Domitrovich & Welsh, 2005:337-346).

According to Siegel and Hartzell (2014:xi), being mindful “is at the heart of nurturing relationships”. Parents living in the present moment, aware of own thoughts and feelings as well as being open to those of their children are a state of mindfulness. Mindfulness gives respect to each person created uniquely to the “*likeness*” (Genesis 1:27) of God in a wonderful and fearful way (Psalm 139:14). When parents are fully present and mindful it enables their children to fully experience themselves in the moment. In this way the child learns about him or herself by the ways the parent communicates with them. A mindful parent involves having intentional actions. With intention the parents purposefully choose their behaviour by keeping their child’s emotional well-being in mind. It is within this emotional connections that the child develops a deeper sense of themselves (Siegel & Hartzell, 2014:xx).

Dickie *et al.* (2006:57) indicate that the child’s conception of God relies profoundly on parent-child relationships. Lawrence (1997:214) states that the child forms a God image on a “data base of memories, with multiple codings and accesses, with certain sets of entries coded ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘God’, *et cetera*”. The roots of these representations are thus not conceptual but rather experiential (a representation of mother is shaped out of experiences of mother and so forth). The God representation differs from other representations, reason being it cannot be based on direct experiences of God. The child begins to form the God image on other memories most often associated with memories with primary care givers (Lawrence, 1997:214). Studies by Dickie *et al.* (1997:25-43), examining two different samples of children (age 4-11), rating mother, father and God on two scales, namely nurturance and power. Results show that children perceived God to be like both their mother and father. For men, mothers were responsible creating a climate for the self-esteem of their sons through nurturing and discipline – in turn contributing to perceiving God as nurturing, feeling close to God and boosting religion. For women, both parents created a model of nurturing and power – in turn contributing to perceiving God as nurturing and powerful. From these studies Dickie *et al.* (2006:57) conclude that nurturing parents affect the adolescent’s self-concepts and self-esteem, which in turn then predict the image of a nurturing God. The punishing and judging parent shows a direct affect in creating an image of a punishing and judging God. The children gradually internalise their perceptions of their parents to viewing the self similar to their parents. For this reason, childhood perceptions of parents will predict both self-perceptions and God perceptions. As the adolescents start to distance themselves

from their parents, their self-concept will predict their God concept. As the young adults begin to separate physically, emotionally and spiritually they not only model their self and God perceptions based on perceptions of parents but God also becomes the perfect substitute attachment figure. In cases of emotionally and/ or physically absent parents the substitute attachment figure or substance can become a compensator (for instance social media). Even in adulthood mothers continue to have an influence on the child's faith and image of God. It was found by Dickie *et al.* (2006:59) that punishment and judgment were more damaging for women's concepts of God than for men.

Blanchard *et al.* (2014:45) state that leading like Jesus entails focussing on God "exalt God only". This is what Jesus did and parents should follow His example. They make the following statement. Think of all the time and energy that can be saved when parents stop comparing themselves and their families to others and shift attention to what God's wishes are for their family.

### **2.5.2 Gender**

Gender-stereotyped expectations also play a cardinal role in self-esteem. It was found in one study that the more frequently girls (ages 5 to 8) talked with friends about appearances of people, watched TV shows that focus on physical appearance, and perceived their close friends to value thinness, the greater their dissatisfaction with their own physical self and lower their overall self-esteem would be one year later (Dohnt & Tiggermann, 2006:929-936). Girls feel less confident during adolescence than boys about their physical appearance and athletic abilities. While boys show advantage in respect to academic, maths, science and physical self-esteem, girls exceed boys in language, arts and in self-esteem dimensions of close friendships and social acceptance. These results also stand firm in cases where children of equal skill levels are compared (Fredricks & Eccles, 2002: 519-533; Jacobs *et al.*, 2002:509-527; Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003:34-47). There is a widely held assumption that boys' overall sense of self-worth is higher than girls', truth is, only a slight difference exists (Marsh & Ayotte, 2003:687-706; Young & Mroczek, 2003:589-603). It may be that girls think less well of themselves, reason being they internalise these negative cultural messages (Berk, 2009:458).

### **2.5.3 Cultural orientation**

People are driven to self-enhance, motivated to favourably regard themselves along culturally valued characteristics (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2010:17-36). As with parenting styles and gender culture it is also an important variable to the development of self-esteem. Self-concept and self-esteem differs depending on if the individual comes from an individualistic- or a collectivist culture (Seabra *et al.*, 2017:769).

Western societies became more individualistic in the course of modernisation. Individualism involves greater awareness of own preferences as well as improved ability to perform independently (Veenhoven, 1999:158). They see themselves as separate entities and are more concerned with their own personal needs where self-esteem is more personal and less relational. Veenhoven (1999:158) hold the view that individuals flourish in autonomy stating that “man is seen as capable to control his own lot”. In cases where personal identity is in jeopardy the person will feel more annoyed and unhappier than when the collective identity is threatened (Seabra *et al.*, 2017:769).

In the collective culture individuals have little choice and shape much to the requests of society. In this, little assortment identities and personality types are limited with narrowly defined social roles (Veenhoven, 1999:167). People define the self as part of a group stressing group goals above individual goals. Self-esteem in a collectivist culture will be interested in “what others think of me and my group” (Seabra *et al.*, 2017:769).

A study done by Veenhoven (1999:157-186) set out to test claims about reduced quality-of-life in an individualistic society concluding that “individualised society fits human nature better than a collectivist society does”.

### **2.5.4 Social media**

According to Collins (2011:371-372), possible reasons for low (or threatened) self-image are among others unrealistic expectations, erroneous thinking and societal influences. Researchers have shown interest in investigating the effects of social media on well-being and self-esteem ever since the internet became a consistent leisure activity (Valkenburg *et al.*, 2006:585). The status of social media has fuelled questions amongst both social scientists, as well as the general public “regarding the antecedents, correlates and consequences of using these platforms” (Appel *et al.*, 2016:1-2). Vogel *et al.* (2014:206)

describe social media as “pervasive” when referring to popular social networking sites like for instance Facebook. The tremendous growth of social networking sites and frequent use of mobile devices are due to advances in information and communication technology creating fast and convenient ways for people to communicate and connect with one another (Lee *et al.*, 2009:1320-1329). With open access social media can be found every- and anywhere with infinite uses from entertaining people to offering new techniques of retrieving and exchanging information and to connecting people with one another. Seabra *et al.* (2017:768) refer to this as “a global phenomenon with an ever-increasing number of users”.

Statistics done by Facebook (2018) show “1.45 billion daily active users on average for March 2018, and 2.20 billion monthly active users as of March 31, 2018”. Additionally, “millions of photos are posted and shared on social network sites daily; Instagram, for instance, hosts over 55 million photos and generates 1.2 billion likes each day” (Kim *et al.*, 2016:117). This platform gives ample opportunities for communicating information about the self, getting feedback of self from communicating partners and gathering information about others (Appel *et al.*, 2014:16-28), in other words comparing self to others. According to Collins (2011:364), an estimate of 95% of people feel unfit and inferior due to unhealthy comparisons being drawn between real life and a ‘perfect’ world. Vogel *et al.* (2014:217) refer to this as engaging with self-evaluations of comparing the actual self to an ideal self. These activities become a source of questioning the self “Who am I?” and “How do I feel about myself?” But this goes deeper than questioning the value of self to a level that might affect the personality of the self as well: “How sure am I about my own characteristics?” and “Are my characteristics consistent?” (Appel *et al.*, 2016:1). The view a person holds toward the self (i.e. a person’s essential being) can interfere with self-esteem (Seabra *et al.*, 2017:769). Facebook users tend to think that other social media users have better lives (Chou & Edge, 2012:117-121), are happier and more successful than they are, although they don’t know the users personally (Vogel *et al.*, 2014:207). According to Vogel *et al.* (2014:207), it appears that people may be comparing “their realistic *offline* selves to the idealised *online* selves of others, which may be detrimental for well-being and self-evaluation”. Prior research discovered that high-frequency Facebook use relates to increased depression and decreased well-being (Feinstein *et al.*, 2013:161–170; Kalpidou *et al.*, 2011:183–189; Kross *et al.*, 2013; Mehdizadeh, 2010:357–364; Rutledge *et al.*, 2013: 251– 258).

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

The purpose for conducting the literature review was to determine what can be learnt regarding the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers.

To answer this question, it is necessary to firstly understand self-worth. An understanding of self-worth is important in creating bases to build on towards the main aim of this study namely formulating guidelines to enable pastoral caregivers to help believers find inner healing from the negative effect of social media on their self-worth and help them grow to their full identity given by God. Awareness on self-worth is important because it teaches about the uniqueness of people, how they fare in life and about internal and external relationships.

This task was set out by looking at when self-worth originated, the leading founders thereof as well as theories on self-worth. From the historical roots it was shown that from the earliest time it was recognised that humans have a deep need to feel worthy. Two theories were discussed. Firstly, the self-determination theory was explained as an intrinsic developmental process concerned with the motivation behind the choices people make without external influences and interference. It also focuses on the way people internalise social practices and the reasons they develop insecurities. The second and very relevant theory for this study is the sociometer theory that shows how feelings of self-worth help direct social behaviour, suggesting that people's self-worth primarily comes from the feedback they receive from others. Thus, feedback from social media platforms can, on one side form feelings of pride and high self-esteem or, on the other side create shame with low self-esteem.

Understanding the historical roots and theories of self-worth, the next step in the constellation of gathering information, was to explore the development and maintenance of self-worth. Developing self-worth by means of reflected appraisals people come to understand themselves and to form opinions of the self through their own perceptions of what others may think of them. Another way of developing self-worth, and also very important to this study, to help understand the potential contribution of social media and the consequences thereof is social comparison in particular upward social comparisons. Upward social comparison is when people compare themselves to another who is superior

(actual or perceived) to them resulting in an unclear sense of the self. The last process of developing self-worth self-attributions refers to people's tendencies to come to conclusions about feelings and thought patterns from direct observation of behaviour and the consequences thereof. Knowing how self-worth develops and fluctuates between the three processes the definition of self-esteem was the next step in the information gathering process.

The term self-esteem is defined by different researchers in different ways. Brown and Marshall (2006:2) are of the opinion that part of the confusion of defining the term comes from disagreement around the concept itself. They use a fitting riddle "what does everyone want, yet, no one is entirely sure what it is, what it does, or where it can be found". From the definition of self-worth, it is evident that people hold either a positive or negative view of the self. Characteristics of both low- and high self-esteem were discussed as well as the impact of social media.

Understanding the roots of self-worth, the processes of development and maintenance thereof, and definitions and characteristics give a comprehensive explanation on what self-worth is and the negative effects of social media on self-worth. The last information of the constellation of information was the influences on self-esteem. Parental factors, gender, cultural orientation and social media were elaborated on.

The results of the literature study indicate that a lot of research has been done on the effects of social media disclosing that it effects all ages and does not differentiate between genders. Further, theorising that if self-esteem is similar to a reservoir of energy, then persistent problems in identity verification (in this case social media) over a period of time ought to start depleting self-esteem, plummeting its level as it is being used up. The literature study in this chapter showed that persistently comparing the self with social media leads to depletion of self-esteem levels. In other words, the more the lack of self-verification, the greater loss in self-esteem.

In the following chapter the study will endeavour to distinguish why social media has such an effect on self-worth of believers, as self-worth and identity are closely linked as discussed in chapter 1. Further discussion on identity formation will be beneficial in order to reach this study's main goal of providing guidelines for the pastoral caregiver in order to help believers

with low self-worth. This study theorises that growing into an identity given by God will lead to well-being, and by doing so, it may act as a mediator between the use of social media and self-worth.

## CHAPTER 3

### Interpretative aspects on why social media has such an effect on the self-worth

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#### INTRODUCTION

Chapter three is part of the interpretive task of the model of Osmer and asks the question, ‘why is this going on?’ The task in this chapter is to look at possible reasons for the occurrences observed in chapter two by entering into a dialogue with interrelated arts and sciences. An important dimension of Christian spirituality is loving God with the mind, because a spirituality of “sagely wisdom” is characterised by three qualities: thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgment (Osmer, 2008:82). Wise judgement relates to Aristotle’s idea of *prognosis* and “it involves discerning the right course of action in particular circumstances, through understanding the circumstances rightly, the moral ends of action and the effective means to achieve these ends” (Osmer, 2008:84). The question that needs to be answered is: ‘Why does social media have such an effect on the self-worth of believers?’

In order to answer the question, it is important to remember that the overriding question that plagues humanity has to do with identity (Heuertz, 2017:16). ‘Who am I?’ is the fundamental question that compels humans’ search for meaning. According to Nouwen (2006:26), the questions ‘who am I?’ and ‘whom do I belong to?’ resurface throughout life. Strydom (2010:498) adds that these questions are also regularly asked even by believers. “Identity formation requires a self-ideal to strive towards” and during this process, the self-concept must become part of the reality of the person’s uniqueness (Louw, 2011:464). The central theoretical argument of this study is that a believer’s identity, which is based on biblical principles, will promote self-worth in spite of body-ideal messages conveyed through social media.

While the focus of chapter two was on *what* the effect of social media is on the self-worth of believers, it will now shift to a broader discussion about self-worth and putting it into the framework of identity. In cases where the self-ideal is steered by social media images the sense of self (identity formation) becomes distorted, due to upward social comparisons

which lead to low self-worth where the individual loses track of his or her uniqueness. Possible reasons why social media have an effect on self-worth will be considered in the following order.

The chapter will start with a summary of Erikson's psychosocial theory on the development of identity in order to determine weaknesses in the formation process, which can make an individual prone to comparing themselves to others. The reason to incorporate the psychosocial theory is to have a clearer understanding of identity formation as a lifelong process.

Secondly, a discussion of how a person's thoughts can affect their identity will follow. The Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) and the Christian version of Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (CREBT) can give insight into this process. From CREBT a discussion on Christian counselling and compassionate soul care will follow. From REBT, Ellis (1973) expresses his concern toward self-esteem suggesting unconditional self-acceptance as an alternative.

Thirdly, self-compassion is the element that provides people with unconditional self-acceptance, which will be elaborated on as an important aspect that could lead to low self-worth in cases where it is not present in the believer's life. The effects of self-compassion on well-being of the adolescent and the effects of self-compassion on body image will end the discussion on self-compassion.

Fourthly, attention will fall on the nature of the self where the questions "who am I" and "where am I" will be answered by looking at Nouwen's thought on "who am I?" and Keating's view on happiness.

The chapter will conclude with a Christian framework for mindfulness practices to grow and maintain feelings of self-acceptance and compassion that can be grounded in exercises such as *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer, as practised by the desert fathers in earlier centuries. Some of these practices are still valuable to the Christian today.

The researcher is of the opinion that a believer's self-worth, which is based on biblical principles, will come about through understanding his or her identity, coupled with the changing or renewing of his or her thoughts about their identity and learning to accept the self unconditionally, showing (self) compassion towards the self and others.

### **3.1 ERIKSON'S THEORY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

All human beings operate within a system where their surroundings affect not only situations, but also perceptions and as a result there is a continuous co-dependence interaction with the environment. To understand how identity and self-esteem develop within this network, the researcher chose Erikson's psychosocial theory to assess the development during different life stages. Although the theory was formulated quite a long time ago, it is today still accepted as seminal and authoritative.

Erikson (1980) published his revolutionary eight stage theory of lifelong psychosocial development by placing emphasis on the role of culture and society, the conflicts within the self, as well as the development beyond adolescence (Kivnick & Wells, 2013:40). The model is a comprehensive theory of the process (or stages) of development throughout the life cycle, as well as a theory of identity formation, together with the process of forming a sound sense of self (Knight, 2017:1047-1058). Focusing on the adaptive and creative traits of individuality and expanding the concept of the stages of personality development by including the entire lifespan, make Erikson a pioneer in the life-span perspectives (Kivnick & Wells, 2013:40; Knight, 2017:1-12). Articulating how people live and develop over a lifetime in the companionship of other people, within the context of the larger world, became widely accepted "truths" in psychological circles (Kivnick & Wells, 2013:40).

This life course is theorised as a series of stages, each typified by a core developmental task (Crocetti, 2017:145). The eight stages, also referred to as an "epigenetic pattern" are predominantly an inherent developmental order where new stages build on prior stages, while leaning toward the next stages (Myers, 2016:62).

According to Erikson (1980:28), a person experiences a specific trait that has to be learned in each stage as a crisis and a person's personality develops when he or she successfully resolves these crises. The traits are distinctly social in nature. The theory is divided into three phases, namely, forming a sense of trust in others (childhood), developing a sense of identity within society (adolescence) and assisting the next generation to prepare for their future (maturity). He theorises that personality develops in a predetermined order, each consecutive stage building upon the previous stage. The intended outcome of the developmental cycle is an inclusive and unified set of life skills and abilities within the autonomous individual (McLeod, 2018).

The term crisis does not define a disaster, instead it signifies the beginning of a different way of seeing the world. It is these new perspectives that mould and form core relational patterns, as well as belief systems on ways to connect with self and the world (Knight, 2017:1047-1058). Each stage thus involves the balancing of a positive- and corresponding negative trait (crisis). While the positive quality should outweigh the negative, some degree of negativity is needed to grow within the particular stage (Papalia *et al.*, 2004:30). The successful integration of these two opposites generates character strengths or virtues (Erikson, 1980:22). Virtues are distinguished as strengths, which help to resolve or overcome later crises in life. Failure to successfully complete a developmental stage can result in a difficulty to complete further stages, resulting in an unhealthy personality and sense of self. However, with the correct insight, personal- and spiritual growth these difficulties can be successfully resolved at a later stage (McLeod, 2018).

Marcia and Josselson (2013:617-629) note that Erikson’s theory provides a comprehensive developmental overview, giving the pastoral caregiver a good foundational insight for where the counselee is standing at that point of time within the psychosocial context. Furthermore it also gives a clear indication of where he or she might have become “stuck” in their identity formation, as well as the direction they are heading. Because of the general familiarity of these stages, the researcher decided to summarise the different stages in table format. Stage five is especially important for the theme of this study and therefore, a detailed description of this stage will follow after the table.

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Positive trait</b>	<b>Negative trait</b>	<b>Virtue / strength</b>	<b>Weakness</b>
1. Infancy	Trust	Mistrust	Hope	Fear
2. Early childhood	Autonomy	Shame and doubt	Will	Dependence
3. Pre school	Initiative	Guilt	Purpose	Lacking power or ability
4. School age	Industry	Inferiority	Competence	Feelings of inadequacy

5. Adolescence	Identity	Role Confusion	Fidelity	Feelings of insecurity and confusion about the self
6. Young adulthood	Intimacy	Isolation	Love	Loneliness and isolation
7. Middle adulthood	Generativity	Stagnation	Care	Feelings of regret
8. Maturity	Integrity	Despair	Wisdom	Feelings of bitterness and despair

Table 2: Erikson's theory of psychosocial development Source: Michele Rossouw.

Cherry (2018) provides the following diagram of the eight stages of human development.



Figure 3: Eight stages of human development. Source: Cherry (2018).

The fifth developmental stage is of importance for the theme of this study, because it is during this stage or phase of the individual's life, that he or she will attempt to find an answer to the question "Who am I?" From puberty to young adulthood, the adolescent must determine a sense of self. If they don't succeed in answering this question in a proper balanced way, they will consequently experience confusion about role division in their later life (Papalia *et al.*, 2004: 30). The fifth stage is well-known for the search of a sense of self- and personal identity. The core developmental task is achieved through intense exploration and forming a clear, stable and more realistic picture of personal values, beliefs, goals and competencies (Eccles, 1999:30-44; McLeod, 2018).

According to Erikson (1980:94-100), a central trait of adolescent identity development is launching a sense of stability and sameness between self-image and the individual's perceived image in the eyes of others. Wagner *et al.* (2018:482) regard it as a "precondition for the foundation of an adolescent's self-esteem". This process is one of having all of the previous stages reopened, examined and a fresh built-in of the "I" into the self. Placing the adolescent into a new appreciated identity (Myers, 2016:62).

Late childhood and early adolescence are marked as the transition periods where childhood comes to an end, often leaving the teen with feelings of confusion or insecurity about self and their place within society. Seeking to find a sense of self they may experiment with different roles, activities and behaviours. This experience of finding the self is important in the process of forming a strong identity and developing a sense of direction in their lives (Erikson, 1980:94-100; Collins, 2011:183). This phase is characterised by rapid physical, cognitive, socio-emotional growth and motivational changes (Oberle *et al.*, 2010:1330-1342; Wagner *et al.*, 2018:482), taking place that stimulate this exploration phase where thinking patterns focus on the self, reflecting on the type of person they would like to become (Crocetti, 2017:145-150). The development of sound judgment, decision-making skills, social perspective taking, moral reasoning and emotional regulation are fostered by the steady developing and expanding of neuron interconnections in the brain (Steinberg, 2005:69-74). Cole *et al.* (2001:1723-1746) state that ages eight to twelve show a marked increase in self-awareness, self-reflection and perspective taking abilities contributing to the development of a sense of identity and self-concept. These processes may leave some adolescents vulnerable to maladaptive behaviour (Dahl & Gunnar, 2009:1-6; Steinberg *et al.*, 2008:1764-1778; Steinberg, 2005:69-74), increasing the occurrence of anxiety,

depression, substance use and behaviour problems (Costello *et al.*, 2003:837-844). This stage is where the adolescent's self-esteem is believed to be especially vulnerable (Wagner *et al.*, 2018:482). Apart from the vulnerability, self-esteem has been found to be a significant predictor of key life outcomes in early and middle adulthood (Orth & Robins, 2014:381-387).

The integration taking place in this stage, in the form of self-identity, is more than the sum of childhood identifications. It is the "inner capital" accumulated from all the experiences in each of the previous stages (Erikson, 1980:94). It is the conscious sense of self-development through social interactions, which are ever changing due to new experiences and information acquired in daily interactions with others. McAdams (2001:100–122) indicates that the self cannot be seen in isolation from the self-in-relationships. Although parents and significant others have an important influence on how the teen feels about the self, outside forces strongly come into play at this stage. Friends, social groups, social media, societal trends and popular culture play a role in the shaping and forming of identity. Peer relationships increase in importance where the teen, not only spend more time with their peers, but the peers' expectations, opinions and actions further start to play a significant part in how the teen will perceive him or herself (Neff, 2003a:95; Wager *et al.*, 2018:483).

Wagner *et al.* (2018:481) consider social inclusion as "a basic human need", stating that it then makes sense that self-esteem is driven by social feedback and the sense of being approved by others. In the digital age social comparison is very relevant as social media platforms (such as Facebook and Instagram) allow its users to easily access others' lives and providing plenty opportunities for comparisons (Yang *et al.*, 2018). Harter (2003:610–642) points out that social comparison is a paramount method for knowing the self. Since the adolescent has less time with parents and more with peers, the door opens for social media, which starts to play a much bigger role in the development of their values. De Vries (2004:50) is of the opinion that the impact of social media has become extensive due to the drastic changes in the way information is processed. Postman (1986:46) claims that society changes their thinking patterns when they moved from a word-centred culture to an image-centred culture. He explains the inherent danger of this kind of thinking as narrow minded, unable to comprehend the larger concepts such as truth, honour and love (Hersch, 1998:22). This is an example of what De Vries (2004:37) refers to as horizontal learning, where teenagers have less opportunities to learn and practise skills, due to the judgment from other people who possess those skills. The social world has proved to be crucial for offering

feedback and in addition self-esteem has been implied as a possible sociometer for social inclusion. For this reason, relationships and perceptions of inclusion are considered as important predictors of the adolescent's self-esteem and self-worth. Leary and Baumeister (2000:1-62) highlight the role of self-esteem as the vital need of both a sense of belonging and avoidance of social rejection.

Understanding how identity is formed, the next section will place focus on the effects of thoughts on self-worth, discussing rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) and Christian rational emotive behaviour therapy (CREBT). Believers ought to change their thoughts from focusing on worldly standards (comparing the self with the messages received from social media) which is the false self, to scriptural thoughts (believing what the Word teaches about identity) which is the true self (Colossians 3:1-4).

## **3.2 RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY (REBT)**

### **3.2.1 Differences and similarities**

REBT, previously known as Rational Emotive Therapy (RET), focuses on solving emotional and behavioural problems, conflicts and enriching people's lives (Levinson, 2010:55), while striving to help individuals accomplish long-term change (Ellis, 2017:272). It further supports self-effort and brings about the experience of empowerment so that people can rightly take responsibility for and create their own emotions (Ellis, 2017:272).

Phillips (2016:1-11) points out the differences between CREBT and REBT stating that CREBT's goal is helping the believer strengthen his or her faith, to reduce irrational thoughts and behaviours, as well as supporting behaviour that is more consistent with Christianity (Priester *et al.*, 2009:91-114). He further points out that irrationality and rationality are viewed differently in CREBT and REBT. In CREBT the view originates from a religious doctrine, prayer, the importance of afterlife and religious meaning. While REBT places focus on the individual's physical aspects (Woldemichael *et al.*, 2013:1-13). In CREBT the role of the pastoral caregiver includes providing care, counselling and supporting the counselee in life's challenges, while the REBT therapy mostly takes the form of instruction (Woldemichael *et al.*, 2013:1-13).

For CREBT and REBT to work together, there has to be a measure of agreement. REBT teaches that bad or unpleasant situations in life are not necessarily "terrible or life shattering"

(Philips, 2016:2-3), which is consistent with CREBT according to Romans 8:39 nothing in life can separate believers from God's love (Johnson, 2006:45-55). The meaning of this, according to Philips (2016:3), is that although situations may be very bad and traumatic, God's love supports the believer to endure challenging times. CREBT and REBT, bring about low frustration-tolerance, where both proclaim that no situation is as bad as people perceive it to be (Johnson, 2006:45-55). Trust in God's unconditional love will give the believer the ability to cope with "stressful and terrible situations" (Johnson, 2006:45-55). This will help the believer not to "over identify" with his or her situation, but to keep cognisance that they are not the problem, they only have a problem to deal with.

The ABC theory of REBT is that an activating event (A), leads to a belief of cognition (B), that produces feelings or consequences (C). REBT claims that people are active, creative individuals

who can think about their thinking, realistically assess their unrealistic attitudes, dispute their irrational beliefs, and work hard to reconstruct their disordered thoughts, feelings and behaviours; and if they consistently work at reformulating their disturbed ideas and feelings they have a good chance of bringing about increased levels of happiness and involvement (Levinson, 2010:55).

Johnson *et al.* (1994:134) notice and emphasise the compatibility of the ABC model and Scripture, for example Proverbs 23:7 "*For as he thinks in his heart, so is he*" (NKJV). As thoughts and behaviours can be changed through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the application of the ABC model can help believers identify and change irrational beliefs (McMinn *et al.*, 2011:201-260). Thus, both REBT and CREBT emphasise change. Pastoral caregivers are urged to challenge irrational or unbiblical thoughts (convictions based on lies) and to help believers to find the truth in Scripture that will result in changed thoughts and behaviours (Johnson *et al.*, 1994:134; Johnson & Ridley, 1992:220-229). In CREBT the indicators of the ABC model was changed to "A (event), B (beliefs based on scriptural truth or lies) and C (good or bad fruit)" (Johnson *et al.*, 1994:134).

Such a holistic approach shows that changed beliefs give rise to changed emotions and eventually changed behaviours. In a pastoral encounter, it boils down to the pastoral counsellor explaining to the counselee that  $A+B=C$ . The counselee has two choices, e.g.:

- A (Facebook portrays a perfect body image) + B (image results in feelings of inadequacy) = C (low self-esteem with a negative effect on identity),
- A (Facebook portrays a perfect body image) + B (take notice of the image, but know that it is only an image and not the rule for everybody, most probably it is photo shopped) = C (does not affect self-esteem or identity, because the believer knows his or her true identity in God).

REBT and CREBT advocate responsibility for one's own emotional experiences and behaviours, believing it is at the end not external circumstances or people that affect the individual, but the view individuals adopt about themselves in the circumstances (Ellis, 2017:277, Clouse, 1997:38-48). CREBT further emphasises that a new believer is a new creation in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Irrational thinking creates unhealthy emotions for instance anxiety, depression, rage, guilt, shame and jealousy. In response to the same circumstances, rational thinking patterns on the other hand, creating 'healthy negative emotions' for instance concern, sadness, healthy anger and regret (Ellis & Ellis, 2011:135).

REBT identifies three core irrational beliefs from which numerous others stem, these are: "I must always do well and be loved and approved by others", "You must treat me well and act the way I think you should" and "Life should be fair and just" (Ellis, 2017:273). These beliefs are counteracted by both CREBT and REBT by equally emphasising the individual's uniqueness and worth, recognising the importance of choice and personal responsibility.

The work of Johnson (1993), Johnson *et al.* (1994) and Jones (1989) represent the Christian version of REBT, using the Bible as the source to guide the Christian counselee (Johnson, 1993:256). The purpose of CREBT is to help the individual reduce depression, negative thinking and general pathology (Clouse, 1997:43). Ellis (1992:37-40) describes REBT to be extremely relatable to Christian counselee studies, evaluating that both treatments indicate that they are equally effective in reducing depression and irrational negative thoughts (Johnson *et al.*, 1994:130-140; Johnson & Ridley, 1992:220-229). REBT and CREBT follow the same methods and treatment, the difference lies in CREBT using the Bible as to the source of truth, rather than human reason (Johnson *et al.*, 1994:133).

According to Nielsen (2001:34-39), REBT is an impartial, constructivist approach with philosophies closer to Christianity than many other psychosocial therapeutic models.

Johnson (2001:39-47) states that techniques used by REBT are applicable to Christians, because the techniques are value-neutral. Dryden *et al.* (2010:227) state that “REBT shares with the philosophy of Christianity the view that we would do better to condemn the sin, but forgive (or, more accurately accept) the sinner”. REBT and CREBT show compatibility where there is room to learn from the other (Clouse, 1997:38). The following table shows the treatment motivations and selected treatment procedures of both theories:

REBT	CREBT
Treatment Motivation	
Rational beliefs will lead to positive emotional and behavioural consequences and allow pursuit of long-range purposes.	Scriptural beliefs will lead to biblically fruitful emotions and behaviours and will be more pleasing to God.
ABC model is consistent with reason and the writings of great philosophers	ABC model is consistent with Scripture and the life of Jesus.
Selected Treatment Procedures	
Differentiate rational and irrational beliefs. Promote beliefs leading to positive consequences.	Differentiate biblical and unbiblical beliefs (truths vs. lies).
Develop personal rational coping statements for each irrational belief.	Promote beliefs based on scriptural truths. Identify personal scriptural truth statements for each lie.
Dispute irrational beliefs with reason and logic.	Dispute lies with scriptural and biblical examples.
RET imagery using relaxation and rational coping statements.	CRET imagery using calming image of Jesus and scriptural truth statements.

Table 3: Treatment motivations and procedures (Johnson *et al.*, 1994:134).

Complementing CREBT even further, Clinton and Ohlschlager (2000:50) propose a twenty-first-century path for the pastoral caregiver and describe it as a “Para-centric focus” – it will now be discussed.

### **3.2.2 Para-centric focus: Christian counselling and compassionate soul care**

Although Christian (pastoral) care and counselling were always part of the ministry of the church, the scientific version thereof only emerged in the twentieth century and is rooted in the Holy Scriptures. Christian counselling is a gift to the church and world to facilitate the kind of care that Jesus illustrated in His earthly ministry. According to Clinton and Ohlschlager (2000:14), “Christian counselling proclaims Christ to searching hearts and dedicated soul-care ministry raises up people to live fully in his image”. The influence of the Holy Spirit stands at the core of Christian counselling making it truly unique (Clinton & Ohlschlager, 2000:43). The influence of the Holy Spirit is also what distinguishes pastoral counselling from secular psychosocial theories.

Clinton and Ohlschlager (2000:14) agree with other scholars, such as Benner (1998), Collins (1998) and Crabb (2001) who recognise and incorporate Christian (pastoral) counselling into the larger ministry of soul care, spiritual formation and discipleship in the church. Christian soul care covers the scope of helping approaches, namely pastoral care, pastoral counselling and pastoral therapy, each with different goals, levels of training and expertise. Regardless of these differences of counselling styles, the core of Christian counselling is the commitment to bring honour to Jesus Christ and helping the believer find the peace, direction and stability ultimately found in Jesus Christ (Clinton & Ohlschlager, 2000:14).

Since suffering and distress cannot be escaped in this life, people will be better off to find a way to live with it, to find meaning and redemption through it. Although not a pre-requisite, the truly helpful counsellor is one who has personally endured suffering and yet allowed God to transform, heal and mature them through the hard times. It basically boils down to the saying that no-one can help an alcoholic more effectively than a rehabilitated alcoholic. The risk with suffering is that many people allow pain to blind them spiritually, draining their faith and courage, binding up and ‘freezing’ their hearts. Nolte and Dreyer (2010:861-869) mentions Nouwen’s description of the wounded healer as a winsome spirit expressing joy, speaking wisdom and pouring out love from their souls making them wholly attractive to others, especially those in pain. Germer and Neff (2013:856) remark that the majority of counsellors see compassion as an important part of therapy, explaining compassion as “an intimate awareness of the suffering, by oneself and others, with the wish to alleviate it”.

Asking the question if the counselee could benefit from therapy with an “uncompassionate therapist” who is unable to connect with the suffering of the counselee.

Christian counselling, therefore starts with the God of all comfort as He pours out his comfort and care to those suffering and in trouble as they search for meaning, purpose and contentment in answering the “who am I” question. As the Christian counsellor is cured, redeemed and made whole by Christ’s healing love and guidance, they can then in turn offer that same help to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-6; Clinton & Ohlschlager, 2000:23-24). To be an effective pastoral counsellor, he or she must apply God’s word in their personal lives, be open to the Holy Spirit as an instrument in the hands of God to bring change in their own and in the counselee’s lives (Collins, 1998:23). Clinton and Ohlschlager (2000:32) note that the soul-care helper is passionate to reflect the life of Christ and assisting the sanctifying work of the Spirit in order to help counselees to grow spiritually. Christian counselling puts emphasis on changing from the inside out, where it becomes a transforming life experience where God touches, heals and reshapes the heart and soul of the counselee. Muto (2013:82) notes that only when a person is growing inwardly in faith, hope and love will they be able to serve outwardly those entrusted to their care.

Clinton and Ohlschlager (2000:50) propose a para-centric focus for a twenty-first century path for the pastoral caregiver. Para-centric holds two aspects of Christian counselling:

1. The surrendering to the *Paraklete* of God (The Holy Spirit). The invisible God present and coming alive during counselling by invitation. *Paraklesis* and *parakaleo* mean to come alongside someone to help, to give aid, to advocate for someone’s best interest
2. *Para* is linked with being centred and single-mindedly focused on Christ and the counselees.

A para-centric focus is a coming together of the best knowledge and practice from the Scriptures, with clinical sciences (such as psychosocial therapy), as well as ancient and modern wisdom (Clinton & Ohlschlager, 2000:50-53). It further emphasises the relational encounter between at least three persons: God, the pastoral caregiver as God’s healing agent and the counselee. The goal of the pastoral caregiver is to skilfully help the counselee with timely knowledge, wisdom, guidance and support with the aim to encourage him/her to grow in grace and maturity in Jesus Christ, finding joy in the midst of trouble and escaping the traps of sin, shame and despair (Clinton & Ohlschlager, 2000:50-53). From a

compassionate therapeutic setting the counselee can bring the same qualities of kindness, connection and comfort to themselves during sessions that they experience during therapy sessions. According to Germer and Neff (2013:856), such self-compassion training holds great promise for many counselees, seeing it as a skill that can be learned.

Showing earlier a high compatibility between CREBT and REBT, the pastoral caregiver using the para-centric focus can benefit from REBT without falling prey to some of the troubling aspects of the system to help the counselee with low self-esteem. Pastoral counselling can begin with irrational thoughts stemming from comparing to social media images, moving to thoughts focused on Scripture and growth into unconditional self-acceptance.

### **3.2.3 Unconditional self-acceptance**

Ellis (1996:149-151) has been an established criticiser of the concept of self-esteem, both high and low, calling it “perhaps the greatest emotional sickness known to humans”. Stating that self-esteem necessitates a global rating that fails to recognise that individuals are in a process of development (Ellis, 1996:150). He further proposes that individuals with exceptionally high or low self-esteem are vulnerable, reason being they are often characterised by conditional self-acceptance, as well as an unwarranted focus on evaluations, including social comparisons (Ellis, 1977b:99-112). Ellis (1999:69-93) strives to promote the unconditional self-acceptance by offering three forms of unconditional acceptance:

- a) Unconditional self-acceptance is a condition fostering personal adjustment and well-being, accepting and respecting the self, feelings of worth and totality, regardless if one performs well or not (Ellis, 2017:273). Contemporary research on individual differences in unconditional self-acceptance confirms that an absence thereof can be toxic to the well-being of a person (Besser & Hewitt, 2003:120). Research of Chamberlain and Haaga (2001:163-176) shows low levels of unconditional self-acceptance can result in depression, anxiety and low levels of self-esteem, happiness and life satisfaction.
- b) Unconditional other acceptance reminds people of acceptance of others, by remembering that all are flawed and fallible and to embrace attitudes of humility and compassion (Ellis, 2017:273).

- c) Unconditional life acceptance encourages individuals to work on accepting life, what life offers both good and bad, 'changing what can be changed and gracefully accepting that which cannot be changed at the present time' (Ellis, 2017:273).

Roberts (1987:821) mentions that an important aspect of Ellis's REBT theory is the promotion of self-acceptance in the counselee. According to Jones (1989:113), Ellis' position on self-acceptance is that humans must not evaluate themselves (either positively or negatively) based on, for instance, their behaviours and performances. Sharkey (1981:152) claims that the essence of a 'liberal Christian' view of God, is that God's endeavour for humans is "the absolute and unconditional acceptance of a fallible self". Therefore, acceptance by God is not based upon human beings' actions or characters, but on Christ alone (Jones, 1989:113).

Carson and Langer (2006:39, 42) suggest that,

Self-acceptance is a mindful decision that individuals make when they take responsibility for their lives and realise that they are in control of the decisions that create their personal world. When they view the world and themselves mindfully, they are able to accept themselves unconditionally.

Negative rating of the self and others is another form of irrational behaviour (Robb, 2001:29-34). According to Carson and Langer (2006:34), "one of the principal roadblocks to self-acceptance is the inability to accept past mistakes, real or perceived". To counter this negative rating, REBT states that a person is not bad; rather the actions of the person is bad (Johnson, 2006:45-55). Equally, Christians believe that although the inherent sinful nature can influence people and can result in bad behaviour, all of mankind are made in God's image; therefore, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit they can overcome their sinful nature (Johnson, 2006:45-55). Ellis (2000:32) states that the believer could say to him or herself "because God accepts the sinner, though not his or her sins, I can accept myself". The believer's approach to mistakes is looking at them from a biblical perspective, finding scripture that will give a perspective that provide either new knowledge, motivate change in behaviour and/or the opportunity to teach valuable lessons. Carson and Langer (2006:35) explain that to perceive mistakes from such an perspective will allow the believer to see the "silver lining", further accepting his or her actions as potentially growth-enhancing.

While self-acceptance is a foundational principle in REBT, CREBT teaches that God's acceptance through grace (unmerited and unearned favour) is the foundation of the Christian tradition. Since God is unconditional love (1 John 4:7), the believer is invited to abandon self-judgment (through self-comparison) and come into the light of God's presence with their thoughts, feelings and actions. Self-acceptance will grow when the believer experiences the grace of God. CREBT can help the individual to explore their understanding of God's love and justification found in Christ. Paul writes to believers that when they are able to overcome their sinful selfish nature, they will have freedom in Christ: "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death*" (Romans 8:1-2, NIV).

Unconditional self-acceptance does not rate and/or evaluate the self's worth and identity, instead it assumes an intrinsic aspect of existence "developing an attitude of tolerance for the uncertainties in life and acknowledging and forgiving one's own limitations" (Neff, 2003a:91). Neff (2003a:94) predicts that the self-compassionate individual will have more insight in their own thoughts and emotions, resulting in the understanding of their God-given (self) worth.

The pastoral caregiver can successfully incorporate these aspects of unconditional self-acceptance, self-compassion, contemplating on Scripture by means of *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer in the pastoral encounter with the counselee. These aspects will give rise to feelings of being worthwhile and accepted, being compassionate towards the self and others, seeing the self as valuable with the purpose to find meaning, validity and soundness in life. Unconditional self-acceptance, as well as self-compassion leads to emotional safety and a safe space where further growth can take place.

### **3.3 SELF-COMPASSION**

The notion of self-compassion was first defined and introduced into the literature by Neff (2003b:223-250; 2003a:85-102). It includes factors such as: self-acceptance, life satisfaction, social connectedness, self-esteem, mindfulness, autonomy, environmental mastery, having a purpose in life, personal growth, reflective and affective wisdom, curiosity and exploration in life, happiness and optimism (Giovannoni, 2017:175). According to Neff (2003a:87), self-compassion involves,

being open to and moved by one's own suffering, experiencing feelings of caring and kindness toward oneself, taking an understanding, non-judgmental attitude toward one's inadequacies and failures and recognizing that one's experience is part of the common human experience.

The definition of self-compassion is related to the more general definition of compassion defined by the Cambridge dictionary as a "strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them". Thus when self-compassion occurs, feelings of kindness and caring for the welfare of mankind will be spontaneous. Goetz *et al.* (2010:351-374) define self-compassion as the awareness and sensitivity to the experience of suffering joined with the desire to lessen suffering. It is a positive self-attribute that assists people negotiate episodes of personal suffering and failure (Gilbert, 2009:9-74; Neff, 2003b:223-250; 2003a:85-102).

Leary *et al.* (2007:887) state that individuals with high self-compassion understand their problems, weaknesses and shortcomings accurately but, in spite of this they still react with kindness and compassion instead of being harsh or criticising the self. Because self-compassion offers a kind and open attitude towards own suffering (Neff, 2003a:85-102; 2016:264-274), people high in this quality are able to better cope with negative events (Leary *et al.*, 2007:887-904). Germer and Neff (2013:856) remark that to be kind towards the self involves being warm and understanding toward the self during suffering, failure and feeling inadequate instead of punishing the self with harsh critical language.

Compassion puts emphasis on the interactive nature of being together with the interdependence and vulnerability of mankind. Combined with being able to act in response to others' needs, Sinclair *et al.* (2017:168-206) argue that mankind have grown the capacity to also show compassion towards the self. Showing compassion to someone who made a mistake, one has to react with an open-mind and non-judgmental attitude, instead of harshly criticising or judging the person (Neff, 2004:28,29). Neff (2004:29) argues that when these concepts are applied to the self, it means that self-compassion will require that the person will be touched by his or her own suffering. Furthermore, it also means that the individual will desire well-being for him- or herself and feeling obliged to heal his or her own pain. Self-compassion calls for forgiveness of self-criticism and judgement of self and others, helping people to understand that all human beings are interconnected. Installing a sense of gratefulness for every moment, both positive and negative. Assisting people to regard

“difficult people” as teachers and negative occurrences as opportunities for growth (Giovannoni, 2017:175). During times of mistakes or failure the individual will show an understanding attitude toward the self, accepting his or her limitations and imperfections, rather than comparing self to others or judging the self. Neff (2004:28, 29) argues that less judgment in one direction will lead to less judgment in the other direction, “as comparisons between self and others are not needed to enhance or defend self-esteem” (Neff, 2003a:87).

Another unique feature of self-compassion, as given by Neff (2004:28) is recognising shared humanity with others, helping the individual see their own experiences in light of the common human experience, realising that failure and inadequacies are part of humanity. Self-compassion is therefore not based on performance evaluations (social comparisons) of self and of others, in fact it takes the self-evaluation process (upward social comparison) entirely out of the picture, instead focussing on compassion toward the self and recognising one’s common humanity instead of making self-judgments (either positive or negative). Enhancing these feelings of compassion boosts feelings of connection to others, instead of comparing the self to others (Neff, 2003a:92).

With the exception of Neff *et al.* (2005:263-287), self-compassion is fairly new to research in the context of people’s reactions to real-life events. Although research determined a correlation between self-compassion, self-report measures of emotion, life satisfaction and well-being (Neff, 2003a:85-102; Neff *et al.*, 2005:263-287; Neff *et al.*, 2007:139-154), less has been done on how self-compassion relates to reactions to everyday events. Follow up studies by Leary *et al.* (2007:888) examine how self-compassion plays out in the context of hassles, annoyances, inconveniences and problems encountered on a daily basis. Although the majority of daily problems are the doing of people’s intended or unintended actions, events that fall beyond their control are also encountered. According to Neff (2003b:223-250), self-compassion should be equally effective in buffering individuals against negative events, regardless of whether it was their fault or not. Five studies done by Leary *et al.* (2007:901) show self-compassion is an important construct that kerbs reactions towards distressing situations (failure, rejection, embarrassment and other negative events). Self-compassion is further associated with lower negative emotions in real, remembered and imagined events, showing thinking patterns that facilitate the ability to cope with negative situations. An interesting finding from the study is that self-compassionate people were more willing to accept responsibility for their role in negative situations. Individuals with self-

compassion thus accept undesirable aspects of their character and behaviour more readily than individuals with low self-compassion, without getting obsessed with the situations or becoming defensive for feeling bad about themselves. In other words, self-compassion buffers the individual against the impact of negative events (Leary *et al.*, 2007:901).

### **3.3.1 The three components of self-compassion by Neff**

Self-compassion consists theoretically of six components conceptually distinct from one another, while simultaneously interacting by means of adding to and stimulating one another (Neff, 2003a:89). These six components are then grouped into three sections. This mutual interacting creates a self-compassionate frame of mind when faced with personal failure and difficulties in life (Neff, 2016:264-274). The components are:

#### *a) Self-kindness versus self-judgment*

Being kind, supportive and understanding toward the self during occasions of pain or failure. Instead of being self-critical and judging the self for shortcomings, the self is offered acceptance (Neff, 2003a:85-101; Neff *et al.*, 2018).

#### *b) A sense of common humanity versus isolation*

Recognising shared human experiences, understanding that everyone fails from time to time, makes mistakes and leads imperfect lives, instead of isolating the self because of imperfections: "I am the only one who has failed, or am suffering", one chooses to take a perspective that is broader and more connected regarding personal shortcomings and individual differences (Neff, 2003a:85-101; Neff *et al.*, 2018).

#### *c) Mindfulness versus over identification*

Holding painful thoughts and feelings in a balanced and mindful awareness, rather than over-identifying with them. Being aware of the present moment, experiencing suffering with clarity and balance without perceiving negative aspects of the self and one's life experiences as a dramatic storyline (over identification) (Neff, 2003a,:85-101; Neff *et al.*, 2018).

The conceptually distinct components tap into different ways on how individuals emotionally respond to pain and failure (kindness and less judgment), cognitively understand the

difficulty (as part of human experience instead of isolation) and pay attention to suffering (mindfulness and less over identification) (Neff, 2016:264-274).

Neff (2003a:89) states that a certain degree of mindfulness is necessary in order to allow sufficient mental distance from personal negative experiences so that room can be made for feelings of self-kindness and common humanity. Mindfulness directly contributes to the other two components of self-compassion. Firstly, by directly enhancing self-kindness (Neff, 2003a:89) through its non-judgmental and detached stance that in turn lessens self-criticism and increases self-understanding (Jopling, 2000:71). Secondly, the balanced perspective of mindfulness counters feelings of isolation and separateness by being reminded that suffering and personal failure are universal. This realisation can help to put personal experiences into perspective (creating a feeling of connectedness), as well as enhance the ability to be mindful of own thoughts and emotions creating awareness not to over-identify with them (Neff, 2003a:89; 2004:29). To break the cycle of over identification (and social comparisons) thus requires the individual to “step outside the self” in order to give kindness to self and recognise the experience as part of the larger human experience (Neff, 2004:29). Clinton and Ohlschlager (2000:20) state that human suffering is universal, from which no one can escape. People can suffer in anything they do, not only from sins and shortfalls, but people sometimes even suffer when they do right and good. Suffering includes the existential angst that mankind struggles with. This is the effort to find meaning and purpose in life, as well as in pain, grief and sorrow operating at a deeper level of intensity. People furthermore experience suffering in their entire being, affecting and damaging body, soul and spirit. “Suffering is pervasive” (Clinton & Ohlschlager, 2000:21).

Self-kindness and feelings of connectedness in addition can help to further increase mindfulness. Frederickson (2001:218-226) explains that when people stop judging and rebuking themselves long enough to allow a degree of self-acceptance, the negative impact of the emotional experience will lessen and make it easier to maintain a balanced awareness of own thoughts and emotions..

Bishop *et al.* (2004:230–241) state that mindfulness has two elements. Firstly, it is paying attention to the present moment, experiencing it as it happens. Secondly, it is to relate to the experience with a curious, open and accepting attitude. Mindfulness in the context of self-compassion is to be aware of painful experiences in a balanced way without ignoring the pain and/or discomfort nor mulling over disliked aspects of the self or one’s life. It is

important to be mindfully aware of personal suffering in a grounded way in order to extend compassion towards the self without over identifying with the situation. Neff and Germer (2013:29) note that even though mindfulness is a requirement to experience self-compassion, it is important to take note that the two constructs are not precisely the same, noting conceptual differences between the two constructs. The mindfulness component of self-compassion is narrower in scope than the general mindfulness. Mindfulness in self-compassion signifies a balanced awareness of negative thoughts and feelings in personal suffering, whereas mindfulness in general refers to the ability to pay attention to the positive, negative and neutral experiences with acceptance and calmness. Another difference between mindfulness and self-compassion is in their targets. Mindfulness focuses on internal experiences such as emotions, sensory awareness of the body, sound, sight, smell, taste and awareness of passing thoughts and emotions instead of the self as the experiencer (Birnie *et al.*, 2010) For example, in the case of a headache mindful awareness will be directed at the changing pain sensations while self-compassion will aim at the individual who is suffering from the pain. Self-compassion emphasises affective components (that mindfulness does not) such as feelings of care and concern as well as the urge to act upon one's feelings (Birnie *et al.*, 2010). For example, soothing and comforting the self during distressing experiences by reminding the self that those experiences are part of being human (Neff & Germer, 2013:29). A validity examination done by Baer *et al.* (2006:27-45) of five mindfulness measures shows a reasonably strong positive correlation between self-compassion and five identified components of mindfulness such as observing internal experiences, describing one's experience, behaving with awareness, being non-judgmental and non-reactive.

Germer and Neff (2013:858) highlight the importance of the fact that self-compassion does not push negative emotions away, but positive emotions are produced by embracing negative feelings. Neff (2003b:223-250) and Neff *et al.* (2005:263–287) link greater self-compassion with less pondering, perfectionism and fear of failure. Further studies by Leary *et al.* (2007:887–904) and Neff (2003b:223-250) show that the self-compassionate individual will be less likely to suppress unwanted thoughts with more willingness to acknowledge negative emotions as valid and important. Gilbert (2005:9-74) proposes that self-compassion improves well-being since it helps the individual to feel cared for, connected and emotionally calm. Making good impressions (for example on social media) has

important pragmatic consequences as well as providing feedback on one's worthiness and adequacy which causes self-evaluative anxiety. These situations can further call up feelings of shame which stem from negative global self-evaluations together with the perceived threat of social isolation (Tangney, 2003:384–400). According to Leary (1999:32–35) self-compassion may help to ease self-evaluative anxiety, reason being treating the self kindly and acknowledging the imperfect nature of the human condition ought to soften the pressure to continuously receive positive evaluations. Further focussing on the interconnected aspects of experiences may also lessen self-evaluative worries because it is inclined to satisfy the need for belonging that is often the driver. Self-compassion is associated with several psychological strengths such as happiness, optimism, wisdom, curiosity, exploration, personal initiative and emotional intelligence (Heffernan *et al.*, 2010:366; Hollis-Walker & Colosimo, 2011:222). Breines and Chen (2012) discovered that having self-compassion for one's weaknesses, failures and past moral wrong doings give rise to higher motivation to change for the better, putting more effort into learning (growing) and to avoid recurring past mistakes. It is suggested by Gilbert and Proctor (2006:353–379) that self-compassion is responsible for emotional resilience reason being it neutralises the threat system (associated with feelings of insecure attachment and defensiveness) while activating the caregiving system (associated with feelings of secure attachment and safety).

### **3.3.2 Self-compassion versus self-esteem**

Chapter 2 (cf. 2.1.1) gives a detailed discussion on the historical roots of self-esteem. As noted, self-compassionate individuals should feel more positive about themselves than individuals with low self-compassion, yet the high correlation between self-compassion and the trait self-esteem is questioned by Neff (2003b:223-250; 2005:263-287). Studies done by Learly *et al.* (2007:902) provide additional evidence showing that self-compassion is differently connected to thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Self-compassion and not self-esteem, relates to a lower negative effect when the individual compares him- or herself to other individuals and also lowers negative effects when receiving negative feedback.

Self-compassion and self-esteem were further related differently to the degree to which people attributed negative outcomes to the self. High self-esteem ascribes unflattering evaluations and negative events less personally, than people with low self-esteem. The opposite result was noted with high self-compassion, where these individuals ascribe

unfavourable events to their personality. In cases where individuals low in self-esteem encounter negative situations, they tend to engage in self-serving biases (downward social comparisons and egotistical attributions) to make them feel better towards themselves. Self-compassionate individuals in contrast, tend to take personal responsibility while at the same time being kind to themselves (Learly *et al.*, 2007:902).

Both self-compassion, as well as self-esteem can help individuals avoid negative self-feelings. The advantage of a self-compassionate orientation is that it does not require illusions of defensiveness, because it involves a clear perception of one's characteristics (both good and bad), whereas with self-esteem positive self-feelings are maintained through self-serving illusions (Learly *et al.*, 2007:902).

While research proposes that self-compassion has similar mental health benefits as self-esteem Neff (2011:1-12) notes that it does not have the same pitfalls (Crocker & Park, 2004:392-414). For example, Neff and Vonk (2009:23-50) find that although the two constructs are strongly correlated, simultaneous regressions showed that self-compassion was associated with more stable and less dependent feelings of self-worth over time, associated less with self-consciousness, self-rumination anger, closed-mindedness and narcissism than self-esteem. Similar studies conducted by Krieger *et al.* (2015:288-292) find that levels of self-compassion – not self-esteem – experienced less negative effect during stressful situations.

According to Neff (2004:31), a basic problem with self-esteem is that it is based on evaluations of competence and self-worth, for example “how good am I?” and “how much do I like myself?” Self-esteem is based on how the self is different from others, at least in modern western culture. In this culture it is all about how much one ‘stands out’ or is special and ‘better;’ than others. To be average is not approved of; one must be above average in order to feel good about the self. This is problematic for different reasons, firstly, because it is impossible for more than a few to be above average, and secondly, attempts to maintain high self-esteem can lead to narcissism, self-absorption, self-centredness and a lack of concern for others (Baumeister *et al.*, 2000:26-29).

Leary and MacDonald (2003:401-418) note that there is a difference in the process by which self-compassion safeguards individuals, against stressful events from that of self-esteem. While self-esteem is associated with positive feelings about the self and the belief that one

is valued by others (Leary & MacDonald, 2003:401-418); self-compassion on the other hand leans towards a tendency to care for the self (Leary *et al.*, 2007:887). It is thus not surprising that self-compassionate individuals are likely to have high self-esteem (Neff, 2003a:85-102). The reason for high self-esteem, according to Leary *et al.* (2007:887), is “because reacting kindly rather than critically toward oneself promotes positive self-feelings”. They go on to say that these positive feelings characterised by self-compassionate people do not involve narcissism or self-enhancing illusions characterised by people with an unhealthy high self-esteem. Neff (2004:32) states that self-compassion should not be linked to narcissism, prejudice or downward social comparison in the way that self-esteem tends to be linked. According to Kernis (2003:1-26), people both high in self-compassion and esteem are more likely to have “optimal” self-esteem, characterised by for example stable feelings of self-worth that do not fluctuate substantially over time.

In contrast to self-esteem, self-compassion is not based on self-evaluations, instead it is associated with kindness and compassion for the self. People with self-compassion see themselves as human beings and not according to certain traits such as pretty, smart or talented. Self-compassionate people do not feel the need to be better than others, in order to feel good about themselves (Neff, 2004:32).

Leary *et al.* (2007:887-888) state that individuals low in self-compassion account for a considerable portion of depression and anxiety, even with high self-esteem, which suggests that self-compassion promotes well-being that stands distinct from self-esteem. Neff *et al.* (2005:263-287) have, apart from showing a connection between self-compassion and psychological well-being, further examined the effects of self-compassion on individuals' reactions to negative events. These studies investigated the relationship between self-compassion and reactions to academic failure, and conclude that self-compassion limits reactions to real, as well as potential failure. A possible reason for this can be because of the reducing evasiveness of events threatening the self-esteem. These findings suggest that self-compassion has potential as an important construct facilitating resilience and coping.

As discussed in chapter 2, the modern world offers unparalleled opportunities for unfavourable social comparison with the great technological and communication advances. While past generations used to be surrounded by extended family members teaching and offering encouragement and support (Gutierrez *et al.*, 1999:1126-1134), most people today are surrounded by “images of gorgeous bodies and superhuman athletes” constantly

reaching them through the media, internet and magazines. Research has shown that repeated exposure to these kinds of messages of people perceived as more attractive or successful than the self can have a negative effect on self-concept and self-esteem (Gutierrez *et al.*, 1999:1126-1134). The following sections will firstly discuss the effects of self-compassion on the developing adolescent, followed by the effect of self-compassion on body image.

### **3.3.3 Self-compassion and adolescence**

Taking into account that self-compassion is an adaptable trait, interventions can be initiated to encourage and improve self-compassion and in so doing strengthen resilience (Bluth & Eisenlohr-Moul, 2017:108-118; Bluth *et al.*, 2016:479-492; Galla, 2016:204-217; Neff & Germer, 2012:1-17). Self-compassion exists throughout development and results from interactions with caregivers and the attachment style during early ages (Neff, 2003a:85-101).

Neff (2003a:85-101) states that adolescence is the period of life in which self-compassion will most likely be the lowest, making the adolescent especially vulnerable to social comparisons. Harter (2006:505-570) explains that adolescence is a developing period with increased social comparison and evaluation of the self against others (social media images) and certain performance standards. Exploring self-compassion during the period of late childhood and early adolescence is especially important given that it is the development period that brings both challenges and opportunities.

Adolescence can be described as a window of opportunity where the development in multiple domains and developing brain are beneficial to form adaptive coping skills and positive character traits (Roeser & Penela, 2014:9-30). As adolescents mature, they formulate an organised and consistent self-concept (Byrne & Shavelson, 1996:599) and become increasingly aware of their inner thoughts and emotions (Weil *et al.*, 2013:264-271). Lerner *et al.*'s (2005:10-16) positive research on youth development, stresses buffering factors against negative outcomes and promotes well-being, despite the unavoidable challenges during the transition to adulthood. Research on self-compassion in both adults and adolescents, consistently shows positive associations of self-compassion to mindfulness, psychological and physical well-being, self-esteem and compassion towards

others (Sutton *et al.*, 2018:1217). Negative self-compassion associates with depression, anxiety and stress (Bluth & Blanton, 2015:219-230; Marsh *et al.*, 2017:1011-1027) and positive self-compassion associates with social connectedness among adolescents (Bluth & Blanton, 2014:1298-1309; 2015:219-230; Bluth *et al.*, 2016:1098-1109). Adolescents with high self-compassion are less likely to experience shame or fear of failure (Mosewich *et al.*, 2011:103-123). Suggested by these findings, self-compassion during adolescence is a valuable attribute, because it protects against classic developmental vulnerabilities such as increased self-consciousness (Rankin *et al.*, 2004:1-21), feelings of isolation in their experience of personal struggle (Larsen & Hart, 2013:1261-1268) and mood instability in increasing anxiety and depression (Maciejewski *et al.*, 2014:515-526). The self-compassionate adolescent applies adaptive coping skills, has a positive self-perception and experiences high levels of connections with others. They further have a balanced perspective and lack of unkind self-criticism that can encourage bouncing back from difficulties in life (Warren *et al.*, 2016:18-21). Leary *et al.* (2007:887-904) establish that self-compassionate college students showed positive coping, as well as decreased negative reactions to unpleasant life events. It is evident that there is a link between self-compassion and emotional well-being across the adolescent developing phase, indicating that the ability to be self-compassionate provides the adolescent with ways to buffer the effects of stressors and promotes strength-based behaviours. These abilities further make the transition into young adulthood easier, developing healthy and adaptive lifelong behaviours (Bluth *et al.*, 2018:3044).

### **3.3.4 Self-compassion, body satisfaction and well-being**

As discussed in chapter 1.3 and chapter 2.5.2 and 2.5.4, negative feelings about one's body shape or size are frequently viewed "as a typical part of being a woman" (Stern & Engeln, 2018:326; Bearman *et al.*, 2006:217-229; Tantleff-Dunn *et al.*, 2011:392-402). Appearance-based social comparisons in both media images and with peers are a significant contributor to body dissatisfaction (Engeln-Maddox, 2005:1114-1138; Tiggeman *et al.*, 2013:45-53).

Persistent body monitoring often involves making comparisons between own body and culturally reinforced body ideals, according to the objectification theory perspective (Tylka & Sabik, 2010:18-31). Carson and Langer (2006:37) state that mindless comparisons to these social media images can lead to feelings of inadequacy. They further note that comparing

self-worth in comparison to others is mindless and mind-numbing. Self-acceptance, based on the need to be better than someone else or as good as someone else, will leave the individual disappointed “because there will always be others who are more attractive or more intelligent or more athletic than they are” (Carson & Langer, 2006:38). The very thin body ideal of the western cultures leaves many feeling as though they are falling short to cultural standards as shown by media images (Groesz *et al.*, 2002:1-16; Thompson & Stice, 2001:181-183). These types of comparisons lead to body shame, because the ideal is out of reach for most individuals (Myers & Crowther, 2009:683-698; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001:57-64). Experiencing body shame, the individual will be hypercritical of his or her body, taking notice of every possible way their bodies fall short of the ideal image.

Self-compassion entails perceiving one’s experiences and perceived shortcomings as part of common human experiences (Neff, 2003a:85-102). Individuals may be less prone shaming their own bodies or competing with others regarding appearance, by viewing their self-perceived flaws as part of the shared human experience. This could limit the upward appearance comparisons (upward social comparison) that frequently promote body dissatisfaction (Wasylikiw *et al.*, 2012:236-245).

Mindfulness is theoretically a component of self-compassion (Neff, 2003a:85-102) with the potential to deduce body dissatisfaction (Stern & Engeln, 2018:327). Mindfulness practices based on self-compassion may help individuals with body dissatisfaction create an accepting and positive view of their bodies. Mindfulness involves being aware of own suffering in a balanced way, thus individuals experiencing mindfulness may be less preoccupied on perceived physical flaws (Albertson *et al.*, 2014: 444-454). Mindfulness and body satisfaction are positively correlated (Dekeyser *et al.*, 2008:1235-1245). Self-compassion could provide an alternative to shameful, critical thoughts and feelings towards one’s body, because focus is placed on a more kind and accepting approach towards the body.

Various correlational studies found that self-compassion is associated with reduced body image conflicts (Mosewich *et al.*, 2011:103-123; Przedziecki *et al.*, 2013:1872-1879). Low self-compassion negatively associates with body shame, urges for thinness and body dissatisfaction and may suggest ways to improve both body acceptance and appreciation (Ferreira *et al.*, 2013:207-210). Higher levels of self-compassion predict less body and

weight concerns and less preoccupation with body shape and size (Wasylikiw *et al.*, 2012:236-245).

The chapter thus far focused on self-identity, unconditional self-acceptance, self-worth and self-compassion that can be developed by the changing of the mind (CREBT). The pastoral caregiver who works according to a para-centric pastoral style will also acknowledge the importance of a meaningful relationship with God, which will help the believer to grow into and maintain a healthy self-worth. The following section discusses Nouwen's question, "who am I", then Keating's explanation of contemplative prayer and concludes with a Christian framework for mindfulness practices that can be of great help to build the believer's self-worth.

### **3.4 THE QUEST TO "WHO AM I?"**

Who people think they are, in other words, their ideas about their identity, are often confused by the bits of their own narrative and it is these fragments of the unintegrated self that compete for dominance. The result of over identifying with certain fragments is that one piece of the identity lays claim to the whole of identity. In this study, it is the comparison with images on social media that starts to compete for dominance, becoming the whole of the identity causing low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority. According to Heuertz (2017:16), "the paramount question plaguing humanity has to do with identity". People get themselves 'lost', because they fall into an addictive loop of mental and emotional preoccupations by over identifying with their successes and/or failures. Heuertz (2017:6) suggests that instead of identifying with "the lies" people tell themselves about who they think they are, they could rather remind themselves that they are more than the good or the bad they have done in their lives, in fact, people are much more than what they have done, what they have, how they look and what others might think of them. These aspects only make up a small part of an identity, it is not the entirety of who a person truly is (Heuertz, 2017:17).

Heuertz (2017:18) turns to Nouwen's classic teaching of identity, when he has difficulty in untangling the perplexity around the notion of self. Nouwen (2006) proposes that people bounce around the three biggest human lies about identity: "I am what I do", "I am what I have" and "I am what other people say about me" (Heuertz, 2017:17). According to Nouwen (2006:26), the basic question resurfacing throughout life is "who am I?"

### 3.4.1 Nouwen's thought on "Who am I?"

Within the Christian faith, it is affirmed that humankind take on the imprint of the Divine, they are made in the image of God and from this position the truth of identity will flow forward (Heuertz, 2017:17). According to Nouwen (2006:28), "God's words 'you are my beloved' reveal the most intimate truth about all human beings" and claims that doubting this fundamental truth about the self by trusting in alternative identities, is the ultimate spiritual temptation.

From time to time people answer the question "who am I?", replying, "I am what other people say about me". This thinking pattern gives great power to what people say, getting positive feedback from others will lead to positive self-esteem. When negative messages are received, it will lead to negative emotions. Nouwen (2006:29) asks the question "why let what others say about you – good or ill – determine who you are?" When energy is used up on defining the self by deciding, "I am what I do", "I am what others say about me" or "I am what I have", life will most likely become a recurring up-and-down motion. Nouwen (2006:29) refers to this style as the "zigzag approach". Louw (2012:62) argues that identity is not a linear process and describes it as a "zigzag movement" between a person's experiences and the environment's response. Nouwen uses the term "zigzag" to explain fluctuating emotions, while Louw uses the term to refer to identity as being a dynamic process. In both cases, the deciding factor of the "zigzag" effect is between experiences and responses.

James (1890) tried to understand who people are by asking the question "Who am I?" more than a hundred years ago. He used the term "empirical self" to refer to the different ways people ask the question (James, 1890:291). According to him, the social self suggests how people are regarded and recognised by others; the social self has an instinctive drive to be noticed and recognised by others. People associate not because they simply like the company of others, but because they yearn for recognition and status (James, 1890:294). In modern times, this recognition turned toward social media platforms and social comparisons to find the answer to "Who am I?"

According to Nouwen (2006:8) the questions to be asked for spiritual direction are:

- "Who am I?"
- "Where have I come from?"

- “Where am I going?”
- “What is prayer?”
- “Who is God for me?”
- “How does God speak to me?”
- “Where do I belong?”
- “How can I be of service?”

According to Louw (2012:62), the answer to “Who am I?” is determined by the quality of the person’s reaction and the degree and quality of personal responsibility (attitude and aptitude). He describes identity as a process of identification consisting of the interplay between: “Who am I?” as the intra-activities of understanding and evaluating the self. “How do I respond and perform?” as the inter-activities of feedback (levels of acceptance and rejection). “To what do I commit myself?” as the external activities considering values, belief systems and world views. “What shapes life, influences, quality of decision making” as contextual issues rooted in culture.

It is by asking these questions, that the pastoral caregiver can help counselees to grow into an identity given by God. Nouwen (2006:9) describes it as creating space where the capacity of these questions can open up new perspectives and horizons. Realising that daily experiences of life – joy, loneliness, fear, anxiety, insecurities, doubt, ignorance et cetera – form a vital part of the spiritual quest.

Asking these questions must be changed to asking questions about the meaning of life as a Christian. This means a shift from “Who am I? or how do I compare?” in the world of social media, to asking “Where have I come from?” must take place. Nouwen’s (2006:11) guidance on how to live the questions, is to first look within the self. This is not an easy task, reason being the world as it is constantly pulls the individual away from their innermost self, encouraging people to look for the answer outside of themselves. There is ample research to indicate that the purpose of using social media is to explore multiple identities and establish relationships (Boyd, 2014; Greenhow & Robelia, 2009:119-140; Greenhow *et al.*, 2009:246-259).

Self-rejection and doubting who one really is can become the greatest trap in life. Given in to the temptation of self-rejection, people start to believe in ‘voices’ (own and others) calling them worthless, not good enough and unlovable. As a result, success, popularity and power

are more easily perceived as appealing solutions; people act and react to worldly questions with worldly answers (Nouwen, 2006:4). The result is more confusion and self-rejection, because it opposes the sacred voice declaring people are loved and for this reason, Nouwen (2006:30-31) calls it “the greatest enemy of the spiritual life”.

Living the questions (or moving from belief to faith) is a move toward acceptance (or contemplative life). Contemplative spirituality holds one accountable by making the individual aware of the subconscious and unconscious motivations for their behaviour. Who the people think they are, their ideas about their identity, can be confused with bits of their own narrative resulting in disconnection from the whole (over identification).

As Nouwen addresses the lies to help the individual to face the whole and overturning the “fragments to lay claim to the whole of identity” (Heuertz, 2017:185), Keating (1999) considers three programmes of happiness to explain the disconnection with true self.

### **3.4.2 Keating’s view on happiness**

Another driver contributing to disconnecting with the true self, is the way people pursue happiness (Heuertz, 1999:21). Keating’s (1999) framework for finding the true self is called “programs for happiness”, where he emphasises contemplative practices to help the individual become aware of the truth of the self. Keating (1999) explains that children need a certain amount of power and control, affection and esteem, and security and survival for a healthy psychological grounding. Neff (2003a:94) states that different types of environments will foster or hinder the development of self-compassion within the individual. As the child develops, there is a tendency to over identify with one of the programmes of happiness. The consequence of over identifying is getting developmentally and spiritually stuck (Heuertz, 1999:22). Bennett-Goleman (2001:50) describes over-identification as the individual becoming immersed in their present emotional responses up to the extent where other aspects of the person become inaccessible (Neff, 2003a:88). Children, especially during early years, come to know and experience God through their parents’ teaching and living examples. In cases where they do not experience the presence of God, they start to develop self-consciousness. The three instinctual needs (power and control, affection and esteem, security and survival) become then all a person has to build his programme for happiness. Without the assistance from parents and significant others to modify it, a

universe is built with the individual at the centre (Keating, 1999:13). Heuertz (1999:22) stresses that these needs are not bad needs, the problem results from when the individual becomes addicted to one of the programmes in an attempt to maintain happiness. While these programmes are important to foster happiness and healthy development, once enslaved fragmentation happens and the person becomes the debtor, paying with a loss of identity (Heuertz, 1999:22). Keating's explanation can be linked to Erikson's developmental stages and crises.

Keating (1999) works around two main questions. The greatest question of all time, according to Keating (1999:7), is, "Where are you?" and explains that this question originated from the story of creation. In Genesis 3, God asks this question when Adam and Eve went into hiding after their disobedience. For him the question is not just addressed only to Adam and Eve, but addresses every generation throughout time at every moment to everyone at every moment. "Where am I to God, the self and others?" is the basic question of life.

As infants, people do not have self-consciousness, it only emerges through various stages of the child's development. At ages four to five, the child begins to socialise and internalise values of their family, peer group, religion, ethnic group, nationality, race, gender and sexual orientation. Keating (1999:13) uses the word compensation to describe when children are deprived of their basic needs of security, affection and control. These individuals then develop an extreme drive to find symbols to satisfy their needs in their culture. The combination of the drive for happiness and over identification with a particular group to which the individual belongs complicates the emotional programmes for happiness. Keating (1999:15) calls this fragmentation "the homemade self or the false self", stating that everyone is influenced by the false-self system, adding that people must take responsibility for this false self. A practice, highly recommended by Keating (1999:24-26), is contemplative prayer which marks the beginning of awareness of the Divine presence within as "the source of true happiness". Keating's Relational Prayer Model (RPM) uses group prayers on two broad paths, namely active and receptive prayers. Active prayers call attention to the human activity of prayer and the acronym for active prayer is ACTS: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication. In contrast, receptive prayers accentuate "a contemplative attitude of openness, receptivity and surrender" (Baesler, 2002:59).

According to Baesler (2002:59), there is a developmental order from active to receptive prayer that happens together with chronological age. As spiritual knowledge develops in the child and adolescent, there should be a parallel development in their prayer life. As a Christian adult in later life the focus from ego-centred active prayer (prayers of petition) must move towards focussing on God-centred receptive prayer (prayers of surrender) (Baesler, 2002:59). According to Halpin (1990:101), contemplative prayer (receptive prayer) can successfully be taught to children as young as 5 years old. Halpin (1990:99) states that to pray with children requires faith, or at least an authentic seeking of faith from the parents. One cannot give what one does not have. Praying with children involves a relationship, for this reason it is important that the child's relationship with the one teaching the child to pray is healthy (Halpin, 1990:99).

It is through contemplation that the person obtains the courage to face the second question of the second half of the spiritual journey: "Who are you?" People are born as bundles of emotional needs, of which Keating (1999:29) identifies three: security and survival, affection and esteem, power and control. When these needs are not met to some degree during early stages of life, the individual could struggle with depression, apathy and finally "die from psychological starvation". Providing or withholding the psychological needs, therefore has a remarkable effect on the rest of the individual's life. Keating (1999:42) explains that as long as people hold some role or persona, they cannot be free to enter God's presence. According to him, part of life is the process of dropping whatever roles one may have adopted. "The ultimate abandonment of one's role is not to have a self as a fixed point of reference; it is the freedom to manifest God through one's own uniqueness" (Keating, 1999:44). The answer for him is experiencing the self with unconditional love, because that is who people really are. An alternative conceptualisation to experience the self with unconditional love is through self.

On dropping roles, Malan (2011) notes that life in Christ is totally different from the natural life in which people are born. Becoming spiritually alive the believer is called to mature in the new life in Christ and walk with Him daily as his disciple. Malan (2011) provides two conditions in order to qualitatively experience the benefits of a life in Christ. Firstly, the individual must die for him or herself (Luke 9:23). Secondly, the individual must be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The believer must identify with the crucifixion in such a way that they will die for the world and sin. Paul said, "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no*

*longer live, but Christ lives in me*" (Galatians 2:20, NIV). Malan (2011) explains that self-esteem as a condition for life in Christ, cannot be a once-off experience, but it is an ongoing process where the believer experiences the resurrected life practically and daily (Romans 6:5; Philippians 3:10). In return, the Lord Jesus will fill the individual with his Holy Spirit. When this happens, the new life in Christ comes to its full right, because the Holy Spirit forms the mindfulness of Christ's daily presence (John 16:14). When the believer daily experiences a life in Christ (Galatians 4:19), he or she will grow into spiritual maturity, "*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching*" (Ephesians 4:13-15, NIV). The believer becomes mentally and spiritually mature, showing sound discernment with solid beliefs.

God's presence can be manifested through soulfulness (spirituality). Spirituality in terms of the Reformed tradition implies *praxis pietatis*, meaning faith is acted out within the practices of life events essentially linked to maturity, intimacy and human dignity (Louw, 2012:180). Louw (2012:181) further explains that soulfulness implies embodiment:

Spirituality is not about success, but about significance. As an expression of soulfulness, spirituality describes the human soul in action. Wherever a soul starts to live in the light of zeal, hope, purposefulness and meaning, it casts a shadow that brings about peace, reconciliation and healing. Spirituality links with integrity and wholeness, it reveals the ability to suffer.

Paul summons believers to exercise their faith within the realm of present life (1 Timothy 4:8). In this sense, spirituality is the awareness of the presence of God within life events (Waaijman, 2001:315).

Over identifying with a role, the individual will attempt to protect or enhance the role and become more resistant to change. These attempts to protect or enhance self-esteem (or basic needs) may lead to distortions in self-knowledge (Baumeister *et al.*, 1993:141–156; Sedikes, 1993:317–338). Identifying areas where change and growth are needed becomes thus difficult (Neff, 2003a:86). In other words, identifying with the false self will distort knowledge of whom the person really is, making it difficult to realise the true self. Adolescent's egocentrism (as discussed in Erikson's developmental stages) will contribute to increased self-criticism, feelings of isolation and over-identification, all leading to a false sense of self. Unconditional self-love and self-compassion are then likely to be especially needed in this stage of development (Neff, 2003a:95).

Quite a few researchers attempt to introduce alternative conceptualisations of a healthy attitude and relationship toward the self, such as self-respect (Seligman, 1995), true self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1995) or personal character (Damon, 1995). Another useful alternative, that this study also places focus on, is self-compassion (Bennett-Goleman, 2001; Brown, 1999; Hanh, 1997; Kornfield, 1993; Rosenberg, 2000, Rutledge, 1997; Salzberg, 1997; Wallace, 1999), reason being that this concept might expand on the understanding of healthy self-attitudes and unconditional self-love. Neff (2003a:87) defines self-compassion as “being touched by and open to one’s own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one’s suffering and to heal oneself with kindness”. From a theological point of view, the healing will be through the Holy Spirit within. Self-compassion will provide the necessary emotional safety needed to be able to see the false self clearly, simultaneously allowing the self to accurately perceive and rectify erroneous patterns of thoughts (CREBT and REBT), feelings and behaviour (identity process). In addition, the caring element of compassion is a powerful motivation for changing and growing into the true self (Neff, 2003a:87). Self-compassion will provide the person with what Ellis termed unconditional self-acceptance, as discussed in REBT (Ellis, 2017:273). Self-compassion entails three basic components: self-kindness (offering kindness and understanding to self instead of judgment and criticism), common humanity (experiencing own occurrences as part of the larger human experiences, rather than in isolation and separated from the whole) and mindfulness (not over identifying with own thoughts and feelings, but keeping it in balanced awareness) (Neff, 2003a:89).

### **3.5 CHRISTIAN FRAMEWORK**

The purpose of life can only be found in a meaningful relationship with the Creator. For this reason, Christianity places emphasis on the individual’s conscious or rational component of being, free-will and self-determination, goals, purposes and morality (Clouse, 1997:40). The Christian understanding of what sin is goes further than the psychoanalytic understanding of immorality. Moroney (1999:432-451) states that sin is a factor which influences thinking with the possibility to cause erroneous thinking. Sin is regarded as being separated from God and others. In sin the individual fails to notice God’s standard, also being unsuccessful to meet expectations of living out the love commandment within society. The Christian realises that life’s purpose goes further than the self, coping with the world (comparing to social media images), knowing full well that he or she can have the world in their hands, but

lose their own soul (Matthew 16:26) (Clouse, 1997:39). From these elements (free-will and self-determination, goals, purposes and morality) self-determination stands primarily in the guidance process, providing an accepting environment for the Christian counselee with low self-esteem (Clouse, 1997:40).

Within the Christian tradition lie two thoughts that serve as the basis of a mindfulness practice that can lead to a greater unity with God. The traditions are organised into the *via negativa* and the *via positiva* (Trammel, 2017:373).

*a. Via negativa*

Found in the more Orthodox Christianity and early Christian mysticism of Catholic traditions, the *via negativa* involves the mystery of God and God's unknowability (Trammel, 2017:374). Examples of Christian mindfulness have been present for many centuries within the Christian faith tradition stretching as far back as medieval Europe. This type of Christian belief and mindfulness practice is rooted in apophatic prayer, emphasising mystery and a nonlinear route to unity with God (Louth, 2012:137-146). The prolific writer Hildegard of Bingen, saw visions usually after intense periods of prayer and contemplation of Scripture. In her writings she detailed her theology and mystical experiences describing her visions. To help the reader relate to characteristics of God, she used elements of nature and weather, linking the love of God to a flowing river that "refreshes the earth and believers' souls" (Dreyer, 2005:81).

*b. Via positiva*

More contemporary Christian contemplatives identified other spiritual practices addressing a selection of goals of mindfulness. This type of Christian belief emphasises *kataphatic* prayer, a more linear prayer path to God embracing God's knowability and accessibility by means of using one's senses to experience the Divine. Spiritual exercises make use of the human abilities of reason, will, imagination and senses, of which St. Ignatius of Loyola and Keating are examples. Their roots lie within Western Christianity tending towards a more prescriptive path to unity with God (Trammel, 2017:373).

St. Ignatius of Loyola was a Christian mindfulness practitioner who developed and wrote about his spiritual exercises, which some Christians still find useful today. From his devotional practices, it is evident that he prayed for six hours a day and contemplated on passages for the rest of the day. These exercises outline the Christian contemplative

practices and meditations, as well as times of day to apply it (Bushart & Eilers, 2015:166). On the prayer exercises St. Ignatius (1992) wrote instructions, including posture and tactile elements, examples for visualisation and instruction on rhythmic breathing (Trammel, 2017:375). Both Hildegard of Bingen and St. Ignatius offer an outline for mindful practice that embraces Christian practices and imagery (Trammel, 2015:171). Clinical interventions have been using guided imagery that has similar characteristics of contemplation (Fernros *et al.*, 2008:367-376). As a result, visualising God, Jesus or other sacred Christian images can be incorporated in guided imagery practices.

Keating was a member of Christian monks since 1944 and found the contemplative practices from Christian mystics complementary (Keating, 2008). It has been suggested that contemplative practices improve qualities of empathy and self-compassion (Kristeller & Johnson, 2005:391–408) and qualities promoted through mindfulness are regarded as necessary preconditions for self-compassion and empathy to grow (Beddoe & Murphy, 2004:305-312; Block-Lerner *et al.*, 2007:501-516; Neff, 2003b:223-250). The contemplative form of prayer, known as Centring Prayer, is one of the practices well known by Keating (1999:31,32). The goal of contemplative prayer is unity with God, thus improving the ability to be silent and hear God. Describing the prayer as a method to take attention away from the ordinary flow of thoughts in order to “awaken our faith”. Studies on prayer suggest that prayer provides a positive effect, personal integration and well-balanced self-expression, further countering depressive feelings and helps individuals to cope with stress (Spilka, 2005:365-377). In the context of stress and suffering, religion communicates a continuing achievement of meaning, formation and connectedness that encourages flourishing (Lee, 2018:114).

Christian contemplatives ask, “Are you your thoughts and feelings?” suggesting that people are not. They move from “God, I am anxious” to “I have a feeling that I am anxious and in my anxiousness I worship God” (Laird, 2006:77). Contemplation for Conley (2014:24) is “simply to be alone with the Spirit”. Heuertz (2017:183) explains that acceptance is one of the gifts of a contemplative life. As one practises letting go, he or she will learn to receive all that is good within as well as the wisdom to work through challenges. For Muto (2013:84) contemplation is recommitting to Christ in body, mind (thoughts) and spirit. Similar to Heuertz (2017), Muto (2013) notes that contemplation involves the gradual surrendering over a lifetime of desires standing between the individual and full surrender to God. As long

as the person holds on to anything or anyone less than God, the joy of being free without hindrance to the Divine can never be experienced. Once being relatively freed from excessive attachments the person is free to wait upon God in his or her inner and outer life. Inwardly prayer becomes more detached and receptive, less demanding and discursive, entering a space of being with God in all circumstances without knowing where God may be leading the person. It is a matter of letting go of expectations and waiting for deeper revelations. Outwardly the person will attempt to let all that he thinks, says, sees and does become an indicator to God's eternal glory. As a result, the way of living turns into charity and humility, virtues that are essentially companions of contemplation. The root of the word contemplation, which in Latin is *con-templare*, means to live in the Temple; to be always under its canopy (Muto, 2013:89-90). Paul describes mankind in a similar way in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (NIV)

*Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.*

Just as Merton (1968:82-84) says that silence is the mother of truth, the contemplative author Pieper (1987:65) stand in agreement with Psalm 46:10 that the divine directive "*Be still, and know that I am God*" must be followed. Contemplative presence draws the person in peace and silence to new thinking patterns and revelations of his destiny as servants of God, this kind of thoughts, recollection and participation is essential features of Christian commitment. Contemplating on God's word, practicing to surrendering to God and being still in his presence will allow time and space for the Holy Spirit to change thoughts to the truth of Scripture.

Keating developed four moments of centring Prayer describing a dynamic spiral-like movement. These guidelines focus attention and desire on God (Ferguson *et al.*, 2010:309,311).

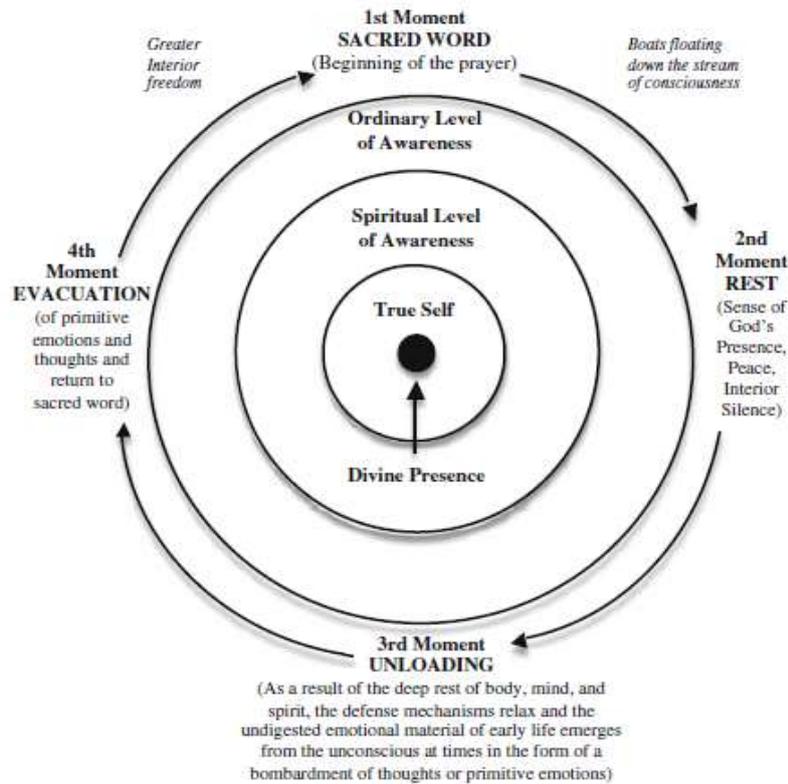


Figure 4: The four moments of Centering Prayer. Source: Keating (1994:77).

The four moments are:

*A. The first moment: Sacred word*

The first moment marks the willingness to turn to and surrender to God. The sacred word represents the symbol of one's intent to surrender one's will specifically to God (Ferguson *et al.*, 2010:311). Decide on a one-to-two syllable meaningful and sacred word such as "Jesus", "Peace" or "Yes".

*B. The second moment: Rest*

This moment is the symbol of acknowledging God's presence and action within by silently introducing the sacred word. The individual can start to appreciate his or her attentiveness once the mind is clearer, less occupied with external events and internal commentaries that go together with it (Ferguson *et al.*, 2010:312).

- The goal is to keep on returning to the sacred word when one becomes aware of engaging in thoughts,
- Experience thoughts, let them pass without getting absorbed in them,
- Be silent,
- Sense God's presence.

### C. *The third moment: Unloading*

This moment marks the unloading of an onslaught of thoughts and feelings flooding into awareness. These thoughts do not have any relationship with the past of the individual.

The disjointed nature of the thoughts implies that they may be coming from the unconscious.

The purpose of the centring prayer is to release unconscious obstacles to the permanent sense of union with God – the space where one finds true peace. Deep-rooted tension is released in the form of emotionally charged thoughts with a kind of urgency. The individual may feel intense: anger, sorrow or fear. The individual may also start to cry or laugh during the prayer which is seen as a sign of inner healing. Keep on returning to the sacred word when one becomes aware of engaging in thoughts.

### D. *Fourth moment: Evacuation*

This moment is the letting go of emotionally charged thoughts as they enter consciousness. Repressed feelings unite with the psyche as they enter the consciousness. "Contemplative prayer gives an individual the opportunity to complete the unfinished business of life by offering the emotions a way to vent" (Ferguson *et al.*, 2010:312). The healing aspect of the prayer does not require either the analysing of childhood source or meanings of thoughts nor "replacing negative emotions with positive emotions" (Bourgeault, 2004). The prayer allows the individual to encounter God's continuous presence regardless of the feelings of the individual.

Remain in God's presence, permitting thoughts to spontaneously appear with the willingness to return to the sacred word.

Believers following Jesus can, according to Lee (2018:139), "develop mindfulness-based skills to better attend to what the Holy Spirit might be teaching them and what God has for

them in the present day”. Christian spiritual practices function in connecting the individual with God as the Bible reveals Him, the Creator of the universe. Spiritual flourishing from this perspective can be understood in terms of growing in intimacy with the living God in relationship. Jesus explained the interconnectedness between people and God in the book of John (15:4 NKJV) “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me*” (Lee, 2018:141). Apart from the centring prayer technique, the *lectio divina* technique can also be integrated in the pastoral encounter to help the believer with his or her low self-worth.

*Lectio Divina* is the Latin word for “divine reading” and is an ancient spiritual practice, which focuses on developing heightened awareness and self-reflection through meditative reading of biblical texts (Trammel, 2015:172). *Lectio divina* consists of four phases: calling on the Divine (*oratio*), reading a text (*lectio*), contemplate on the text (*meditatio*) and practise listening, becoming one with the text (*contemplatio*) (Howard, 2012:56-77). The purpose of this divine reading, according to Keating (2008:47), is to “interiorize the truths of faith so that we can understand them at the level of the heart, as well as the level of the mind”.

Dalal (2009:22) states that “contemplation cannot be separated from listening to the texts” where the reader must make an effort to direct his or her mind to engage with the sentences through listening or contemplation, and then allow the text “to do their work”. Smith’s (2009:108) teaching on the practice of *Lectio divina* explains it as a specific way of reading the Bible “that involves listening with the heart”. A very different practice as that of studying Scripture where the purpose is to understand the meaning of the text. With *Lectio divina* the Bible passage studies the reader. The exercise is to read selected texts of the Bible with specific pauses and concentration on certain words. *Lectio*, turn to a passage of the Bible, no more than a few verses, reading it repeatedly and very slowly while reflecting on each word and phrase, during which the reader pays attention to the impact of the words on his or her heart. In this way the reader is “praying the Scriptures” (Smith, 2009:108).

With *Lectio divina* every word counts with the realisation that every word is there for a reason. *Lectio divina* is the slow, contemplative reading of scripture, allowing the reader to become still and aware of God’s presence, open to the possibility of God speaking to the reader through the text. Smith’s (2009:108) teaching on the practice of *Lectio divina* explains

it as a specific way of reading the Bible “that involves listening with the heart”. Smith’s (2009:109) nine steps are as follow.

1. Select a passage from the Bible
2. Take a few minutes to relax and breathe deeply
3. First reading: read one time and slowly through the passage pausing between each clause. Be silent for a few minutes after the first reading
4. Second reading: go through the text again (slowly), pausing between phrases but use longer pauses this time. Pay attention if any of the words (phrases) stand out. Make mental notes of those words. Write the highlighted words (phrases) down after the second reading
5. Third reading: reread the passage up to the part that stood out. Stop there and repeat those words (phrases) a few times
6. Pondering: reflect on those words (phrases) that stood out repeating a few more times allowing the words to interact with thoughts and memories or any other Bible passages that come to mind. Let it touch the heart, desires as well as fears. Begin to wonder, “What might God want to say to me specifically?”
7. Prayer: turn this question into a prayer asking God “What is the word you have for me in this passage, God?” “Is there anything you want to say to me today?” Listen and write down anything that God might be answering on.
8. Rest: Be still and silent for a moment enjoying the presence of God. This step moves from doing to being.
9. Response: Ask the self and God “What am I being called to do as a result of the word I have been given?”

Slow breathing helps open up emotion and intellectual processes that are less reactive. The use of breath in mindfulness, from a Christian perspective, is reflecting on God as well as finding the presence of God’s love and intention in the breath (Symington & Symington, 2012:71-77). Tan (2011:243-249) brings the practice of letting the mind flow into a Christian framework, suggesting that the individual can reflect on his or her inner thoughts in a sacred space while the content of the thoughts can lead the person back to biblical truths as well as characteristics of compassion and loving-kindness.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

The main goal of this study is to move to guidelines for the pastoral caregiver to assist the believer with low self-esteem due to comparisons with images on social media.

The question to be answered in this chapter is “Why do social media have such an effect on the self-worth of believers?” This chapter showed that parents, caregivers, friends, social groups, social media, societal trends and popular culture are among the factors that play a role in the shaping and forming of identity, concluding that there is a prevalent certainty that by nurturing a person’s self-compassion, especially during childhood and adolescence, would be favourable for both the individual as well as society. Erikson’s psychosocial theory identifying eight stages of development during the lifespan were examined, showing that parents are of the utmost importance for development of identity. Identity development, although a lifelong process, was shown to be a central developmental task during adolescence and emerging adults who are also among the main users of social media. Social media during all life stages, but especially adolescence show to have the ability to have an impact on the person. Parental religious socialisation practices during the young child’s development and self-esteem data provided by the parents and significant others also appear to have lifelong effects on healthy self-worth and religious practices that become especially noticeable later in life. Parental behaviour and religious practices can thus establish a foundation for the formation of true identity.

The theories of REBT and CREBT stress that the individual is responsible for his or her own thoughts, actions and emotions and advocate a positive way of life and living with interrelationship between thoughts, behaviour and emotions. REBT identifies three core irrational beliefs “I must always do well and be loved and approved by others. “you must treat me well and act the way I think you should” and” life should be fair and just”. Criticising the concept self-esteem, Ellis as an alternative suggests the notion of unconditional self-acceptance.

Being mindfully aware of own inner experiences of suffering is a necessary step in developing self-compassion towards the self. Additionally to foster awareness and recognition of the universal human condition of suffering in the self, as well as embracing attitudes of acceptance and nonjudgment that is merged into mindfulness practice are also necessary requirements for self-compassion to be able to take place.

Heuertz's discussion on fragments claiming the whole helped to understand why social media can have an effect on self-worth explaining that over identifying with certain fragments is that one piece of the identity can lay claim to the whole of identity. Nouwen's identification of certain common lies and Keating's three programmes for happiness showed that Christian faith affirms that humankind takes on the imprint of the Divine. According to Nouwen, answering the question "who am I?" must not be answered by "I am what other people say about me". This self-verification technique or what Nouwen calls the "zigzag technique" results in low self-esteem. For him, the greatest trap in life is doubting who a person truly is. A reason for this doubt is believing what one sees on social media, comparing the self to images creating feelings of worthlessness. Keating address two major questions, "Where are you?" and "Who are you?" suggesting that the person must take responsibility of the false self by starting to live the questions and turn to unconditional love and self-compassion to find the true self (identity given by God).

## CHAPTER 4

# NORMATIVE PRINCIPLES REGARDING SPIRITUAL PRACTICES CONCERNING THE SELF-WORTH OF BELIEVERS

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### INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters of this study focussed on the believers' self-worth affected by social media. Discussing if social media have an impact, what the impact is and why social media more than often, have such a negative impact on self-worth. The aim of the study is to provide pastoral guidelines concerning the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers.

The third task of the study focuses on Osmer's normative task by asking the question 'What does Scripture teach regarding the self-worth of believers?' Pastoral counsellors view Scripture as their basic guideline for answering this question. For this reason texts relevant to identity, renewing of the mind and the true self will be discussed by means of a theological reflection done by proper exegesis, according to the model of Stuart (2009). Stuart's (2009:68) model of exegesis is a process of six steps namely, text and translation, literary-historical context, form and structure, grammatical and lexical data, biblical and theological context, and application.

The following texts on creation (or identity) were identified in Chapter one: Psalm 139:13-16, Genesis 1:26 and Jeremiah 1:5. Renewing of the mind: Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23, 1 Corinthians 14:20, Proverbs 18:21, Mathew 12:34. The new self: Colossians 3:10, Luke 3:22. This study will do exegesis on four pericopes, namely:

- for a deeper theological insight into the creation of humankind (identity): Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 139:14,
- for the renewal of the mind: Ephesians 4:23, and
- for a description of the new self: Colossians 3:10.

The application of Genesis and the Psalm on identity will be discussed as a separate unit in section 4.4.6. The literacy-historical context of Ephesians and Colossians will be discussed as a separate unit in section 4.5.2.

Normatively, the main task for this chapter will be to build self-worth on biblical guidelines regarding a believer's identity in God. The Book of Genesis, according to Vosloo (2009:1), is not just an invitation to retrace the story of time, but there is an additional invitation which is the opposite from reading the book for historical purposes. It is more a request to allow the characters from Genesis to enter the readers' personal space, this means that the reader must identify personally with own life situations and circumstances with the revealed historical events. In truth, Adam, Eve and all the other characters can be seen as a representation of the reader. In one or another time through life the believer will be the Cain, Noah or Abraham. Something bigger things happen when the believer can identify with biblical characters within their daily life and circumstances. In this space the believer can know that he or she can trust God, based on his previous work, his majesty, love and grace, pain and disappointment. The believer sometimes becomes overwhelmed by the mystery of God when God is portrayed as simultaneously almighty and suffering (Vosloo, 2009:1).

Stuart's (2009) sixth step (application) will be discussed as a unit for all the chosen pericopes, by means of Nouwen's (1975) guidelines for spiritual growth. The three movements of the spiritual life are, moving from loneliness to solitude, from hostility to hospitality and from illusion to prayer.

God has found us in Christ before he lost us in Adam. He associated us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). He has always known us; now in Christ he invites us to know ourselves even as we have always been known (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Paul says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7 RSV). Yet our own unbelief veils our minds to keep us from recognizing the image of God, revealed in Christ, as the authentic reflection of our original identity (2 Corinthians 4:4).

We are not designed to live by bread alone. Bread represents the harvest of our own labor. Jesus invites us to look away from our own labor and to lift up our eyes and to see a harvest that is already ripe. A harvest is only ripe when the seed in the fruit matches the seed that was sown (Du Toit, 2017:17-20).

In the above passages, Du Toit (2017:17-20) reminds the reader that discovering the self "in the mirror is the key that unlocks the door to divine encounter". Humankind's most intimate,

urgent quest is asking, “Who am I?” (Nouwen, 2006) and “Where am I?” (Keating, 1999) which is answered through Scripture. In modern times with advanced technology people have limitless access to platforms and people, both known and unknown. Comparing the self to the images portrayed on social media platforms turns people away from the traditional teachings and examples set by parents and significant others. It was shown in previous chapters that the influence of parents and significant others have a tremendous impact on laying foundations of healthy self-esteem and developing identity. This study proposes that the answer to the question “Who am I?” must not be found in one comparing oneself to the images portrayed on social media, but must be found in Scripture. Taking responsibility for finding the answer through Scripture will lead the believer to find his or her identity as given by God. A shift from comparing the self to social media images, to finding self-identity given by God, will ask for the renewing of the mind (focussing and reflecting on scriptural truth), which will in turn lead to the new self, answering the questions “Who am I?” and “Where am I?” from a biblical point of view.

And we all, with new understanding, see ourselves in him as in a mirror; thus we are changed from an inferior mind-set to the revealed opinion of our true Origin (2 Corinthians 3:18).

#### **4.1 WHAT IS EXEGESIS?**

Van Rensburg *et al.* (2011:11) state that the Bible is one of the biggest gifts of grace from God to humankind. Scripture is officially God’s ‘voice’ taken from over hundreds of years where God’s revelation become audible, visual and experienceable within specific human contexts. Thus, becoming contextually part of a person’s framework. Through the understanding and insight of the Bible and through the power of the Holy Spirit, sermons can take place, counsellors can counsel and people can confess about God’s work in their lives. Van Rensburg *et al.* (2011:11) further explain that the Bible is God’s word in human language and for this reason it can be – or must be - interpreted, proclaimed and applied.

When studying any kind of document, it is important to keep the reason behind the document in mind. The Bible first and foremost is about God, therefore, the first question to be asked in exegesis is, “What does this text teach about the glory of God and his work?” Secondly, scripture is intended to show the believer the road to salvation. Thirdly, the Bible reveals God’s will to humankind so that they can live accordingly. Exegesis therefore focuses on

glorifying God, encouraging a living, liberating and personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the end goal and aim to practically equip the believers to glorify God with their lives (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011:14-15) and grow into an identity given by God.

Joubert and Maré (2015:21-23) explain that within a rapid changing society bombarded with individualism, diversity, technological advances (social media), post-Christianity *et cetera*, there are multiple new voices and questions around and within people that cannot be ignored anymore. According to them, some believers stopped taking responsibility to “struggle” with the Bible through reflection, research and studying. They use the example of Proverbs where it is about daily choices within the presence of God, together with caution, distinctiveness, healthy assessment of situations, studying and continuous awareness of God’s will. Two mistakes of the believer not taking responsibility, are to ‘blindly believe’ what they hear and secondly, to break the Bible down into snippets using one text without knowing the context. For them, serious exegesis and continuously contemplating the Word are what is needed. In Ephesians 6, Paul writes that the Bible is the sword of the Spirit. It is only through the Spirit that the Bible can come alive to the believer.

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to illuminate the message of Scripture. It is through the Holy Spirit that we are able to understand the Bible’s full meaning, accept it in our hearts and know how to apply it to our lives (Frazee, 2014:216).

The believer must take responsibility, be obedient, have faith and subject himself to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to hear the word correctly and live accordingly. Obedience must lead to action. “Keer op keer moet ons ons volledig op die Gees se leiding verlaat om te hoor, te sien, te verstaan en te doen wat die Woord kommunikeer” (Joubert & Maré, 2015:25-27).

#### **4.2. THE EXEGETICAL METHOD OF DOUGLAS STUART**

The researcher follows the method of exegesis as proposed by Stuart (2009), for this reason the identified verses under sections 4.3 - 4.6 will follow the process of six steps. A diagram of the method is indicated as bellow:



Figure 5: Diagram of the model of Stuart. Source: Stuart (2009)

### Step 1: The text and translation

This is the first step of choosing a specific pericope, which is a section from the Bible that forms a unit proceeding to transfer an independent message with the rest of the Book. The pericope is typically a 'single-mind-unit' wherein a theme or part of a theme will be discussed (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011:37). Stuart (2009:69) teaches that to develop an understanding of the passage as a unit, it is important to go over it aloud. The reason for this exercise is that oral-aural memory is stored differently in the brain, than visual memory. *Lectio divina* means "divine reading" or as Smith (2009:90) refers to it "soul training". It is a way of reading the Scripture whereby the reader steadily lets go of his or her own agenda, open the self to the message of God and grow in the knowledge of Christ.

### Step 2: Literary-historical context

A general background of the passage must be examined by determining the background and foreground of the passage. Bosman (2013:793-801) states that a historical understanding is "as much an attempt to understand the past as it is concerned with the present". Hendrick (2008:1) defines history as "a story the present tells itself about the past and its meaning lies in the interaction of the two". The passage will be set in place within the bigger picture looking at: where does it fit into the Bible, who wrote it, social setting, geographical setting and a possible date of the event (Stuart, 2009:73).

### Step 3: Form and structure

The undertaking of reading implicates making an effort to understand the relationship of words to one another. Interpreting begins once a text is read together with asking what the text means. The Bible consists of different genres of literature, each calling for a different type of interpretation (Harlow, 2008:166). Identifying the genre and the form of the passage, as well as of the Bible book wherein it is written. For example, is it prose or poetry (or both), narrative, speech, lament, hymn, oracle of woe, apocalyptic vision, wisdom saying, *et cetera* (Stuart, 2009: 76). The genre is an important part in the explanation, because it consists of different characteristics and subgenres that have an important influence on the interpretation of the verse (Van Rensburg *et al.*, 2011:47). Joubert and Maré (2015:34) explain that it is important to be knowledgeable concerning the language and different text types of genres that the Bible authors used to accompany the original readers to think about God's revelations and to change their lives accordingly. The original life setting of the passage will also be looked into, as well as the structural patterns where occurrence of repetitions and progressions can shed light on what the passage is emphasising.

### Step 4: Grammatical and lexical data

In this section interest is in grammatical features that may have an effect on the interpretation of a passage whereas ambiguities ought to get special attention. The Cambridge dictionary explains ambiguous as "having or expressing more than one possible meaning, sometimes intentionally". A mini word study is done to determine "something about that word or wording as it is used throughout the Bible" (Stuart, 2009:81). Any sensible chosen passage will contain at least one important word or wording (concept) worthy of investigation beyond the confines of the passage (Stuart, 2009:81).

### Step 5: Biblical and theological context

A search for any part of the passage quoted elsewhere in the Bible will take place. It is important to keep in mind that although there are many writers that worked towards compiling the Bible, that the word of God lies in the work of the Holy Spirit of God. The Bible is thus not personal knowledge of human writers or a historical piece of human literature (Sewell, 1994). Each Bible book forms part of the whole Bible making it important during the exegesis process, to compare the chosen pericope with other passages (Stuart, 2009:81). The purpose of examining how the passage fits in with the greater theological whole will

assist in how the passage can be used to make the listener or reader more theologically alert.

#### Step 6: Application

Van Rensburg *et al.* (2011:235-236) describe the hermeneutical bridging process of bringing a text to the listener as the process wherein the result of the complete exegesis process (grammatical-historic analyses and synthesis) in which were determined what God revealed in the text is communicated to the current listener. Stuart (2009:83) advises to show caution staying clear of “the fallacy of exemplarism (the idea that because someone in the Bible does it, we can or ought to do it too)”. However, if the passage is sensibly chosen, together with proper exegesis, there will be no misleading notion or creating erroneous beliefs.

From above discussion it is clear that exegesis is comprehensive, as well as an enriching process. Following Stuart’s (2009) guidelines for exegesis, the researcher keeps in mind that as explained by Van Rensburg *et al.* (2011:33) firstly, God speaks through the declaration of a verse and secondly, the listener will accept and interpret the verse according to their current position regarding the level of their maturity in faith and current situation (needs). The researcher will now continue to look at the four pericopes as proposed in the introduction section.

### **4.3 IDENTITY: GENESIS 1:26**

#### **4.3.1 Step 1: Overview of the pericope (Text and translation)**

The first pericope is Genesis 1:1-31. Genesis not only forms the introduction to the Pentateuch and Old Testament, but rather the foundation of the entire Bible (Bosman, 2003:99), beginning with the creation (Longman & Dillard, 2007:57), making known the creation of the universe, the fall of man, God’s judgment of man and the promise of redemption. The researcher also chooses to make use of the New International Version (NIV), which is a more functional equivalent translation. The focus verse in the pericope is verse 26: “*Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.*”

The significance of the focus verse can be seen in the explanation of Mathews (1996:160) and Jayakumar (2016:233) describing the creation of mankind as “the crown of God’s handiwork”. The narrative indicates the prominence of this creative act in a number of ways:

- a. The creation account expresses a rising order of significance with human life as the final and as a result the peak, creative act
- b. Out of the creative acts, verse 26 is the only one preceded by divine deliberation “Let us make”
- c. Above expression takes the place of the impersonal words spoken in the previous creation acts, for example “Let there be” and “Let the earth”
- d. Human life alone is created in the “image” of God and given the assignment to rule over the universe (verses 26-28)
- e. The verb *bara* occurs three times in verse 27
- f. The creation account of mankind is given a longer account than the previous creations
- g. In verse 27 the chiastic procedure emphasise the prominence on “image”
- h. Unlike the animals, mankind is referred to as a direct creation of God

Jayakumar (2016:233) makes the statement that Christianity - for these reasons - does not consider mankind as evolved, but as created and sustained by a personal God. Regarding each person as a uniquely individual with equally unique personalities and characteristic features, viewing humans as significantly important compared to other living beings.

Joubert and Maré (2015:68) raise the question “what does it mean to be created in the image of God? Does this mean people physically look like God?” They explain that the words “image” and “parable” together, means “similar, but not identical”. They are of the opinion that “created in the image of God” means that people are God’s representatives on earth – God appointed people to rule the earth in his name. They also believe that it means that people carry within them some elements of God’s nature and character, something of who God is, reflects in people. Man was created to live in community, to be in a close relationship with God, talking and listening to Him.

Bosman’s (2003:102) account on the “image of God” is that creating man as God’s representative and “image of God” are closely linked. Man truly becomes the image carrier when representing God by watching over earth and its animals, to be fertile and to inhabit and cultivate earth.

#### 4.3.2 Step 2: Context (Literacy-historical context)

The whole of the Old Testament is referred to as the Hebrew Bible and can be divided in three main sections: The Law or Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. The first five books of the Old Testament are called the Law or the Pentateuch (from the Greek word *pentateuchos*, literally meaning a book consisting of five volumes) (Joubert & Maré, 2015:63). Hill & Walton (2009:53,789) refer to it as the “five scrolls”. Although the Pentateuch is known as the law, the word *Torah* means “instruction” or “teaching” (Joubert & Maré, 2015:63). The Pentateuch is the most significant part of the Hebrew canon, because it was the first divinely inspired literary compilation that the Hebrew community acknowledged as Scripture (Hill & Walton, 2009:54). A canon, applied to the Bible, is a group of religious books measured against the standard of divine inspiration (Hill & Walton, 2009:Glossary). Joubert and Maré (2015:64) sum up the whole of the Pentateuch in six words: promise, election, salvation, covenant, law, and land.

The aim of Genesis, according to Hill and Walton (2009:74) is to begin the covenant history. Despite the fact that God created everything perfect, sin drew people away from God to the extent that they lost an accurate perspective of what God was like and so God made a covenant with Abraham. The reason for the covenant was to restore the relationship between God and mankind.

The genre of this pericope is a narrative, not with a complete explanation of how God created the heavens and the earth, but just stating that God is the Creator. The creation narrative builds to a climax with the creation of humankind in the image of God.

Longman and Dillard (2007:54) remark on the variety of genres within the book of Genesis, moving from the first eleven chapters with its wide temporal sweep and spatial scope, to the episodic patriarchal narratives and ending with Joseph’s account (from the creation of the world to the sojourn in Egypt). The eleven *toledoth* sections further indicate the historical impulse. Harlow (2008:166) categorises Genesis 1 and 2 as prose narratives, explaining that prose takes several different genres in the Bible of which the most noticeable one is narrative. Narratives intend to give an account of past events, such as the patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12 -50).

The majority of Jews and Christians (Hebrew, Samaritan and early Christian tradition) considered Moses as the author and compiler of the five books (Hill & Walton, 2013:798). Longman and Dillard (2007:38) note that these five books share a union of history, plot and topic drawing them together to a single author – Moses. Although the five books do not claim (explicitly or implicitly) Moses as the exclusive author, a number of references to his writings can be found where God commands him to record certain historical events (for example Exodus 24:4; 34:27), as well as a song (Deuteronomy 31:22). While much of the Torah does not identify Moses as the author, the text witnesses that he was the receiver of revelation and witness to redemptive acts of God (Longman & Dillard, 2007:38). Since there are obvious additions (for example Deuteronomy 34, the narrative of the death of Moses) many speak in terms of the “essential authorship” of Moses, affirming Moses as the author of the Torah, however, also allowing the possibility of later canonical additions (Longman & Dillard, 2007:42). Hill and Walton (2009:76) regard Moses as doing most of the work of a divinely inspired editor, rather than the work of an author, since there is no reason for suspicion that certain material of Genesis was in writing form prior to Moses’ time.

According to DeCanio (2007), the exodus generation is most probably the recipients of the book of Genesis. However, it is clear that the intended audience was to cover all future generations of Abraham born under the Mosaic covenant (Deuteronomy 29:14–15).

Hill and Walton (2009:25) explain that the Bible must be understood as “God’s revelation of himself”, for this reason the book cannot be read for factual details alone. All the details make a history line consisting of people, places, dates and events - the raw materials of Israel’s history. As the Bible was written within its own timeframe in different languages, cultural and social issues, the essence of the Bible can only be grasped and understood once it has been established what the Bible book meant for the readers in its time; for this reason a sociohistorical account of the applicable time is important. Longman and Dillard (2007:38) explain that Genesis covers a vast period of time, beginning at the event of creation, which exact date cannot be speculated about, through to Abraham at the end of chapter 11 and closes with the Joseph account in Genesis 50. Genesis thus covers a time period of unknown duration, following the people of God as they travel from one end of the Near East to the other: from Mesopotamia to the land of promise and ending in Egypt. Vosloo (2009:3) explains that the places mentioned in Genesis 1-11 is vague, the characters cannot be historically identified and the happenings are typically prehistorical tales. Although the

patriarch time can be dated, opinions widely differ on when exactly it occurred. Harlow (2008:165) states that Genesis 1's cosmology "is ancient and obsolete, not timelessly valid, but culturally relative".

### 4.3.3 Step 3: Structural aspects (Form and structure)

The structure of Genesis:

1. Creation (1-2)
2. The Fall (2-4)
3. The Flood (5-9)
4. Babel (10-11)
5. The Call of Abraham (12-38)
6. Descent into Egypt (39-50)

Longman and Dillard (2007:53) describe the book of Genesis as a 'pie' that can be cut in more than one way. To them the first approach and also most fascinating structural device, is the *Toledoth* formula that occurs eleven times (2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12,19; 36:1,9). Translations for this phrase include "these are the generations", "this is the family history" and "this is the account", followed by a personal name, except for the first occurrence named "heavens and the earth". From the first occurrence the narrative divides into: "these are the generations of" Adam, Noah, Noah's sons, Shem, Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, Jacob. This structure shows that the book of Genesis has a prologue (1:1 to 2:3) which is followed with ten episodes.

They further describe the second approach to divide Genesis mainly into two parts, based on the changed content and style, i.e.: Genesis 1:1 – 11:32 and 12:1 – 50:26.

- Genesis 1-11 (primeval history) falling out of the period framework of dates and the patriarch time (Hill & Walton, 2009:48; Joubert & Maré, 2015:63), covering the time between creation and the tower of Babel (Longman & Dillard, 2007:53). This first part is an account of the creation and humankind, explaining the nature and purpose of humanity, giving details regarding sin and reveals the character of God in His response to human sin, as well as forgivingly dealing with fallen creation (Vosloo, 2009:5).
- Genesis 12-50 dated between 2200 to 1200 BC (Hill & Walton, 2000:48) gives details on how Israel (through Abraham) became the elect covenant people, God's revealing of

himself and restoring the broken relationship between Creator and creation (Vosloo, 2009:5).

The selected pericope falls in the first division, the primeval history narrative and the most basic affirmation is that God created. Both of the divisions begin with creation as a result of God speaking. In Genesis 1:1 God calls the universe into existence by the power of his word, and in Genesis 12:1 God calls special people into covenant also by the power of his word.

Miller (2012:244) summarises the theories about Genesis 1:26 as follows:

- a. People are God's representatives on earth. God entrusted mankind with God-like authority as caretakers of the earth.
- b. God created mankind with God-like characteristics: love, creativity, morality, reason and a soul that can last an eternity.

Genesis 5:3 reaffirms 1:26 indicating that the succession of the "*image*" and blessing are understood through sonship. Mathews (1996:164) explains that ancient Near East royal people were seen as the sons or representatives of the gods (2 Samuel 7:13; Psalms 2:7). Humankind is assigned as God's royal representative (sonship) to rule over the earth in his place. Even after the human family sinned, they did not lose the "*image*" (Genesis 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9) instead the "*glory*" of sonship declined. In the New Testament the same lines are taken up when it comes to the idea of "*image*". Even as fallen sinners humankind is still considered the "*image of God*" (1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9; Mathews, 1996:171).

#### **4.3.4 Step 4: Linguistic aspects (Grammatical and lexical data)**

In the focus verse important words that needs more explanation are "*image*", "*likeness*" and "*create*". The Cambridge Bible (Bible Hub) provides the following text analysis of these words and indicates that some distinction must be drawn between the words "*in our image*", "*after our likeness*":

"Image" (Heb. *šelem*; LXX εἰκών; Lat. *imago*) and "Likeness" (Heb. *d'mûth*; LXX ὁμοίωσις; Lat. *similitudo*).

Here "*image*" is more permanent, while "*likeness*" is more fleeting.

Genesis 1:1 reads, “*in the likeness (d’*mûth*) of God made he him*” and Genesis 5:3, “*And he (Adam) begat a son in his own likeness, after his own image.*” The conclusion that can be made is:

- “Image” suggests reproduction in form and substance, physical or spiritual. Mankind’s nature is made “in the image of God”; possessing divine qualities indestructible and inalienable, which no animal possessed.
- “Likeness” gives the idea of resemblance and outward similarity. Mankind is made “after the likeness of God”; his character is potentially divine, capable of approaching, or receding from, the “likeness” of God.

McKeown (2008:26) explains that although the terms “image” and “likeness” offer somewhat different degrees, they are used interchangeably in the Old Testament. Bray (1991:196) points out that image refers primarily to a concrete image – a definite shape, while likeness is more abstract – a resemblance. McKeown (2008:27) states that the use of these words in Genesis 1:26, 27 most probably suggest the same reality and the purpose thereof is to provide emphasis through repetition. Although not easy to determine the meaning of image, McKeown (2008:27) closely associates it with the uniqueness and distinctiveness of humans in the created order. The image of God thus set mankind apart from other creatures. The significance of this statement is that God can have a relationship with humans. Porter (2003:21) explains that human beings created “*in the image of God*” probably means “that, unlike other creatures, humans can communicate with God and respond to his word”. This concept is empowering assuming that “*image*” means that people are able to enter into a relationship with God. “*Image*” is then an undeniably powerful claim of the Bible (Towner, 2005:341-356).

The word “*created*” (Heb. *bârâ*, LXX ἐποίησεν, Lat. *creavit*) is used especially referring to the acts of God, in doing, or calling into existence, something new or marvellous. Other verses where the same word is used, is for instance Exodus 34:10 “*I will do marvels such as have not been wrought (Heb. created) in all the earth*” and Psalm 51:10 “*Create in me a clean heart.*” The meaning of *bârâ* refers to the creation of living organisms (Genesis 1:21); the creation of man (Genesis 1:27); and the creation of the whole universe (Genesis 2:3-4). The same word is also used in Psalm 148:5, “*He commanded, and they were created.*” The word *bârâ* (to create) occurs three times in one verse (1:27). Although God blesses both animals and humans, a slight difference occurs in the explanation of the blessing of mankind

with the additional words “*God said to them*” (1:28). Most commentators agree that this phrase is intentional as well as significant. Wenham (1987:33) explains its purpose as to attract “attention to the personal relationship between God and man” showing that mankind is raised to a superior and responsible relationship with God.

#### **4.3.5 Step 5: Revelation of God (Biblical and theological context)**

According to Harlow (2008:163), the early chapters of Genesis offer a key biblical foundation for believers’ viewpoint on the nature of reality, ultimate purpose and goal for creation and life on earth. The book of Genesis is not limited to the account of creation, but puts emphasis on the fact that the world was brought into account by God. God is portrayed as the Creator who stands in a relationship with his creation.

In Genesis it is made clear that God designed and created all things and continues to operate within the boundaries for his purpose. God called the universe into being of his own free will by his unlimited power, creating all out of nothing (Longman & Dillard, 2007:57; Baker, 2013:2). Creation is described in a way to show God as the exclusive cause behind creating universe and humankind with Genesis 1 and 2 revealing God as the powerful creator and mankind as his “dependent creatures” (Longman & Dillard, 2007:57). The Scripture recurrently confirms God’s power to create (Exodus 20:11; Psalm 33:6,9; 102:25; Isaiah 45:12; Jeremiah 10:12; John 1:3; Acts 14:15; 17:24; Colossians 1:16,17; Hebrews 11:3; Revelation 4:11) (Baker, 2013:2).

Genesis, according to Harlow (2008:164), primarily aims to teach theological truths regarding God, the world and the human race. Confirming that God is the creator of everything, that creation is good and that humankind signifies the peak of God’s creation. Harlow (2008:165) describes it as “it tells us the *that* and the *why* of creation, but not the *how* of creation; that is, it does not seek to convey physical facts about creation that every generation is obligated to accept as scientifically true”. Readers can thus know that the truth of Genesis lies in its theological affirmations regarding God’s sovereignty, the goodness of creation and human dignity (Harlow, 2008:165). Joubert and Maré (2015:67) affirm that recognising the creator is what matters and the *foci* of the message to be conveyed is that the universe did not arise by accident, but that the creator is the living God.

Sovereignty means that God, as the ruler of the universe, is in complete control over everything that happens here on earth and in heaven. Scripture teaches that God is a loving, sensitive and responsive parent (*Abba*). God desires and values a relationship with creatures able to respond to his love and for this reason God gave the gift of freedom to man, since love cannot be forced. Pinnock (1996:20) states that God is an interacting God without overruling. Sovereignty in this sense means, “that God is omni-competent in relation to all circumstances that arise and is unable to be defeated in any ultimate sense”.

#### **4.3.6 Step 6: Integration process (Application): Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 139:14**

The application of Genesis and the Psalm on identity will be discussed as a unit in section 4.4.6.

### **4.4 IDENTITY: PSALM 139:14**

#### **4.4.1 Step 1: Overview of the pericope (Text and translation)**

The second pericope chosen for exegesis is from the book of Psalms with the focus on Psalm 139:14 “*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*” The researcher chooses to make use of the New International Version (NIV), which is a more functional equivalent translation.

God’s creative actions started “*in the beginning*”, but He did not stop being Creator after the completion of the work in Genesis 1-2 (Fretheim, 2005:6-9). Fretheim (2005:6) explains that the referral to creation in the Old Testament goes further than the start of the physical world by firstly associating social, cultural and national orders of life with creation. In this sense God has a continuing relationship with the world as creator and cannot be reduced to the role of manager of creation. “Deutero-Isaiah’s use of creation language for Yahweh’s deeds of salvation can thus be understood as a demonstration of God’s ongoing creative work” (Isaiah 41:20) (Fretheim, 2005:8). Creation further refers to the divine eschatological act where God bring about a new heaven and earth (Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-5). Fretheim (2005:9,125) thirdly explains that the new creation does not restore the original beginning but something truly new of which a key component of the new creation is redemption. God is redeeming the individual to what he or she was created to be.

Mays (1994:425) describes Psalm 139 as the most personal expression in Scripture, a doctrinal classic since it reveals human existence in all its dimensions in terms of God's knowledge, presence and power. Reflecting an understanding of mankind as enclosed in divine reality.

Davidson (1998:448) pictures God's creative activity of the foetus growing within the womb as the work of a "skilled divine embroider weaving in secret an intricate pattern or design, still to be unveiled". Goldingay (2008:634) notes how Davidson's description emphasises the uniqueness of the process where God individually creates every person. Continuing to state that mankind have been set apart as undeniably distinctive creatures.

According to Shinn (2006:8-9), the poet of Psalm 139 is filled with wonderment knowing God's creative work. Mankind is indeed the peak of God's creation, the only beings to be created in God's image just a little lower than God (Psalm 8:53). According to Ellicott's commentary (Bible Hub) the prime thought of Psalm 139:14 is that every birth is a divine creation.

Maré (2010:706) describes Psalm 139 as a "joyful celebration of the beauty and wonder of humanity's creation". The psalmist shows appreciation for Yahweh's greatness in creating mankind. Mankind as the apex of creation are formed as skilful artists, the only beings made in the image of God.

#### **4.4.2 Step 2: Context (Literacy-historical context)**

Walton and Hill (2013) note that the Psalms were written over a thousand-year period spanning across the history of the Old Testament and forming the backbone of the Old Testament representing the legacy of Israelite worship and liturgy. Thus deeply entrenched in the Israelite culture and interconnected with the rest of the biblical text. Prayers to God by individuals as well as prayers designed for corporate use can be found in this book, some arising out of historical or personal circumstances and others addressing specific liturgical contexts (Walton & Hill, 2013).

According to Walton and Hill (2013), the Psalms are written in Hebrew poetic form of which the most prominent feature is parallelism. Walton and Hill (2013) define parallelism as "the correspondence between phrases of a poetic line when the second phrase carries forward the thought of the first, but together they form a single statement".

Psalms are divided into three major genres with subcategories as well as minor categories. The major categories are praise, lament and wisdom consisting of 29 corporate praise psalms (hymns), 16 individual psalms (thanksgiving psalms) and 55 lament psalms (both corporate and individual) of which psalm 139 forms part of. The remaining 50 consist of wisdom psalms, royal psalms, pilgrimage psalms and an uncommon mixture of categories (Walton & Hill, 2013). There are various suggestions on the classification of Psalm 139: hymn, spiritual song, song of innocence, prayer, psalm of confidence, song of thanksgiving, individual complaint, theological meditation, royal psalm and song of wisdom (Peels, 2008:41). According to Gerstenberger (2001:405-406), elements of various types of psalms can be differentiated in the subsections of psalm 139 such as, complaint, thanksgiving, hymn and wisdom. Further arguing that due to the psalm's unity the entire text should not be subjected to the rule of one form element asserting that the outstanding features of the different form elements are sapiential language and meditative mood. Tentatively characterising the psalm as meditation. Peels (2008:42) stand in agreement maintaining that because the text is so varied it makes it difficult to define one specific genre to it stating that the tone is one of devotion and intimacy; not the scholarly product of dogmatics. Maré (2010:697) agrees with both these arguments that the psalm should be understood as a meditation. "In the context of the psalm the different theological motifs, namely God's omniscience, God's omnipresence, God's creation of humankind, the petition against enemies and for transformation indicate that this meditation occurs within the framework of a celebration of Yahweh as Creator".

Krawelitzki (2014:440) states that Psalm 139 does not refer to God in a general sense and is further not interested in drawing abstract theological conclusions about God's character. The text is interested in the strengthening of the relationship between the psalmist and God by reflecting on God's being and engagement with the psalmist.

According to Maré (2010:697) it is difficult to pinpoint the *sitz in Leben* agreeing with Gerstenberger (2001:406) who maintains that Psalm 139 is a personal prayer and meditation. Further recognising that it could have been read in the common assembly by a wise person, a representative of some school, followed by a communal response to the reading.

The earliest Hebrew manuscripts (second century BC) include the Psalms (Walton & Hill, 2013). David is seen as the composer of many of the psalms but according to Walton and Hill (2013) it is not important whether David is the author, editor or the populariser of the book stating that he is “certainly the driving force behind the biblical psalmic tradition”. Named authors of the Psalms other than David include Solomon, Moses, Asaph, Heman, Ethan and Sons of Korah (Walton & Hill, 2013). If these were the authors further assuming that the psalms contain data about them, then according to Mays (1994:8) “the psalms are not history, nor are they directly about history, but they have a history”.

Mays (1994:8,9) refer to the Book of Psalms as a “collection literature” composed of independent pieces compiled to put the book together. The individual psalms are from different times and backgrounds ranging across the course of Israel’s career. In this respect the book is like a contemporary hymnal consisting of hymns from the early church, the Reformation and the decade of the hymnal’s publication. Gerstenberger (2001:406) date the psalm to the exilic or postexilic community in Judah or the Diaspora.

#### **4.4.3 Step 3: Structural aspects (Form and structure)**

Books contributing to the Old Testament theology on creation include Genesis, Exodus, the legal texts of the Pentateuch, the prophets, wisdom texts and the psalms (Maré, 2010:694).

The 150 psalms are divided into five books (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150), of which the first two serve as an introduction to the collection and the last five as the worship peak (Walton & Hill, 2013).

Krawelitzki (2014:441) notes that Psalms 115, 135 and 139 reveal the psalter’s perception of God’s power which is communicated in a consistent manner throughout the complete book; further stating that these three psalms come close to the concept of God’s omnipotence.

Fokkelman (2000:303-304) and Terrein (2003:874) propose the following structure for Psalm 139 dividing Psalm 139 into four strophes:

- |           |         |  |
|-----------|---------|--|
| Stanza 1: | vv1-6   | God’s search and knowledge for mankind     |
| Stanza 2: | vv7-12  | where to flee from God’s presence?         |
| Stanza 3: | vv13-18 | the marvellous creation of trivial mankind |

Stanza 4: vv19-24 God's continuous search of me

Maré (2010:695) proposes the following structure:

Stanza 1: vv1-6 God's omniscience

Stanza 2: vv7-12 God's omnipresence

Stanza 3: vv13-18 God's creation of humanity

Stanza 4: vv19-24 petition for the destruction of the wicked and for personal transformation.

While the first two stanzas are a celebration of God being omniscient and omnipresent stanza 3 emphasise the relationship between God and the poet surrounding Him with his presence because He is the Creator. Verses 13-18 "*fearfully and wonderfully made*" celebrate the mystery of human birth (Maré, 2010:700) where the poet rediscovers the knowing presence of God through the wonder of his own creation (Brown, 1996:282).

Verses 1, 2 and 4 are about God's knowledge of people, verse 14 expresses people's knowledge of God and the final two events in verse 23 request that God know people ever more deeply. Everything that the human heart desires can be found by being in a relationship with God (Futato & Schwab, 2009:139).

#### 4.4.4 Step 4: Linguistic aspects (Grammatical and lexical data)

Psalms 139:14's focus words to be analysed are "*wonderfully made*". Bible Hub lexicon gives the following explanation:

and wonderfully	נִפְּלִי־תִי (nif-lei-ti)	<a href="#">6395</a> : to be separated or distinct
made; Wonderful	נִפְּלְאִים (nif-la'im)	<a href="#">6381</a> : to be surpassing or extraordinary

Texts that can be compared to Psalm 139:14 according to Bible Hub is: be extraordinary, wonderful 2 Samuel 1:26; Psalm 119:18 of God's acts, בְּעֵינָיו י' Psalm 118:23.

Strong's (Bible Hub) definition is as follow.

“Wonderfully made” נִפְלְאֵתִי (niḡ·lê·tî): to be distinct, marked out, be separated, be distinguished (Niphal) to be distinct, be separated, be distinguished, to be wonderful (Hiphil) to make separate, set apart

“Marvelous” נִפְלְאִים (niḡ·lā·'îm): to be marvellous, be wonderful, be surpassing, be extraordinary, separate by distinguishing action (Niphal) to be beyond one's power, be difficult to do, to be difficult to understand, to be wonderful, be extraordinary, marvellous

Waltke (2007:215-219) on the creation of humanity state that “*image*” appears seventeen times in the Old Testament always referring to a physical image or formed body. This however does not mean that God has a physical form according to the word humans are theomorphic (having God's form) but because God is spirit, to be made in God's image means humans faithfully and adequately represent God in their total beings. The distance and dissimilarity between mankind and God is stressed by “*according to his likeness*”. Where likeness describes and limits the meaning of image emphasising that image is no more than a representation of God. God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, heavenly, eternal and Spirit. Yet humans are “*fearfully and wonderfully*” made, created to faithfully and sufficiently represent God, capable to live in relationship with God.

#### **4.4.5 Step 5: Revelation of God (Biblical and theological context)**

The first reference in the Bible to God's activities can be found in Genesis 1:1 “*in the beginning God created*” placing “*Creator*” at the top of the list of explanations of who Yahweh is and what Yahweh does. Thus, Yahweh is the ultimate source of creation which places Him in relationship not only with Israel but with the world (Maré, 2010:693). On God as creator Brueggemann and Belliner (2014:584) note that God as the creator of world and life placed order in it and continues to sustain and govern that order. Yahweh is thus the creator and judge intimately sees mankind and the one granting judgement as well as mercy.

On God as the caregiver, Futato and Schwab (2009:415) note that God's knowledge of-, presence with-, and care for each individual began before birth (Psalm 139:16a). God is watching over the process of each individual's formation while still in the seclusion of the womb. Thus mankind is a wonderfully complex and marvellous workmanship of God who cares about the details of each person's life. He cares about the minute details of the body

forming the inner parts weaving them together. He cares about the fine details of daily living as well as the yet-to-be-experiences.

According to Mays (1994:425), Psalm 139 is a guide to the meaning and practice of thanksgiving by God the redeemer reminding the reader that salvation comes to them in community creating a community that can speak as one in unity. It further teaches that salvation is not first of all and only for the sake of mankind, foremost it is the revelation of the coming kingdom of God. God's salvation gives the believer reason to hope that what God begun with them he will bring to completion. "*Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 1:6, NIV). God's creative deeds comprise of originating, continuing and completing creation (Maré, 2010:705).

On God as omniscient in verse 1-6, Brown (2002:208) states that the all-encompassing knowledge of Yahweh stems from his being the Creator of the world as well as the poet. Yahweh as the transcendent creator of everything is also intimately familiar with the psalmist. The psalm thus holds together divine distance and intimacy where the psalmist is the object of knowledge bridging the distance between Creator and creation. In this way Yahweh's transcendence and immanence is brought together.

On God's as omnipresent in verse 7-12, Goldingay (2008:631) notes that Yahweh, as the creator, cannot be restricted and that it is impossible to escape his presence. The poet emphasises that God's presence cannot be escaped by putting together image after image from the created order showing that there is no limit to his reach, since all of creation falls under God's dominion (Miles, 2009:358).

God is love. According to Benner (2003:23), "creation declares that humans are born of love and for love, created in the image of a God who is love. Love is our source and love is to be our fulfilment".

#### **4.4.6 Step 6: Integration process (Application): Genesis1:26 and Psalm 139:14**

Identity formation requires a self-ideal to strive towards. In this process the self-concept must become part of the reality of the uniqueness of the person (Louw, 2011:464).

Jayakumar (2016:234) notes that it takes time for people to determine who and what they are. Mostly to get to understand the selfhood better, it is shaped by a psychology informed by culture and religion. One of the possible reasons for low self-worth is not having sufficient knowledge and understanding of how and why God created mankind. The questions “Who am I?” and “who do I belong to?” can be answered with Genesis 1: 26-27 as an indication of the reality of the uniqueness of humankind. The word *bara* highlights that God alone is the Creator of mankind, man alone out of all creation is created to the image of God, indicating a unique relationship between God and mankind (Joubert & Maré, 2015:68). It is this reality that gives mankind their unique worth and intrinsic value (Lee, 2018). According to Strydom (2010:498), “self-acceptance and building a healthy self-esteem start with being restored back into a love relationship with God the Father through his Son, Jesus Christ.”

According to Cowan (2003:74), many people have difficulty in accepting God’s grace stating, “it is so easy for us to tell other people that they are made in the image and likeness of God, but oftentimes it is difficult to accept it for ourselves”. Further commenting that people with low self-esteem find it difficult to accept compliments often replying to the given compliment with “if you only knew”. The suggestion to those people is that they should hear God saying to them “if *yóu* only knew, you could not help but love yourself, because you are my very energy in human form. You are a burning bush, afire with my presence”.

Identity has always been an essential matter that mankind faces. Togarasei (2016:101) describes identity as “very central to human existence”, of which family, ethnicity, nationhood and religion are forms of identity shaping self-understanding and behaviour. Kochalumchuvattil (2010:109) points out that identity brings about significance and meaning to life. According to Paul, “Christ’s kingdom brings belonging, membership, communion, equality, common purpose and familial bonds” (Sivasundaram, 2008). An example of a Pauline key text in identity formation can be found in 1 Corinthians 5:17. Paul reveals in this text that being in Christ “brings about new creation, one who is in Christ therefore becomes a new creature” (Togarasei, 2016:107). The meaning of this text is that being a Christian requests a new identity (Togarasei, 2016:107).

On a Christian understanding of human potential, Nelson and Slife (2017:461) note that from the earliest times Christian writers voiced ideas on human potential and how to achieve it concluding that a person’s positive potential is based on two things. First, mankind is created in the image of God, and while their reflection or “*likeness*” of that image has been obscured

(by social media for instance) they can “clean the mirror” of their souls in order to reflect this again. Secondly, this status gives people the potential to have Godlike characteristics through the process of thanksgiving (Louth, 2007:32-44). Nelson and Slife (2017:462) state that human potential is not about the individual, instead it references an Other who bless mankind with unique qualities and potential, offering them to be in a relationship with Him and calling them to imitate the Divine. As the essence of this Other is love, the imitation is essentially about building a loving relationship with others as well as with God. According to Futato and Schwab (2009:413), the deepest longing of the human heart is to have an intimate relationship. “To know and be known and loved is the soul’s passion”. This type of relationship is the heartbeat of Psalm 139 (Futato & Schwab, 2009:413).

Psalm 139 consists of two stanzas: first stanza Psalm 139:1-18 is a highly personal reflection of who God is in terms of his knowledge (1-6), presence (7-12) and care (13-18). It is God’s personal knowledge of the “I” that captures the heart of the psalmist rather than God’s omniscience. It is God’s all-surrounding presence of the “I” rather than God’s omnipresence that is in view. It is not God’s care of creation, but the personal care of the “I” that becomes the motivation for thanksgiving. It is reflecting on the “I” that leads into the second stanza Psalm 139:19-24 where the psalmist acts in response to two key components for an intimate relationship namely loyalty (12-22) and humility (23-24) (Futato & Schwab, 2009:413). According to Togarasei (2016:107), newness calls for a new identity communicated in uprightness in the life of the new person. Loyalty and humility are elements of a new identity bringing the person to a closer and personal relationship with God.

Loyalty: Firstly, the believer is called to be loyal (19-22) reason being that an intimate relationship cannot exist in the absence of loyalty. Loyalty to the Lord is expressed in a variety of ways. As an expression of loyalty to the Father the believer is called to love his or her enemies in the same way they are loved by the Lord (Matthew 5:43-45). At the same time the believer is further called to “hate what is wrong” and “hold tightly to what is good” (Romans 12:9). This can be difficult especially in current times of advancing technology and different communication styles, but this kind of loyalty is an aspect of an intimate relationship with God. The believer is called to this kind of loyalty not out of arrogance, but out of humility (Futato & Schwab, 2009:416).

Humility: as loyalty, humility can also be expressed in various ways. In this instance it appears in the form of teachability. The elements arrogance and teachability cannot reside

in the same space. Humility and teachability goes together saying, “I have much more to learn”. Conscious of the fact that the believer has already been “searched” (Psalm 139:1) by the Lord, the believer wants to be searched even more deeply (Psalm 139:23). Though the Lord already knows everything (Psalm 139:1), even one’s thoughts (Psalm 139:2) the believer wants the Lord to know his or her heart (Psalm 139:23a) and thoughts even more (Psalm 139:23b). This means that the believer wants the intimacy of the relationship to deepen even more which needs humility. “I am humble, open to learning anything about myself that is out of accord with who God is and what his will is for my life” (Futato & Schwab, 2009:416). The believer wants the Lord to know him/her, in order for him to “*lead me along the path of everlasting life*” (Psalm 139:24) this path is walked in a humble and loyal relationship with God who knows the believer (Psalm 139:13-18) all because of the Lord’s love for the believer (Futato & Schwab, 2009:416). To be in a humble and loyal intimate relationship with God the believer is open and susceptible to internalise the meanings of Genesis 1:27 and Psalm 139:14 finding identity in God with the knowledge that they were “*created in the image of God*” in a “*wonderfully and fearfully*” way. According to Volf (2006:198-201), identity is drawn from a faith relationship with God and as noted by Brueggemann and Bellinger (2014:583) every believer must find his or her significance in living in the ways of Scripture. The task of humans is thus “to seek and find that order and live in it”.

## **4.5 RENEWING OF THE MIND: EPHESIANS 4:23**

### **4.5.1 Step 1: Overview of the pericope (Text and translation)**

The third pericope the researcher wants to look at, is Ephesians 4:23 and chooses to make use of the New Living translation. Henry’s Commentaries (Bible Hub) show that the first three chapters of Ephesians consist of several important doctrinal truths, whereas the last chapters consist of the most important and serious exhortations that can be given. The doctrinal part (chapters 1 – 3) is to inform the minds of people to the gospel’s vast truths and doctrines, while chapter four onwards represent the practical part, designed for directing the lives and manners of people. The choice of this pericope fell on the practical section for the reason that it clearly stipulates Christian duties in verses 17-24 as an exhortation to Christian purity and holiness of life, placing the main focus on verse 23 “*Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes*”.

In verse 23 Paul appeals to believers that they must grow spiritually that the Holy Spirit can renew their way of thinking – this will also lead to a change in attitude and behaviour, which will entitle believers to resist the desires of sin. Arnold (2010:288) states that Paul encourages the people to “*be renewed*” in their minds, just as he did in Colossians 3:10 with different wording “*have clothed yourselves with the new spiritual self*”. The terms used in Ephesians appear only in this one occasion in the New Testament and is closely connected to the “*new*” in Colossians 3:10. Arnold (2010:288) explains the meaning is “passive, since the Spirit is the operative agent, affecting the renewal”.

According to Thielman (2010:305), Paul assumes that the readers received instruction firstly, about putting off their old ways of living which could only lead to destruction and secondly, that they have learnt to be renewed continually in their thinking. Here it is stressed that renewal of thoughts is an ongoing process. The two processes (continual corruption and continual renewal) thus, stand in contrast to one another. Paul encourages the readers not to stay on a self-destructive path, but instead to experience continual renewal (Romans 12:2) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Grudem (1994:746-762) defines sanctification as follows:

- an inner state
- an ongoing process throughout life (after justification)
- a process wherein the believer partakes
- not a process to be fulfilled or completed on earth
- a process where some people progress better than others

#### **4.5.2 Step 2: Context (Literacy-historical context)**

Ephesians and Colossians are two of thirteen letters in the New Testament traditionally attributed to the apostle Paul. Ephesians and Colossians stand together with Philippians and Philemon known as Pauls letters of captivity (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; 6:20; Philemon 1:12-14; Colossians 4:10; Philemon v1) (Van Rensburg, 2003:761). A strong resemblance between Ephesians and Colossians can be seen regarding style, theology and language indicating that it could have been written at the same time. Philemon (also a letter of captivity) differs from these letters in style, content and alignment (Joubert & Maré, 2015:865). Ellicott’s commentary (Bible Hub) acknowledges that as in other New Testament books, their authenticity has been challenged on both internal evidence as well as by critics

who readily acknowledge the four preceding group of epistles. While the epistle to the Philippians and Philemon have not been doubted, the two epistles bearing the most critique is the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Colossians, on the ground of the Epistle of Colossians involving references to a Gnosticism of a later date and the Epistle of the Ephesians on the theory that it is a mere copy and expansion of the Epistle to Colossians.

Carson and Moo (2005:481) state that the relationship to Colossians can be argued in different ways: those who reject Pauline authorship argue that one person could not write the two letters with firstly so much resemblance (Ephesians 6:21-22 and Colossians 4:7-8) and secondly, so much significant differences. Those in favour of Paul as the author stand equally empathic to the possibility that two minds could not deliver two works with as much interdependence combined with independence. They go on to explain that Ephesians “is not so much a copy of parts of Colossians as a development of it” (Carson & Moo, 2005:481), similar in vocabulary with curious differences not finding it unreasonable to think of Paul as producing Colossians with a particular situation in mind and shortly after following with Ephesians offering broader purposes. Van Rensburg (2009:1861) is in agreement stating that Pauls’ teachings about God’s role in the church in Ephesians and Colossians is an extension and gives more detail than his teachings in the other letters.

Keener (1993:538) states that while scholars often dispute Ephesians authorship, most of the non-Pauline words, phrases and stylistic features appear at least occasionally in letters that’s agreed upon were written by Paul. According to Carson and Moo (2005:480), during the early days the letter was in wide circulation and the authenticity thereof does not seem to have been in any doubt. The letter was also accepted by Marcion the leader of the Laodiceans, appearing in the Muratorian Canon and used by heretics as well as the orthodox. It was further viewed as a Pauline letter by Ignatius, Polycarp, Clement of Rome, Hermas as well as other apostolic fathers. Nobody seemed to question the Pauline authorship until the modern period where Colossians is held as a genuine Pauline letter and Ephesians as the work of an imitator who used Colossians for some of his thoughts and language (Carson & Moo, 2005:480). According to Carson and Moo (2005:517), the authorship of Colossians has been a subject of considerable discussion stating that although there is a connection with Paul, many recent scholars believe that one of Paul’s followers rather than Paul himself penned the book. The opening claim to have been written by Paul “*I Paul*” (1:1) and “*I, Paul write this greeting in my own hand*” (4:18), as well as in 2

Thessalonians 3:17 “*the distinguishing mark in all my letters*” where mostly accepted through the centuries. Modern times dispute this claim on three main grounds: language, theology and relation. They conclude that the actual authorship does not matter stating that it is agreed upon that there is a Pauline connection. At the least the author (if not Paul) must have come from one of Paul’s followers given a Pauline viewpoint in this letter.

Van Rensburg (2003:763) places the letter of Ephesians during the time 56 and 62 after Christ while Paul was in either Rome or Caesarea in prison. According to Carson and Moo (2005:486), the letter appears to be written from the same place as Colossians. The letter speaks of Paul’s imprisonment in Rome (3:1; 4:1) which would mean a date in early 60s after Christ. Those rejecting Pauline authorship date Ephesians later in the years 70-90 after Christ (Carson & Moo, 2005:486). According to Carson and Moo (2005:522), there is not substantial evidence of the date of Colossians and that a good deal of their conclusion depends on the place of imprisonment: if Rome was the place they place it in the early 60s most probably 61AD. According to Miller (2012:456) Paul wrote to the church of Colosse (a small town east of Ephesus) while imprisoned in Rome about AD 60-62. Clarke’s commentary (Bible Hub) claims that the epistles to Colossians and Philippians appear to have been written within a short space of each other around AD 62.

The purpose of Paul’s letters was meant to be read aloud to their recipients. It is further appropriate to view the contents in the light of the customs of ancient rhetoric. With this being said the ancient rhetorical handbooks should not be mechanically and rigidly applied. They can be employed where they fit to clarify the persuasive strategy used by the writer (Alexander, 2000:556-557). According to Barth (1974:38), the Ephesians letter was intended for the converted gentile Christians, after Paul’s visits to Ephesus. The impersonal tone of the letter suggests that the writer did not know the readers, for example “*ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus*” (1:15) and “*surely you have heard*” (3:2; 4:21). From this Carson and Moo (2005:488) suggest that the letter was originally meant as a circular letter, because of the absence of characteristic Pauline expressions of warmth that would be expected in a letter to a church he visited more than once and built a church (Acts 19:8, 10; 20:31), showing his affection for them and their’s for him in their last farewell (Acts 20:17-38, especially verses 36-37). They conclude that they do not know for sure whom the letter was originally intended for. Joubert and Maré (2015:866) agree that the letter was not intended exclusively for the community of Ephesian believers, reason being he visited the

city more than once, the second time staying for three years (Van Rensburg, 2003:763) would grant a much more personal message. According to Van Rensburg (2003:760), Paul sent out the Ephesians letter as a circular letter to encourage and strengthen the believers of Asia.

Keener (1993:539) compares the parallelism and repetition in the letter of Ephesians with Hebrew poetry, however they also used rhetoric, for example in speeches of praise relating to gods or humans. The first three chapters of the letter is worship language which elaborates the sort of introductory prayer and thanksgiving that frequently emerged in ancient letters. Paul combines the different ancient categories of rhetoric: the exhortation parts are “deliberative” with the purpose to persuade the readers to a particular course of action; other parts of his letter are “epideictic” where he praises God and urges the church to point towards God’s glory in creation (Keener, 1993:539). Carson and Moo (2005:484) state that a substantial section of the letter emphasises the importance of lives lived in conformity with the salvation that God gave believers. The first half of Ephesians takes on a pleonastic style with lofty doxologies, prayers and theological themes, while the second half falls within the customary Pauline range (Carson & Moo, 2005:484).

Van der Watt (2009:1899) claims that the Colossians did not have a Spiritual leader to guide them with daily problems and without guidance the fledging church was easily led on a wrong track. The apostle Paul heard about the false teachings to Colosse and felt concerned enough about it to take the time to guide the Colossians to right practices and thinking. Paul warns the Colosse believers of being in danger of popular syncretism and in part writes to protect them against this threat (Carson & Moo, 2005:525). The city of Colossae in Asia Minor had not been evangelised by Paul (2:1) as he could not preach everywhere he send trusted fellow workers to proclaim the gospel (Porter, 2003:386). It can be derived from his words “*a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf*” (91:7) and “*our beloved co-worker*” (1:7-8) that Paul had sent Epaphras to Colosse as the founder of the church (Miller, 2012:456). According to Alexander (2000:556), the letter to the Colossians was a substitute for speech with the purpose of alerting the Colossians to the danger of false teachings. Captivating them “*through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ*” (Colossians 2:8). These teachings are thought to be a kind of Jewish mysticism also affecting other Pauline churches. Counteracting these teachings further rejecting the divinity of any figure aside

from Jesus Paul presents a picture of the cosmic Christ in particular in Colossians 1:15-20. These verses represent a hymn, initially in praise of wisdom and most likely Jewish which is reinterpreted to refer to Jesus. Jesus is referred to as “*the firstborn of all creation*” (Colossians 1:15) and portrayed as the head of the universal Church (Colossians 1:18) (Porter, 2003:386-387). Clarke’s commentary (Bible Hub) refers to the language as bold and energetic with grand sentiments and vigorous and majestic conceptions. The phraseology is Jewish in many places with the obvious reason that the apostle had to explain subjects which had no name in any other language. Carson and Moo (2005:518) state that Paul uses poetic forms in the letter. While the main part of the letter contains warnings against false teaching and against allowing its proponents to condemn the Colossian believers, the fact that the central section places focus on the call for a specific future action of resisting the philosophy suggest the genre of rhetoric (Alexander, 2000:557).

The racial and cultural division between the Jews and the Gentiles was a major issue in the Ephesians church. Paul was arrested on the charge of having brought a Gentile into the temple (Acts 21:28-29; 28:16) (Keener, 1993:539).

#### **4.5.3 Step 3: Structural aspects (Form and structure)**

The first three chapters of Ephesians consist of several important doctrinal truths with the purpose to inform people in the truths and doctrines (Ephesians 1:1 to 4:16) of the gospel and the last three chapters hold the most weighty and serious exhortations with the intention to direct lives and manners. The first part, as explained by Henry’s commentaries (Bible study tools) is the Christian privileges and the second part Christian duties; in order to partake in these privileges is to responsibly practise the prescribed duties. The doctrines that have been taught in the first chapters further lay a good foundation on which to build the practice of the prescribed duties. In Ephesians Christian faith and Christian practice mutually befriend one another.

According to Keener (1993:548), Jewish writers and Greek philosophers could have agreed with the emphasis Paul puts on “*renewing the mind*” (4:23) as they understood that one’s attitudes and values can affect one’s lifestyle. However, Paul’s root for renewal varies from theirs. Paul bases renewal on the new kind of life that is available in Christ, this kind of life most Jewish people only expected after the resurrection of the dead.

Ellicott (Bible Hub) summarises the chapters of Ephesians as follows:

1.Doctrinal Section	2.Practical Section	3.Conclusion
1.The introduction Ephesians 1	1.The new life Ephesians 4:17-24	a)Special desire of their prayers for him in his captivity Ephesians 6:18-20
2. The call of the Gentiles Ephesians 2	2.Conquest of sin Ephesians 4:25-31; 5:21	b)Commendation of Tychicus Ephesians 6:21-22
3. Prayer for their fuller knowledge Ephesians 3	3.Regeneration of social relations Ephesians 5:22-23; 6:1-4; 6:5-9	c)Salutation and blessing Ephesians 6:23-34
4. Final summary of Doctrine Ephesians 4	4.Final exhortation Ephesians 6:10-17	

#### 4.5.4 Step 4: Linguistic aspects (Grammatical and lexical data)

Ephesians 4:23 focus words to be analysed are “*renewed*”, “*spirit*” and “*mind*”.

NASB	Greek	Transliteration	Strong's	Definition	Origin
and that you be renewed	ἀνανεοῦσθαι	Ananeousthai	365	to renew	from <i>ana</i> and <i>neos</i> ,
in the spirit	πνεύματι	Pneumatic	4151	wind, spirit	from <i>pneó</i>
of your mind,	νοῦς	Noos	3563	mind, understanding, reason	Contr. of a prim. word <i>noos</i> (mind)

BibleHub (<https://biblehub.com/lexicon/ephesians/4-23.htm>)

Strong's online concordance (Bible Hub) shows the following on the focus words:

<p><b>Renew</b></p> <p>ananeoó: to renew</p> <p><u>Original Word:</u> ἀνανεόω</p> <p><u>Definition:</u> I renew; mid: I renew myself, am renewed.</p>	<p>3501 /néos, "recent, new") – properly, going up to a higher stage (level of sanctification) by God's power; divinely renewed.</p> <p>365 /ananeoō ("<i>make new in relation to time</i>") is only used in Ephesians 4:23. Here believers are reminded of God's continuous offer to bring new strides in their sanctification through "sanctified reasoning" – raising the meaning up to new levels of spiritual comprehension and reality.</p>
<p><b>Spirit</b></p> <p>pneuma: wind, spirit</p> <p><u>Original Word:</u> πνεῦμα, ατος, τό</p> <p><u>Definition:</u> wind, breath, spirit.</p>	<p>4151 pneúma – properly, spirit (Spirit), wind, or breath. The most frequent meaning (translation) of 4151 (pneúma) in the NT is "<i>spirit</i>" ("Spirit"). Only the context however determines which sense(s) is meant.</p> <p>[Any of the above renderings (spirit-Spirit, wind, breath) of 4151 (pneúma) is always theoretically possible (spirit, Spirit, wind, breath). But when the</p>

	<p>attributive adjective ("<i>holy</i>") is used, it always refers to the Holy Spirit. "<i>Spirit</i>" ("<i>spirit</i>") is by far the most common translation (application) of 4151 (pneúma).</p> <p>The Hebrew counterpart (rûach) has the same range of meaning as 4151 (pneúma), i.e. it likewise can refer to spirit/Spirit, wind, or breath.</p>
<p><b>Mind</b></p> <p>nous: mind, understanding, reason</p> <p><u>Original Word</u>: νοῦς, νοός, νοῖ, νοῦν, ὁ</p> <p><u>Definition</u>: the mind, the reason, the reasoning faculty, intellect.</p>	<p>3563 noús (a masculine noun) – the God-given capacity of each person to think (reason); the mind; mental capacity to exercise reflective thinking. For the believer, 3563 (noús) is the organ of receiving God's thoughts, through faith.</p> <p>Romans 12:2,3: "<i>2And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (3563 /ólynthos), so that you may prove what the will (2307 /thélēma) of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. 3For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith (4102 /pístis)</i>".</p>

The Cambridge's Bible (Bible Hub) online commentaries focus on the words as follows:

*And be renewed in the spirit of your mind;*

23. *be renewed*. A present infinitive in the Greek. The idea is thus of progress and growth, the antithesis to the “corrupting” just above. The decisive fact of new position in and connexion with Christ was to result, and was resulting, in an ever developed spiritual experience, with its ever new disclosures both of need and of grace. Corinthians 4:16 — paraphrasing the clause (on the principle explained in the first note on Ephesians 4:22) “*and with regard to your being renewed.*”

*in the spirit of your mind* I.e., practically, “in your spiritual life and faculty, coming out in the phase of thought and understanding,” as distinct from e.g. the phase of emotion. “Spirit” can scarcely here refer to the Holy Ghost; and it cannot bear the vague modern sense of “sentiment,” or the like. It is the human spirit, as the substratum, so to speak, of every activity of the “inner man,” and now especially of the activity which sees and grasps truth (“your mind”). Ephesians 4:17 —The Greek may be rendered “*by the spirit of your mind,*” as the instrument, or avenue, used by the Eternal Spirit in the process of renewal.

According to Thielman (2010:305), the phrase “*the renewal takes place*” can be interpreted in different ways.

- Firstly, “by the Spirit of your mind” referring to the work of God's Spirit in the renewal of the believer's mind.
- Secondly, “in the spirit of your mind” referring to the location of the renewal as the inward life of the believer.

The term (*pneuma*, spirit) is used fourteen times in Ephesians, out of this twelve clearly refers to the Spirit of God and one refers to an evil spirit (2:2). Thielman (2010:305) comes to the conclusion that the term in this letter most likely refers to a spiritual being and not to an aspect of human existence.

Arnold (2010:288-289) states that for interpreting the clause “to be renewed by the Spirit in your mind” there are two interrelated explanatory issues that need to be determined:

Is the “spirit” the Holy Spirit or the human spirit?

Is “mind” the object of the renewal or a genitive modifier of “the spirit” for example “the spirit of your mind”?

Paul exhorts the people to “be renewed” in their minds, also the same thought conveyed in the parallel passage in Colossians 3:10 - “*have put on the new self which is being renewed*”.

The term for renewal used here in Ephesians can only be seen in this one instance in the New Testament and is closely connected to the idea of the “new self” in Colossians 3:10. The renewing work of the Holy Spirit is similar to the functions Paul attributes to the Spirit in Romans 8. The Spirit is thus the dynamic power of God’s work in the believer’s life who can break the tendency of believers to keep on acting and thinking according to the flesh (Romans 8:5-11,13). This puts the mind as the focus of the Spirit’s renewing work “the mind is being renewed by the Spirit” similar to what Paul says in Romans 12:2 “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*”. The term “mind” involves the capacity to understand and reason, thus to make moral decisions and lifestyle choices. Arnold’s (2010:288-289) preferred solution is that the Holy Spirit is the agent of renewal, while the mind is the object of its renewing work.

#### **4.4.5 Step 5: Revelation of God (Biblical and theological context)**

Carson and Moo (2005:494-496) highlight the following theological revelations from Ephesians 4.

##### *a. God is a God of grace*

Paul refers to the spiritual blessings in Christ that believers enjoy. The salvation of believers does not take place because they earn it, but because it was planned by God; predestination linked with God’s will and pleasure (1:5) with his plan (1:11). The opening further includes references to sonship through Christ, redemption through his blood, sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:5, 7, 13).

##### *b. Christ is the saviour*

Christ’s saving work is stressed in the opening of Ephesians that persists throughout the letter. It is clear that who Christ is and what he does, lies at the heart of the Christian way. A segment of Christ’s work is “*to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ*” (1:10).

##### *c. God is revealed in the mystery of the Bible*

Ephesians emphasises how important it is for the believer to grow in knowledge expressed in a variety of ways, for example Paul says that God “*made known to us the mystery*” (1:9)

and “*the mystery of the gospel*” (6:19). Here mystery does not refer to something that is difficult to work out, but as something impossible to work out if not disclosed by God. God has made known what people could not work out for themselves (3:3) and the making known of God’s “*manifold wisdom*” (3:10).

*d. God is love*

Important fact for the believer to know is expressed in the prayer that they may be “*rooted and established in love*” and able “*to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge*” (3:17-19). The word (*agape*, “*love*”) occurs more often in Ephesians, than any other New Testament book, with the exception of 1 Corinthians and 1 John.

*e. God is unity*

Ephesians stresses the point of bringing Gentiles, as well as Jews into membership of the one body (3:4-6). Believers should strive to preserve unity (4:3). Paul brings attention to a series of unities: *one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father, one body, one hope, one faith and one baptism* (4:4-6) despite the fact that there are diverse gifts of: *apostles, prophets and others in the church* (4:11-13). Here the vision of one church, completely united in the Lord, even though containing members of different races is stressed.

*f. God gives salvation*

A considerable section of the letter is dedicated to the importance of lives lived in conformity with the salvation given to believers. The kind to life lived by Gentiles is contrasted with the new life lived by believers (4:17 – 5:21), the darkness of the old ways against the Lord’s light (5:8).

*g. God provides*

The section on the Christian’s armour is a reminder that God makes full provision for those who engage in Christian service (6:10-18).

In this letter we cannot miss the supreme place of God, who brings salvation despite the unworthiness of sinners. Nor can we overlook the greatness of Christ

or the fact that the church, his body, occupies an important place in God's working out of his great purpose (Carson & Moo, 2005:496).

#### **4.5.6 Step 6: Integration process (Application)**

According to Du Toit (2017:302), renewing the innermost mind is a transformation that happens in the spirit of a person's mind. To be awakened by biblical truth is awakening on a much deeper level than simply intellectually or academically. He explains that the general belief of information starts in the head and then moves to the heart, rather believing scriptural truth starts in the heart and then moves to the head. "To be radically transformed in our thinking in order to rediscover his image and likeness fully redeemed in us" (Du Toit, 2017:303).

Lincoln (1990:287) highlights the continuous nature of the renewal that can only take place as the believers allow themselves to be renewed. Renewal is thus for the inner person, the mind which will in turn have consequences for external actions. The notion here is the same to that of Colossians 3:10 speaking of "*being renewed in knowledge*". "There is to be a constant development of believers' perception which will result, in practice, in their ability to choose the good" (Lincoln, 1990:287).

### **4.6 THE NEW SELF: COLOSSIANS 3:9-10**

#### **4.6.1 Step 1: Overview of the pericope (Text and translation)**

The fourth pericope is from Colossians 3 with the focus on verses 9 and 10 "*Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices. And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator*" (NIV).

According to Pao (2012:226, Paul uses the clothing metaphor in Colossians 3:9 and 10 to point out a definitive and drastic change produced by the cross and resurrection. Agreeing with the act of taking off "*the old humanity*" in verse 9, Paul calls the believers to "*put on the new humanity*". As the participle ("taken off" and "put on") is a casual adverbial that further provides ground for Paul's former request to avoid behaviour reflecting the "*old humanity*".

Paul expresses to a group of Christians the following: "*as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ*" in Galatians 3:27 and in Romans 13:14 "*clothe yourself with the*

*Lord Jesus Christ*". O'Brien (1982:190) states that in above verses the "*new man*" as opposite to "*the old man*" carry a twofold meaning: singular and corporate.

- Singular: An individual reference where the Colossians are assigned to the new nature where the renewal is a continuous process (Romans 12:2) in accordance with the image of the Creator. The renewal of the new man is to be compared with what Paul speaks regarding the "inner man" in 2 Corinthians 4:16 which is also an ongoing process (from day to day). Through a similar process the recipients are build up with the power of God's Spirit "for the inner man" in Ephesians 3:16
- Corporate: The phrase "the new man" holds a corporate reference assigning the new humanity in Christ (Body of Christ). As the "old man" is what people once were "in Adam" (the personification of unregenerate humanity), so the "new man" is what they become "in Christ" (the personification of the new humanity).

Arnold (2002:395) states that identity in solidarity with Adam's sin refers to the "old self" that has been removed into the "new self" which is identity in union with Christ. The "old self" (3:9) is the nature of people before their conversion with his deeds (habits, ways of acting), "and have put on the new self" (3:10; Ephesians 4:23; 2:15) who is continually being "*renewed*" (3:10). The new man is in a continuous state of development by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). This new state and nature brought about by the Holy Spirit is vastly different from that of the "*old self*". Towards the perfect "*knowledge in the image of its Creator*" (3:10). The new creation leads to knowledge and truth and is regarded by Paul as parallel to: (Arnold, 2002:395):

- Man's first creation as he was then made in the image of God (naturally) -Genesis 1:27.
- So now, man is made in the image of God (spiritually) - Colossians 3:10.

According to Alford (2018) it is not restoring the old, but in creating the new that redemption has been brought about. All that may have been God's image in which the first Adam was created, it is certain that the image of God in which Christ's Spirit re-creates, will be more glorious where there is not (Galatians 3:28) Greek or Jew but Christ is all and in all (all equal by every class of mankind) (Alford, 2018).

The choice of words "*the new that is being renewed in knowledge*" means the following:

1. It suggests that the new life is not the result of a successful, daily battle with temptation. Instead the new life marks the beginning (Wright, 2008:131). Paul did not

insist that the Colossians change their lives for the better, reform their ways or to adapt their lives. Pointed out by Schweizer and Chester (1982:197) it is concerned with new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), “not just giving up a few vices and accepting a few virtues”. The individual’s whole nature must be exchanged, not merely refurbished.

2. The individual always needs more renewal, since the new “is being renewed” (Romans 12:2). The use of the present participle propose continuous improvement (Corinthians 3:18; 4:16-17; Philippians 3:21). Moule (1991:120) states that it requires “a continual mortification of what is, in fact, already dead, a continual actualisation of an already existing new creation”.
3. The passive voice points out that the renewal is not a result from own efforts rather the renewed individual becomes God’s creative handiwork. The new nature is a gift from God, not as the result of the individual’s will-worship (2:23), own power or self-actualisation. The individual must work out the salvation that God has worked in his or her life (Philippians 2:12-13).
4. Knowledge of God, His Son and God’s ways are central for a livelihood that is pleasing to God. This richness of knowledge comes as a consequence of the renewal.
5. The renewal comes from being joined to Christ the image of the immortal God (1:15-16), in whom mankind have been created (Genesis 1:27). No prescription of behaviours can create the image of God in humans (Garland, 1998:207).

Verse 11 announces that new humanity re-created in Christ wipes away all the old sinful splits keeping people apart from one another (1 Corinthians 7:18-19; Galatians 5:6; 6:15). Dunn (1996:227) comments, “If Christ is everything in everything, then nothing can diminish or disparage the standing of any one human in relation to another or to God”.

#### **4.6.2 Step 2: Context (Literacy-historical context)**

The literacy-historical context of Colossians is discussed together with that of Ephesians in section 4.5.2.

#### **4.6.3 Step 3: Structural aspects (Form and structure)**

The outline of Colossians (Alexander, 2000:556):

- I. Letter Opening – Address and Greeting (1:1-2)
- II. Extended thanksgiving section (1:3-23)
- III. Letter body (1:24 – 4:9)
  - A. Body opening (1:24 – 4:9)
  - B. Body middle (2:6 – 4:6)
    1. Exhortation related to the Philosophy (2:6 – 3:4)
    2. More general exhortation (3:5 – 4:6)
  - C. Body closing (4:7-9)
- IV. Letter closing – Greetings, hortatory remarks, autographic subscription and grace benediction (4:10-18)

Van Der Watt (2009:1899) identifies three main movements in Colossians:

1. Who Jesus is and what He can do (1:3 – 2:5)
2. How Jesus brings about change and gives salvation (2:6-23)
3. How the lives of those who accepted salvation should look (3:1 – 4:6)

The metaphor of stripping off the old rags and putting on new clothes (Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 4:20-25; Job 29:14; Isaiah 61:10) signifies the transition from the list of vices “things on earth” (3:5-11) and worldly principles (2:20-23) to the list of virtues “set on the things above” (3:12-17) and the household code (3:18-41) helping the individual to look beyond ethical warnings to understand and see the basis of his or her moral transformation (Garland, 1998:206; Thompson, 2005:74). Garland (1998:206) states that these sins make the image of God unnoticeable in a person.

The body, middle or central part of Colossians is described by Alexander (2000:555) as two parts:

- The exhortations of 2:6 – 3:3 focussing on the alternative teaching and their more extended theological warrants correspond to the first part.
- The more general exhortations of 3:5 – 4:6 correspond to the usual *paraenesis* of the second part.

The tone of this section is one of warning, admonition and exhortation where the issues raised in the thanksgiving and body-opening are further elaborated on. The writer’s unease

about the receivers' knowledge and understanding (1:9; 2:2) and his interest in their sustained faithfulness to the gospel (1:23) are elaborated on (2:6 – 3:4). The implicit *paraenesis* about “*every good work*”, patient endurance and thankfulness (1:9-12) becomes explicit in the exhortations of 3:5 – 4:6. Proclamations from the Christ hymn (1:15-20) are utilised in the Christological warrant for the warning against the philosophy in 2:9-10,15,19 and what is involved in the reconciliation that is brought about by Christ's death (1:22) is developed in 2:10-15.

On Colossians 3:10 Harris (1991:152) states that the presence of the attributive participle “*being renewed*” that adjusts the substantive “*the new*” may appear to be a paradox: “*the new being renewed again*”. According to Pao (2012:226), the connection of the terms is important for different reasons: Firstly, “The new humanity” indicates the decisive incorporation of the believer in Christ, while “being renewed” indicates the believer's ongoing participation as they become what they already are which is consistent with emphasis Paul puts on the believers' daily involvement “our inner self is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

The second passive voice of the participle is directed to God as the ultimate agent where the tension between God's past acts through Christ and the present Christian involvement is for that reason supplemented by the tension between divine agency and human responsibility.

The third use of the verb “to renew” can play an important role in revealing the work of the triune God where the believer's renewal is often the work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 3:16). If this is to be the case then it means that God calls on the believer to put on the new humanity created by his new creative act through his Son while the Spirit carries on working through them as they grow into what God had prepared for them. Therefore, this tension sheds light on God's unfolding plan for humanity through his Son and the Holy Spirit. Bible Hub online search provides the following parallel texts on the words “*the new*”, “*renewed*” and “*knowledge*”

- The new: Ezekiel 11:19; 18:31; 36:26; Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Ephesians 2:10, 15; 4:24; Revelation 21:5.
- Renewed: Psalm 51:10; Romans 12:2; Ephesians 4:23; Hebrews 6:6
- Knowledge: John 17:3; 2Corinthians 3:18; 4:6; 1John 2:3, 5.

#### 4.6.4 Step 4: Linguistic aspects (Grammatical and lexical data)

Colossians 3:9 focus words to be analysed are "old self" and verse 10 "new", "being renewed", "knowledge" and "image".

On verse 9 focus word "old man" Strong's concordance from the BibleHub gives the following:

3820: "old". palaios: old, ancient

Original Word: παλαιός, ά, όν

Definition: old, ancient, worn out, not new or recent.

444: A man, one of the human race. anthrōpos: a man, human, mankind

Original Word: άνθρωπος, ου, ό

Definition: a man, one of the human race.

HELPS word studies from BibleHub expands on the word man:

444 ánthrōpos – man, also the generic term for "mankind"; the human race; people, including women and men (Matthew 4:19; 12:12).

(anthrōpos) relates to both genders (male and female) as both are created in the image of God – each equally vested with individual personhood and destiny (Galatians 3:28). Accordingly, the Bible uses 444 (ánthrōpos) of a specific man, woman, or class (type, group) of people – i.e. mankind in general (inclusive of every man, woman and child; (1 Corinthians 11:7).

Strong's concordance online search (Bible Hub) provides the following explanation on the focus words of verse 10:

3501: "new". neos: young, new, fresh

Original Word: νέος, α, ον. Greek: Νέον

Definition: (a) young, youthful, (b) new, fresh.

341: "Being renewed". anakainoó: to make new

Original Word: ἀνακαινῶ. Greek: ἀνακαινούμενον

Definition: I renew, make new again, change.

1922: “*Knowledge*”. ἐπίγνωσις: recognition, knowledge

Original Word: ἐπίγνωσις, εως, ἤ. Greek: ἐπίγνωσιν

Definition: knowledge, perception, discernment, recognition, intuition

1504: “[the] *image*”. εἰκόν: an image

Original Word: εἰκών, ὄνος, ἤ. Greek: εἰκόνα

Definition: an image, likeness, bust

Alford (2018) explains that the norm and method of the renewal is, κατ’ εἰκ. τ. κτίσαντος αὐτόν (the new man),—i.e. God, who is ever the Creator.

According to Ellicott’s commentary (Bible Hub) “*the new man*” can be found in verse 10 “*the new man, is renewed*” as well as in the parallel passage Ephesians 4:22-23. In this sense “*the new man*” is properly the youthful man “*which is renewed*” meaning to which is given a nature really fresh and new.

Geneva Study Bible (Bible Hub) explains the phrases (a) “*which is renewed in*” and (b) “*knowledge after the image of him that created him*” as follows:

- a. Renewed: Is the newness of life existing in knowledge which then transforms man to the image of God his maker (the pureness of the whole soul).
- b. Knowledge: refers to an effectual knowledge.

Matthew Poole’s commentary (Bible Hub) understands, “*which is renewed in knowledge*” as being savingly enlightened and the working of the Spirit which brings one to a more effectual knowledge.

#### **4.6.5 Step 5: Revelation of God (Biblical and theological context)**

According to Alexander (2000:570), the Pauline gospel contributes to some of the most insightful reflections on the person of Christ within the New Testament. Christ as the centre of God’s purpose and the key to reality also according to the hymn holds the cosmos

together. Colossians most distinctive feature is its sustained treatment of Christ in relation to creation as well as the reconciliation of the cosmos. Christ should not simply be seen as creation's firstborn (1:15); but all things were created in, through and for him (1:16). God is the creator and Christ is both agent of creation and ultimately, its goal. "*For him*" in 1:16 adds to the assertions of 1 Corinthians 8:6 regarding Christ's agency as the one to whom all creation is directed, the purpose of existence. Furthermore all things hold together in him (1:17); their integrity and coherence depend on his role. In other words it stresses that the firstborn, agent and goal of creation is appropriately firstborn, agent and goal of reconciliation within the new creation.

The implication of believing in the cosmic Christ is that He is sovereign over evil powers that threaten human life. Colossians 1:15-20 these cosmic powers are illustrated as being created in and for Christ, as having fallen out of harmony and as being reconciled through the death of Christ. Making Christ the head over all rulers and authority (2:10) (Alexander, 2000:570-572).

Colossians 1:15-20 reaffirms the formulation about Christ in cosmic terms in a ecclesiological context: "*Christ is all and in all*" (3:11) where the first part of the verse as the adaptation of the baptismal formulation (Galatians 3:28; 1Corinthians 12:13) stating that in the new humanity there are no ethnic, cultural and social distinctions. The second part adds, "Christ is all and in all", because Christ is everything and all that matters, the old human categories of evaluation became insignificant (Alexander, 2000:570-572).

Colossians further describes Christ's status in terms of lordship, asserting that by virtue of his exaltation to the right hand of God (3:1), Christ is Lord, the one to whom believers are accountable (1:10) and owe allegiance (2:6; 3:17). Reflecting this relationship even in everyday life (3:18-41) (Alexander, 2000:570-572).

Through Christ God's presence becomes visible and God's purposes effective. Christ is not called God in Colossians but the formulations of 1:19 and 2:9 put the two in a very close relationship providing an equal to the Johannine notion of incarnation: All the fullness of God dwells in Christ bodily (Alexander, 2000:570-572).

According to Alexander (2000:572), the most accurate way to portray what God has achieved for humanity, reconciliation stands out. The other foremost benefit in the letter is wisdom (1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5), knowledge (1:6, 9-10, 27; 2:2-3; 3:10), and

understanding (1:9; 2:2). Both Christ's death and resurrection play a part in the divine deliverance producing the new.

Christ is in people "*the hope of glory*" (1:27) he has reconciled them (1:22). According to Carson and Moo (2005:528), there is an unusual way of looking at the atonement when Paul says God forgave people their sins "*having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross*" (2:14) the thought even here is not far removed from Paul's treatment of the law in Galatians 3. Once again in Christ are "*all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*" (2:3); "*all the fullness of the Deity lives in him in bodily form*" (2:9) and believers "*have been brought to fullness*" in Christ (2:10). When mankind were dead in sins, God made them alive with Christ (2:13), dying with Christ "*elemental spiritual forces of this world*" (2:20) and raised up with him (3:1). Christ is thus "*all, and is in all*" (3:11) and mankind are "*God's chosen people*" (3:12). People give thanks to God the Father through Christ (3:17). Through the letter run the themes of Christ's excellence and completeness of the salvation that he brought about in dying for mankind on the cross. In this letter Paul insists on Christ's supremacy over and above all supernatural forces (Alexander, 2000:570-572).

Thompson (2005:78) states that Christ offers transformation and renewal, not from within or as an accomplishment, but as a gift and by God's power.

According to Joubert and Maré (2015:899), where Paul focused only on the people's world in 2 Corinthians 5:19 when he writes about Christ's reconciliation he focusses on the whole cosmos in Colossians 1:15-20. Therefore, Colossians teaches that Christ is much more than only Lord of people's hearts. He is in fact also Lord of the entire cosmos.

#### **4.6.6 Step 6: Integration process (Application)**

The believer has to cast off the old solidarities together with its behaviours (like a set of ragged clothes) joining with a new solidarity which renews the image of God in him or her creating new behaviours.

The letter to Colossians emphasises die central role of Christ and the believer's new identity in Christ. The apostle Paul's calling is to build people up and teach them in wisdom (*sofia*). Throughout the letter, Paul steers the people to grow and mature in Christ (1:28) as well as praying that they "*may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and*

*in understanding and discernment of spiritual things*" (1:9). Paul highlights *sofia* as a substantial ingredient of the Colossian's faith which is related to their insight into and the practical living in God's will. Their calling is to literally walk (*peripatein*) in a way worthy of God. This calling to believers to live a new life that pleases God is true to Paul's writings which can also be seen in Colossians 3:20; Romans 12:2; Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 5:10 and 1 Thessalonians 4:1. In this regard faith is not only something to confess but importantly to live in such a way that God alone receives all the glory (Joubert & Maré, 2015:894).

According to Thompson (2005:74), Paul labels the believer as one whose life is "*hidden with Christ in God*". Because they are identified with Christ as belonging to God, Paul exhorts them to "*seek the things that are above*" instead of things that are "*on the earth*". The practices in 3:5-9 are marked by self-indulgence and lack of self-control, following these prohibitions Paul turns in 3:12-17 to the values that characterise and come from the mind "*set on the things above*" mentioning life characterised by humility, regard for the other, graciousness and giving which then mirror the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

Carson and Moo (2005:529) state the letter to Colossians highlights the concern for the whole church not only for the specific segment in which a person lives. Along with the emphasis on the oneness of the church people should further be mindful of the letter's teaching about the differences distinguishing believers. Paul gives directions to wives and husbands, children and fathers, slaves and masters (3:18-4:1). Everyone is servants of Christ and all must live accordingly but that does not wipe out relationships in society. While people's positions differ and the mutual obligation to live faith out rests on all, the precise form that it takes differs according to circumstances. In each generation the believers are tempted to go along with the philosophy of the time. It must be kept in mind that Paul's cautioning about "*hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of the world*" (2:8) will never be out of season.

Christ's church is a worshipping community and the virtues that are characterised in the lives of its members are thus promoting harmony and unity within the community (3:12-13). Peace, Christ's reconciling activity that has been celebrated as affecting the cosmos (1:20) is to be particularly assumed within the new community and allowed to rule (3:15). Above all what is necessary is love (3:14; 1:4, 7) if the community is to become what it is meant to be.

#### **4.7 IMPLICATIONS FROM THE ABOVE EXEGESIS FOR THE SELF-WORTH OF A BELIEVER**

According to Thompson (2005:78), the promise of the gospel is that the transforming grace has entered the present world offering new life to people where the new creation is the renewal and not the replacement of the present creation (Alexander, 2000:644).

The believers' identities depend on their relationship with Christ and not on comparing the self to social media images. The primary way of viewing a relationship with Christ can be seen in Genesis 1:26, 27 as divinely created and as God's representatives on earth. The heartbeat of Psalm 139 is an intimate relationship with God and in Ephesians it is the continual renewal of the mind through the Holy Spirit.

In Colossians it is in terms of union with Christ which is also the significance of the initiation rite of baptism (Colossians 2:12). The believer can be said to be "*in Christ*" or "*in the Lord*" (Colossians 1:2, 4, 28; 2:6-7) and the motif of incorporating into Christ is the cord running through Colossians 2:9-15 (Alexander, 2000:644). In union with Christ, believers have fullness (Colossians 2:10). In Him they were spiritually circumcised (Colossians 2:11) and "*with him*" they died (Colossians 2:20) were buried (Colossians 2:12) were raised (Colossians 2:12; 3:1) and made alive (Colossians 2:13). The nature of the relationship is such that the believer's life can be described as hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3); without a doubt his/her life is Christ (Colossians 3:4). Christian identity is intricately bound up with the Christ who has died, been raised, is exalted in heaven and to be revealed (Alexander, 2000:644).

To be in union with Christ is not a static relationship, but it can be seen in terms of growth (1:10; 2:19), proceeding to maturity (1:28; 3:14; 4:12). Those united to Christ have been filled (2:10). Believers have been provided with what they need, but they must also appropriate this if they are to move toward their fullest potential by continually renewing their minds (Ephesians 4:23). They have received Christ Jesus the Lord, but are urged to continue to live their lives in Him (2:6-7) and cautioned about the consequences of not continuing and holding fast (1:23; 2:19). To live a life in Christ the Lord (2:6) is acknowledging his cosmic lordship as laying claim on all of life (3:17) (Alexander, 2000:644).

Christianity teaches about true knowledge: knowledge of the self as well as knowledge about God, the self can only be known in the light of God. From Genesis 1:26-27, it is clear that

God made man in his own image. Human beings are made by God, not according to image or likeness of any other being but according to the image of their Creator. The apostle Paul declares that the image in which man was made and made anew consists of knowledge, righteousness and true holiness. Du Toit (2017:326) states that in the letter to Colossians, Paul continues to celebrate God's perfect work in Christ in redeeming his likeness in mankind.

The renewal of the new humanity is continually being renewed in and growing in knowledge (1:10). The believer should anticipate to experience a continual development of perception resulting in the ability to live their lives accordingly to the new order, a thought equal to Paul's formulation in Romans 12:2 about being "*transformed by the renewing of your minds*". This renewal in knowledge of the new person stands in agreement with the image of the one who created it referring to Genesis 1:27 that the believer forms part of the new creation, a new humanity in whom the image of God is restored (Alexander, 2000:644).

Where the image of God is restored in the believer as an ongoing process through the Holy Spirit the believer will focus on a way of life set on biblical principles being mindful of thought processes continually growing in knowledge and renewing the mind. This way of living and thinking will help the believer find and maintain an identity as given by God which will lead to a healthy self-worth where the believer as a recipient of wisdom can walk in wisdom and become a teacher of wisdom.

#### **4.8 CONCLUSIONS**

The following concluding remarks regarding an identity as given by God can be made from the prior pericopes.

Genesis 1:26

- The message from Genesis reminds the reader of today that human life alone is created in the "image" of God and that the creation of mankind is the crown of God's handiwork.
- Mankind is not only created but also sustained by a personal God.
- God created each person uniquely individual with equally unique personalities and characteristic features
- "Created in the image of God" means that people are God's representatives on earth.

- “Created in the image of God” means that people carry within them some elements of God’s nature and character. Therefore something of who God is, reflects in people.
- Mankind was created to live in community, to be in a close relationship with God, talking and listening to Him

#### Psalm 139:14

- Emphasises the uniqueness of the process where God individually creates every person.
- Mankind is a wonderfully complex and marvellous workmanship of God who cares about the details of each person’s life. He cares about the minute details of the body; he cares about the details of daily living as well as the yet-to-be-experiences.
- Everything that the human heart desires can be found by being in a relationship with God.
- Creation declares that humans are born of love and for love, created in the image of a God who is love. Love is the source and love is to be the believers’ fulfilment. Self-acceptance and building a healthy self-esteem starts with being restored back into a love relationship with God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ.
- Identity has always been an essential matter faced by people. Identity brings about significance and meaning to life. Christ’s kingdom brings belonging, membership, communion, equality, common purpose and familial bonds.
- Being in Christ brings about new creation; one who is in Christ therefore becomes a new creature.
- A person’s positive potential is based on two things. Firstly, created in the image of God. Secondly this status gives people the potential to have Godlike characteristics.
- Loyalty and humility are elements of a new identity bringing the person to a closer and personal relationship with God.
- Identity is drawn from a faith relationship with God and every believer must find his or her significance in living in the ways of Scripture.

#### Ephesians 4:23

- It is stressed that renewal of thoughts is an ongoing process. Paul encourages the readers not to stay on a self-destructive path, but instead to experience continual renewal (Romans 12:2) under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- Attitudes and values can affect one's lifestyle. Paul bases renewal on the new kind of life that is available in Christ.
- Ephesians emphasises how important it is for the believer to grow in knowledge. Renewing the innermost mind is a transformation that happens in the spirit of a person's mind. To be awakened by biblical truth is awakening on a much deeper level than simply intellectually or academically. Believing scriptural truth starts in the heart and then moves to the head.
- Ephesians highlights the continuous nature of the renewal that can only take place as the believers allow themselves to be renewed. Renewal is thus for the inner person, the mind which will in turn have consequences for external actions. There is to be a constant development of believers' perceptions which will result, in practice, in their ability to choose the good.

#### Colossians 3:9-10

- Colossians emphasises the central role of Christ as the Lord and the believer's new identity in Christ.
- Colossians teaches about the definitive and drastic change produced by the cross and resurrection.
- The believers' whole nature must be exchanged, not merely refurbished. It is not restoring the old, but creating the new that redemption has been brought about. All that may have been God's image in which the first Adam was created. It is certain that the image of God in which Christ's Spirit re-creates is even to be better.
- Knowledge of God, His Son and God's ways are central for a livelihood that is pleasing to God. This richness of knowledge comes as a result of the renewal that will create new behaviours.
- The believer is called to literally walk (*peripatein*) in a way worthy of God. God calls on the believer to put on the new humanity created by his new creative act through his Son while the Spirit carries on working through them as they grow into what God prepared for them. The new man is thus in a continuous state of development by the Holy Spirit.
- Colossians highlights the concern for the whole church not only for the specific segment in which a person lives. Along with the emphasis on the oneness of the

church people should further be mindful of the letter's teaching about the differences distinguishing believers.

Believers are created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:26), "*wonderfully and fearfully*" (Psalm 139:14), they have become new persons (Colossians 3:10). This humanity is not simply an individual entity but also corporate that transcends the divisions of the old humanity (3:11) with a keenness of the new creation as a whole. Christ embodies wisdom, and so the believer is a recipient and then a teacher of wisdom and the Christian life is walking in wisdom (New Interpreters Bible, 2000:574, 576). For a healthy self-worth the believer must understand, accept and take responsibility for his or her identity as Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 139 teach, realising that growing into such an identity is an ongoing process of heavenly mindedness (Ephesians 4:23). Colossians 3:10 makes it clear that the new person is not totally new yet, but in a process of being renewed.

## CHAPTER 5

### **Pastoral guidelines to help believers grow to their full identity given by God**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The fourth and final task of the study focuses on Osmer's pragmatic task: 'What pastoral guidelines can be formulated in order to help believers grow to their full identity given by God?' This part of the study will incorporate and process the findings of the previous three tasks with the intention to formulate pastoral guidelines in order to help believers grow to their full identity given by God. The pragmatic task involves deep inner change, where self-worth will be fundamentally altered through changing thoughts and attitudes according to a biblical mind-set.

The central argument of this study is about how technology has become dazzling at every level to its consumers, transforming the way people live and think. According to Collins (2011:364), an estimate of 95% of people feel unfit and inferior due to unhealthy comparisons being drawn between real life and a 'perfect' world as portrayed through social media. Possible reasons for low self-image are, among others, unrealistic expectations, erroneous thinking and societal influences where the idea that people must adhere to others' standards to be accepted has become the norm. Recognising the powerful role of social media shaping society, perceptions of identity and self-worth call for a transformational mind-set. Chapter 2 focused on what can be learned regarding the negative effects of social media on the self-worth of believers. The sociometer theory suggests that self-worth primarily comes from feedback received from others (cf. 2.1.2b). People take on roles according to the perceived expectations of others (cf. 2.2.1). Upward social comparison causes feelings of inadequacy resulting in poorer self-evaluations and experiences of negative effect which results in an unclear sense of self (cf. 2.2.2). Through all of these processes (sociometer theory, reflected appraisals, social comparison) self-worth depends on the extent to which external sources approve or value the self, showing four major factors that influence the self-worth, namely the reaction of others, comparisons of others, social roles and identification which then become a source of questioning the self 'Who am I?' and 'How do I feel about myself?' Chapter 3 shifted to a broader discussion about self-worth,

putting it into the framework of identity by entering into a dialogue with interrelated arts and sciences. Erikson's psychosocial theory on the development of identity was chosen to determine possible weaknesses in the formation process, with the focus on the adolescent phase (cf. 3.1, 3.4.3). This phase shows the most substantial growth period where the adolescent seeks a sense of self by experimenting different roles, activities and behaviours attempting to find the answer to the question 'Who am I?' With REBT placing focus on irrational thinking behaviours, CREBT's goal is helping the believer strengthen his or her faith by reducing irrational thoughts and emphasising that a new believer is a new creation in Christ (cf. 3.2.1). Both theories strive to solve emotional and behavioural problems, conflicts and enriching people's lives while striving for long-term change. Further, supporting self-effort bringing about the experience of empowerment so that people can rightly take responsibility for and create their own emotions. The suggestion is that the pastoral counselling process can start with the initial focus on irrational thoughts that stem from comparing to social media images, moving to thoughts focused on Scripture and growth into unconditional self-acceptance and self-compassion. Within the Christian faith, it is confirmed that mankind take on the imprint of the Divine, they are made in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) and from this position the truth of identity will flow forward which was discussed in depth by means of exegesis in chapter 4. The research in this study thus far supports the central argument that comparing the self to external sources, such as social media images leads to low self-worth. Louw (1999:253-254) maintains that it is clear that the quality of the answer to the question 'Who am I?' is of decisive interest concerning identity. According to Louw (1999:253-254), 'Who am I?' looks into the quality of how the individual reacts to life events and the degree and quality of how a person takes responsibility for his or her personal (spiritual) growth. In this regard identity has to do with the individual being called to make choices and then take responsibility for those choices by showing correlation between moral consciousness and actions. It is then the principle of responsibility that leads to self-acceptance and self-compassion (cf. 3.2.3, 3.4.1). With this background the study will proceed with the formulation of pastoral guidelines within a *paracentric* focus which complements CREBT. Clinton and Ohlschlager (2002:50) describe the *paracentric* approach as a twenty-first-century path for pastoral counselling towards a more intentional development of a descriptive, prescriptive and heuristic (experiential) perspective. Paracentric describes a Spirit-directed and Christ-centred pastoral counsellor committed to

assist the counselee with a wide range of needs, from comforting to encouragement to confrontation.

## **5.1 AIM**

The aim of this chapter is to formulate pastoral guidelines that will enable pastoral counsellors to help believers find healing from the lies that they believe due to comparisons made on social media (especially Facebook) and the negative effect it has on their self-worth. In order to comply with the aim the following aspects will be discussed in this chapter:

- Important points of departure
- Guidelines for the pastoral counsellor

## **5.2 IMPORTANT POINTS OF DEPARTURE**

It is important to firstly describe important points of departure of the study in order to formulate the guidelines that will enable the pastoral counsellor to help the believer find healing.

### **5.2.1 Christian Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy**

The main goals of CREBT are to help the believer strengthen his or her faith and reduce irrational thoughts and behaviours (cf.3.2). The role of the pastoral counsellor in CREBT includes providing care, counselling and supporting the believer in challenges that they may face in life, with the message that nothing in life can separate them from God's love (Romans 8:38-39). The message is that even during stressful and traumatic situations, God's love will support the believer giving them strength to endure hardship which will help the believer not to over identify with the situation. The ABC model (cf. 3.2.1) emphasises Proverbs 23:7, teaching human beings' thoughts from the foundation of their behaviours. Exposure to the ABC and CREBT models can help the counselees to change their thoughts through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It assists the believer to firstly identify and then change irrational beliefs. These models (CREBT and ABC) are supportive to the pastoral counsellor to identify irrational or unbiblical thoughts and help the believer to find the truth in Scripture resulting in changed thoughts and behaviours. Through these models, the importance of human beings' free will is emphasised, because the counselees must take the responsibility to change the way they are thinking about themselves. The pastoral counsellor must use the Bible as the

source of truth to guide the believers to replace the lies they believe with the truth of the Word (cf. 1.7.2; 3.2.1).

### **5.2.2 Para-centric focus: Pastoral counselling and compassionate soul care**

The pastoral counsellor using the para-centric focus, places the Holy Spirit at the centre of the counselling process by facilitating the kind of care illustrated by Jesus in his earthly ministry, while raising people up to full life in his image. The pastoral counsellor is committed to bring honour to Christ with the aim of helping the believer find the type of peace, direction and stability that can only be found in Christ (1 Timothy 3:16-17). Although not a prerequisite, the truly committed counsellor embraces personal suffering and allows Christ to transform, heal and mature them through their own experiences. As the counsellor is redeemed and made whole by Christ's healing love and guidance, they can use their experience to offer the same help to others. The pastoral counsellor must further apply God's word in their personal lives, be open to the work of the Holy Spirit and be an instrument in God's 'hands' in order to bring change to their own and in others' lives. The paracentric focus puts emphasis on changing from the inside out, where it becomes a transforming life experience where God touches, heals and reshapes the heart and soul of both the counsellor and counselee (cf. 3.2.2).

### **5.2.3 Unconditional self-acceptance**

As a criticiser of self-esteem, Ellis (1996) refers to self-esteem as an "emotional sickness" (cf. 3.2.3), while Leary and Baumeister (2000) describe self-esteem as a vital need for a sense of belonging and avoidance of social rejection (cf. 3.1). Both indicators of the necessity to build self-esteem. This study therefore, proposes an alternative for self-esteem, namely unconditional self-acceptance. Unconditional self-acceptance does not rate or evaluate the self's worth and identity. Instead it promotes developing an attitude of resilience to life's uncertainties in acknowledging and forgiving own limitations. Self-acceptance as a foundational principle of CREBT, teaches God's acceptance through grace as the foundation of Christian tradition. Self-acceptance is a mindful decision made by individuals when they accept responsibility for their lives realising they are in control of their own decisions which in turn creates their personal world. The pastoral counsellor believes that the inherent sinful nature can have an influence on the believer, resulting in bad choices and behaviour that can be overcome through the working of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Here, the counselee

approaches their low self-worth by looking at it from a biblical perspective, finding Scripture that will give a clearer perspective that provides either new knowledge, motivates change in behaviour and or gives opportunities to teach valuable lessons. Since God is unconditional love, the counselee is invited to abandon self-judgment and come into God's presence with their thoughts, feelings and actions. The contemplative believer recommits thus to Christ holistically (body, mind (thoughts) and spirit), fully surrendering to God. Once freed from comparisons (excessive attachments) the believer is free to serve God in both inner and outer life. If the counselee can contemplate on Scriptures such as "*Be still and know I am God*" he or she can experience inner peace and silence to help them with new thinking patterns and revelations. The pastoral counsellor can successfully incorporate the aspects of unconditional self-acceptance, self-compassion and contemplation on Scripture by means of *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer which will give rise to feelings of being worthwhile and accepted (cf. 3.2.3).

#### **5.2.4 Self-compassion**

Self-compassion is compassion directed inwards. The three main components of self-compassion: kindness, a sense of shared humanity and mindfulness create a self-compassionate frame of mind. These qualities that the counselee experiences from the pastoral counsellor creates a safe therapeutic setting, helping the counselee to bring the same qualities (kindness, connection and comfort) to themselves (cf. 3.2.2). Self-compassion involves being touched by own suffering, creating the desire to ease the suffering and treat the self with understanding and concern. It is relevant to all personal experiences of suffering, together with inadequacies, failures and painful life situations referring to the inclination to be caring and understanding towards the self, rather than being harsh and critical. Noticing some disliked aspects of one's personality, the tone of language used to acknowledge the shortcoming will for example be kind and supportive, rather than attacking and rebuking the self as not 'good enough'. The pastoral counsellor approaches the believer with warmth and unconditional self-acceptance, even though certain behaviours may be in need of change. In the same way, in stressful circumstances a self-compassionate response will likely pause first to offer soothing and comfort instead of immediately trying to control or fix the problem at hand. Self-compassion curbs self-criticism, self-evaluation and judgement toward self and others, helping the believer recognise common humanity (connectedness). The believer will have an understanding attitude toward self during times

of mistakes or failures, accepting own limitations and imperfections, rather than comparing the self to others or judging the self. The self-compassionate individual more willingly accepts undesirable aspects of his or her character and behaviour without being obsessed with the situation or becoming defensive (cf. 3.4).

### **5.3.5 Mindfulness**

Mindfulness involves turning towards own painful thoughts and emotions while seeing it for what it *is*, without either suppressing, avoiding or over identifying with the pain. Exercising mindfulness is an important way to build self-compassion. Mindfulness has a direct impact on all the components of self-compassion by enhancing self-kindness, by being non-judgmental and also counters feelings of isolation and separateness with the reminder that suffering and personal failure are universal (cf. 3.4.1).

### **5.3.6 Prayer**

Studies on prayer suggest that prayer provides positive effect, personal integration and well-balanced self-expression, further countering depressive feelings and helping individuals to cope with stress (Spilka, 2005:365-377). In the context of stress and suffering, spirituality communicates a continuing achievement of meaning, formation and connectedness that encourages flourishing (Lee, 2018:114).

Centring prayer is a responsive model of surrendering to God's loving presence and healing action within, which is built around a relationship with God (Ferguson *et al.*, 2010:306, 310). The prayer is about opening oneself to God, surrendering and saying "Here I am, fill me". The contemplative form of prayer, known as centring prayer, is one of the practices well described by Keating (1999:31, 32). The goal is unity with God thus, improving the ability to be silent, hear God and be filled with the Spirit. Describing the prayer as a method to take one's attention away from the ordinary flow of thoughts, in order to awaken faith (cf. 2.5.2).

The theological basis of Centering Prayer is Jesus' intimate experience of God as *Abba* (Mark 14:36), his teaching of the prayer in secret (Matthew 6:6), and the final discourse of the Gospel of John, describing the divine indwelling (John 17:21–23a) (Ferguson *et al.*, 2010:309).

### **5.3.7 Parental influences on self-compassion and self-esteem**

The degree to which children comprehend their parents parenting styles show to have an impact on how the child will view him- or herself. Furthermore, the child's God image is mostly a projection or inflation that the child holds of parent's images, either favourable or unfavourable (cf. 1.7.2; 2.5.1, 3.4.2). Self-compassion exists throughout development and result from interactions with counsellors and attachment styles during the early ages of the child. Given that adolescence is the period of both challenges and opportunities, makes exploring self-compassion during this period especially important. Adolescence is the period where social comparisons and evaluation of self against others are the highest. For this reason, adolescence can be seen as a window of opportunity period where development in multiple domains forms adaptive coping skills and positive character traits can take place. Self-compassion is a valuable attribute, because it protects against classic developmental vulnerabilities such as increased self-consciousness, feelings of isolation and mood fluxes. The self-compassionate adolescent that applies adaptive coping skills has a positive self-perception and experiences high levels of connections with others, showing a balanced perspective and lack of unkind self-criticism, displaying positive coping, as well as decreased negative reactions to unpleasant life events. These abilities help the adolescent to a more easily transition into young adulthood, further also developing healthy and adaptive lifelong behaviours (cf. 3.4.3; 3.5.2).

### **5.3.8 The quest to "Who am I?"**

Christian faith affirms that people take on the imprint of the Divine (they are made in the image of God) and from this position the truth of identity flows forward. Nouwen (2006:28) states that doubting this truth by trusting in alternative identities is the ultimate spiritual temptation. Louw (2012:62) describes identity as a process of identification consisting of the interplay between the questions: "Who am I?", "How do I respond and perform?" and "To what do I commit myself?" Asking these three questions, the pastoral counsellor creates a space where the capacity of the questions can open up new perspectives and horizons which can help the believer grow into an identity given by God (cf. 3.5.1).

### **5.3.9 Keating's view on happiness**

"Programs for happiness" is Keating's (1999) framework for finding the true self, where he emphasises contemplative practices to assist the believer to become aware of the truth of

the self. According to this programme, the consequences of over identifying is getting stuck both developmentally, as well as spiritually. Keating (1999:7) works around two main questions: “Where am I to God, the self and others?” where he recommends contemplative prayer as the practice in search of this answer which marks the beginning of awareness of the Divine presence. It is through contemplation that the believer gets the courage to face the second question: “Who are you?” The quest for the answer to this question asks of the believer to drop whatever roles the believer may have adopted, as well as treating the self with unconditional love. Dropping all roles marks the freedom to manifest God through one’s own uniqueness (cf. 3.5.2).

### **5.3.10 New identity in Christ**

Not having sufficient knowledge and understanding of how and why God created mankind is one of the many possible reasons for low self-worth. Genesis 1:26-27 indicates the uniqueness of mankind by answering the questions “Who am I?” and “Who do I belong to?” Accepting the self and building a healthy self-esteem are the beginning of being restored back into a relationship with God. Colossians emphasises the central role of Christ and the believer’s new identity in Christ. According to Togarasei (2016:101), identity is a central aspect of human existence and Kochalumcjuvattil (2016:109) points out that identity brings about significance and meaning to life. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul reveals that being in Christ *“the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here”* (NIV). Togarasei (2016:107) interprets the text as, being a Christian requires a new identity (cf. 4.4.6). According to Alexander (2000:644), Christian identity is tied to Christ who has died, been raised and exalted in heaven (cf. 4.7). Psalm 139:14 emphasises how wonderfully complex, individually and uniquely God created each person. Creation proclaims that mankind is born of love and for love, created in the image of God who is love. Identity is derived from a faith relationship with God and the believer must find significance in living accordingly to the Scripture. For a healthy self-worth, the believer takes responsibility for his identity as Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 139 teach, realising that growing into an identity as given by God is an ongoing process of heavenly mindedness (cf. 4.8).

### **5.3.11 Renewing the mind**

Renewal (or changing) of thoughts is an ongoing process under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This continuous renewal can only take place if the believers allow themselves to be renewed. Paul appeals to the believers to grow spiritually in order for the Holy Spirit to renew their thinking (Ephesians 4:23; cf. 4.5.1; 4.5.6; 4.6.1). The renewal that happens in the spirit of the believer's mind is to awaken a much deeper level than simply intellectually. In other words, believing in Scriptural truths starts in the heart and then moves to the head. Renewing the mind has an effect on behaviour, the constant development of the believers' perception results in their ability to choose the good (cf. 4.8).

## **5.4 PASTORAL COUNSELLING GUIDELINES ADDRESSING SELF-WORTH**

Although each individual is unique (cf. 4.4.1) and must be approached as such a certain set of basic guidelines is necessary in the counselling process. Flexibility from the pastoral counsellor is an important aspect to keep in mind, reason being certain steps in the counselling process overlap and more important, the process is directed on long term change, supporting self-effort and bringing about empowerment so that the counselee can rightly take responsibility for their own emotions (cf. 3.2.1).

The influence of the Holy Spirit stands at the core of pastoral counselling (cf. 3.2.2; 3.6). Becoming a new creation in Christ (cf. 4.6.6), the counselee must realise that it is not external circumstances, people or social media that affect them, but the view that they adopt about themselves in these circumstances (cf. 3.2.1), change is thus from the inside out.

The researcher will use and expand on the ABC model from CREBT (Johnson, 1993; Johnson *et al.*, 1994; Jones, 1989). A schematic representation of the counselling guidelines is as follows (cf. 3.2.1):

<b>ABC model</b>	<b>Pastoral counselling guidelines</b>
A. Event	Identify the problem
B. Beliefs based on scriptural truths or lies	Access the problem
C. Good or bad fruit	Develop a plan

Table 4: Diagram of the ABC model and pastoral counselling guidelines. Source: Michele Rossouw

Because the proposed form of counselling is action oriented, fast moving and of short term, it is important for the counsellor to, from the beginning, establish a clear end point for the treatment.

The researcher proposes that the sessions must be organised as follows:



Establish a counselling orientation



The attitude of the pastoral counsellor  
- Counsellor prayer



Session 1: Establish an emphatic relationship  
- Counselee homework: Who am I?



## Session 2: Identify the problem (A in ABC)

- Counselee homework: Reflection questions



## Session 3: Access the problem (B in ABC)

### a. Assessment

### b. Identify exceptions

- Counselee homework: Enhance exceptions

### c. Establish specific goals

- Counselee homework: Vision



## Session 4: Develop a plan (C in ABC)

- Counselee homework: good or bad fruit
- Counselee homework: eight day Bible study
- Counselee homework: Who am I?



## Session 5: Ending the counselling sessions

The different steps will now be discussed in detail.

### 5.4.1 Establishing a counselling orientation

To formulate guidelines the researcher will build on and expand on CREBT and REBT advocating self-responsibility, rational thinking and empowering the counselee (cf. 3.2.1). In line with these models the researcher proposes short-term counselling. The distinguishing factors between short-term (brief) counselling and other approaches are:

- The number of sessions (five to eight),
- The orientation of the pastoral counsellor regarding the care that is being offered.

In brief, counselling the pastoral counsellor cannot become diverted into unhurriedly building of rapport, passive listening or taking extensive history (characteristics of long-term counselling). It is important to explain to the counselee that brief counselling is just as effective as long-term sessions in certain situations. The focus of brief counselling is empowerment and taking action as soon as possible by means of identifying, focussing and enhancing positive and rational thinking patterns (cf. 3.2), thus renewing the mind (cf. 4.5.1).

To build a relational encounter fast and accurately involves, physical attending, careful listening, temporarily suspending judgment while offering appropriate warmth and respect. Respect is the foundation value of the counselling process, holding the assumption that everyone is worthy of respect. For Grobler *et al.* (2003:89) showing respect to the counselee the counsellor allows them to decide what they really want. The counsellor must realise that respect does not happen automatically, it is earned primarily through the skilful establishment of relationships.

Strong and respectful relationships are built by:

- Listening to the counselee and observing the non-verbal communication.
- Determine the underlying irrational thought patterns and beliefs as a result of comparing to social media images (cf.2.2.2; 2.4).
- Recognise, gain insight and challenge the irrational beliefs of not feeling good enough. Make it clear that you are “for” the counselee, meaning respect is both gracious and tough-minded. The counselee’s points of view are taken seriously even in situations where they need to be challenged.
- Be genuine, meaning the relationship is real and emphatic not phony (Egan, 2014:47-48).

- Believe in the counselees' good will, understanding their reluctance for change and a willingness to help them work through it (Egan, 2014:47-48).
- Keep the counselee's agenda in focus; pursue the counselee's agenda not your own (Egan, 2014:47-48).

In brief, counselling the counsellor does not presume that the counselee can be "fixed" for life, the goal is not to solve all problems (or even most), instead assuming the "domino effect"<sup>8</sup>. Change is thus believed to be contagious.

The positive traits of limited counselling are:

- Hamper dependency in the care given relationship.
- Empower and stimulate the counselee to accept the self unconditionally (cf.3.2.3).
- Guide the counselees to operate in the real world while they continue to address their problems with compassion towards the self and others (cf.3.4).
- Realising that the formation of the new self is an inner process, an ongoing process throughout life, a process wherein the counselee must choose to partake in, not a process to be fulfilled or completed on earth and a process where some people progress better than others (cf. 4.5.1).

The goals of limited counselling are:

- Encouraging the counselee to recognise and lean on their existing network of support (family, friends, church, et cetera) (cf. 2.5.1, 3.2.2).
- Change focus from problems (negative and stagnation) to focussing on solutions (positive and action taking).
- Change the counselee's view of themselves, by working on their irrational thoughts in order for them to start to believe that they have a part in finding the solutions.

Designing of exercises and reachable homework tasks:

A swift way of bringing change is by addressing and acting on specific real life problems by applying homework tasks. Ideas for these tasks will naturally arise as part of the counselling conversations, however, the suggestion of reachable assignments will rely on the pastoral counsellor's skills. People going through challenging times tend to ignore their own strengths and resources for this reason there should be consensus between the counsellor and

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<sup>8</sup> Change initiated in one area of the counselee's life will initiate a chain of similar events in other areas.

counselee regarding the homework tasks in order to keep the counselee self-motivated and interested. To design homework tasks the counsellor should keep the following in mind:

- The counsellor wishes to help the counselee build on his or her existing strengths, skills and capacities.
- The focus of short term counselling is to build on the counselee's own coping resources and strengths, no matter how suppressed and undeveloped they may be.
- Choose Bible texts that will address the counselee's specific problems and help them open up and develop their resources and strengths.
- A quick way to help the counselee enhance self-esteem is to motivate them to use some of their latent strengths.
- Showing the counselee respect is the key to build on strengths. The counselling space must be welcoming, encouraging and extending compliments where the counselee is showing positive progress on homework tasks. Compliments before homework tasks have the purpose of helping the counselee get into a frame of mind to accept something new, or break through resistance.

#### **5.4.2 The attitude of the pastoral counsellor**

Pastoral counselling should be all about pointing the counselee to God helping them grow into a relationship with God. Therefore, to be a responsible pastoral counsellor he or she must be aware of their emotions before each counselling session, making sure personal thoughts are still and set aside. Proper counselling attitude will include a gentle heart, gentle spirit, non-judgmental, flexible, humility and compassion. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23): love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control must be evident characteristics in the counsellors' relationship with God, as well as with others. Each day should start by surrendering to God. The following prayer can be used:

##### **5.4.2.1 Counsellor prayer**

Invite the Holy Spirit into the relational encounter, remembering that at least three persons are present in each session namely, the Holy Spirit, the pastoral counsellor as the healing agent and the counselee (cf. 3.2.2). The following is an example prayer of the researcher.

*Pray asking the Spirit to:  
Enter my inner being, fill my core.  
Command my eyes to see through it;  
Command my ears to listen through it;  
Command my heart and make it gentle and compassionate;  
Command my thoughts to seek the truth, Command my brain to make the right  
connections for clear and correct interpretations.  
Shape this process as seems best to You for I am clay in Your hands. (Jeremiah 18:6)*

### **5.4.3 Session 1: Establish an emphatic relationship**

It is important to, from the onset, establish a relationship of spiritual love from the pastoral counsellor to the counselee providing the counselee with the love he/she needs.

The first session is allocated for building relationship and trust, informing the counselee of the structure of the process and methods that will be used. Gathering information from the counselee is another important aspect of the first session (This includes: reason for seeking help, brief history, what they need and their expectations from the counsellor and the process, where they want to be at the end of the sessions).

Before starting with the actual pastoral process, the following aspects are of importance and the pastoral counsellor has to share the point of departure with the counselee.

First of all, an important aspect is to start change as soon as possible so that the domino effect can begin. A short term counselling process recognises a sense of common humanity (cf. 3.4.1), mankind is part of a world that is caught up in individual and corporate sin, conflicts, losses, doubts and anxieties. The task of the pastoral counsellor is not to do away with these conditions, but to help the counsees to address the problems they face, find healthy ways to operate within the system of social media and to be open to hear God's call and be faithful to it.

Secondly, the responsibility for one's own emotional experiences and behaviours must be emphasised, believing it is at the end not external circumstances (social media) or people that affect the counselee, but the view he or she adopts about him- or herself in their circumstances (Ellis, 2017:277, Clouse, 1997:38-48) (cf. 3.2.1). Remind the counselee that

ultimately peace, direction and stability can only be found in Christ and that the counsellor only serves as an instrument in the hands of God to facilitate change.

Thirdly, the pastoral counsellor has to explain to the counselee that a holistic approach will be followed by means of the Christian based ABC model of CREBT (cf. 3.2.1). To address the negative effect of social media on self-worth, the pastoral counsellor will focus on the following attributes: unconditional self-acceptance, self-compassion, and contemplative practices.

- The first positive attribute is unconditional self-acceptance (cf. 3.2.3)

An important aspect of the REBT and CREBT theories, is promoting self-acceptance in the counselee. Self-acceptance means that the counselee must not evaluate him- or herself (neither positively, nor negatively). Self-acceptance promotes personal adjustment, well-being, accepting and respecting of self, feelings of worth regardless of performance. Reminding the counselee that everybody is flawed and fallible and to embrace these flawed aspects with compassion. Since God is unconditional love (John 4:7) the counselee is invited to stop self-judgment by comparisons and enter God's presence with thoughts, feelings and actions (cf. 4.5.6).

- The second positive attribute is self-compassion (cf.3.4)

The self-compassionate counselee correctly understands his or her problems, weaknesses and shortcomings and in spite of the "flaws" still reacts with kindness and compassion, rather than being harsh or criticising. It gives an open attitude towards suffering realising that kindness and understanding toward the self is needed during periods of pain or failure. Recognising shared human experiences understanding everybody fails from time to time and not to isolate one's pain and mistakes. And lastly, to hold painful thoughts and feelings in balance, rather than over identifying with it (cf.3.4.1).

- Contemplative practices in the form of *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer (3.6)

These two traits will be practised and embraced by means of four selected scriptures that will teach the counselee who he or she is as a creation of God, through the texts Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 139:14. Changing from the inside out, will change thought patterns learning not to over identify and recognising irrational thinking patterns through the texts Ephesians 4:23. Colossians 3:9-10 will give clear guidelines of who the new person in Christ is and that the new self needs constant renewal.

Lastly, the counselee must understand that the counselling process, as explained, is just the beginning of onward and continues growth in an identity as given by God.

The objective of the first session is to help the counselee take responsibility, become motivated and collaborate in the process of inner change. To help the counselee with low self-worth caused by the negative effects of social media the first thing to teach the counselee is that:

- He or she is divinely called based on creation. Encourage the counselee to accept God’s plan for his or her life.
- Must be confident that Christ will never leave nor forsake the counselee. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).
- The counselee must commit to the counselling technique.

The pastoral counsellor must also explain to the counselee the ABC-model and that the counselee basically has two choices (cf. 3.2.1):

<p>Option 1:</p> <p>A (Facebook portraits a perfect body image) + B (image results in feelings of inadequacy) = C (low self-esteem with a negative effect on identity)</p>	<p>Option 2:</p> <p>A (Facebook portraits a perfect body image) + B (take notice of the image, but know that it is only an image and not the rule for everybody, most probably it is photo shopped) = C (does not affect self-esteem or identity, because the believer knows his or her true identity in God and therefore accepted him- or herself for who he or she is).</p>
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After the first session the following homework task must be given.

**5.4.3.1 Counselee homework: “Who am I?”**

Write an essay on “Who am I?” (cf. 3.5.1). Defining the present self in as much detail as possible. Note present emotions and feelings towards the self, others and God. The



becomes a life changing, as well as life long process (cf. 3.2.2). Besides working with and expanding on the ABC model, the counsellor can also utilise Erikson's (1980) eight stage psychosocial development theory to determine where the counselee is standing within their psychosocial context and to get an indication of where the counselee is heading (cf. 3.1).

The main task of the second session is to identify the main problem(s) and or needs by means of the following suggested steps:

- The problems identified must be clearly defined in specific and concrete terms in a way that makes them resolvable.

For example: describing someone as having low self-esteem is too vague and not an explicit definition of a problem. To what will the counsellor and counselee measure an elevated self-esteem? A more precise definition will be "I feel depressed". Concrete and specific definitions of the problem contribute to more prompt solutions and so the importance to work with the counselee to focus specifically on the key problem(s) that were started to be identified in the first session.

- The goal is to focus on, manage and resolve the identified problem(s) in a Godly way, according to Scripture. Thus, in the process of focusing on and resolving the identified problem(s) the counselee's behaviour will change accordingly (domino effect).

After identifying and defining the problems, the pastoral counsellor can start to create mindfulness regarding the counselees' perceptions of his or her identity by asking the questions from Louw (2012:62) suggesting that identity, as a process of identification, are based on the interplay between the following three questions (cf.3.5.1):

- "Who are you?"
- "How do you respond and perform?"
- "To what do you commit yourself?"

The purpose of these questions is to create a space where the capacity of the questions can bring awareness of the levels of self-acceptance and self-compassion. The counselee practises towards the self as well as opening up new perspectives and horizons needed for the counselee to recognise irrational thinking patterns caused by comparing with social media images. The counsellor must make detailed notes of the answers.

#### *5.4.4.1 Counselee homework: Reflection questions*

Ask the counsees to reflect on their answers during the week by means of:

- Becoming aware and identifying levels of self-acceptance, self-compassion and comparing self to others and or social media.
- In daily thoughts and activities become aware of and identify where their priorities are. For instance, do they respond to and commit more to comparing self to social media, or do they respond to and commit to a Godly mind-set.

#### **5.4.5 Session 3: Access the problem (B in ABC)**

The pastoral counsellor must use the Bible as the primary source when helping counsees. Knowledge of other auxiliary sciences (as the ABC, CREBT and Erikson's theory) can be used, but obedience to the Word of God is the main goal.

This part of the counselling process can be divided into three sections:

##### *5.4.5.1 The assessment*

- A central question to be asked is "why now?" With all the stresses of everyday life, why now, seek pastoral counselling?
- An important part of assessment is to establish if and what previous attempts have been made in order to address the problem. Knowing previous attempts keeps the counsellor from leading the counselee down the same paths again that can be discouraging and wasting time.
- Identify the stimuli that trigger the onset of the problem.

##### *5.4.5.2 Identify exceptions*

One of the reasons people end up at counselling is because they feel that their problems exist all the time, thus over identifying with it (cf. 3.4.1c). Once in this thought process of irrational thinking and over identifying, the counselee easily overlooks times that the problem is absent or simply dismissed it as petty.

With brief pastoral counselling the exceptions are of great importance, serving as the central focus of an empowering counselling process. This marks the start of recognising irrational

thinking and over identification with social media images. There are two approaches that can be followed:

Approach 1: Identifying the exceptions (that need a different line of questioning):

- How are periods that you do not compare yourself to social media images?
- How did you achieve that?
- What did it feel like?
- Did your family and friends notice a difference in you?
- How did you know that they noticed a change in you?
- How do you think, you can stop the comparisons and over identification?

Approach 2: Offer sincere compliments where it is due.

With this approach the counsellor focuses and places attention on times that the counselee did not engage in the identified problem behaviour. In other words, the instances where the counselee showed self-acceptance and self-compassion are being recognised, acknowledged and rewarded rather than exclusively focussing on the problem behaviour or irrational thinking processes. The goal is to create awareness on positive steps towards a healthy self-esteem. Thus, to start a positive domino effect of recognising positive attributes will encourage the counselee to embrace, recognise and practice more positive attitudes and behaviours:

- I am impressed that you recognised the tendency to compare yourself to social media platforms.
- I am pleased that you realised that the portrayed images on media are most of the times not authentic versions.
- I am impressed that you treated yourself with compassion and less criticism.

#### 5.4.5.2(a) *Counselee homework: Enhance exceptions*

The purpose of the questions as homework is to help the counselee become conscious of their thought processes (lies and or biblical truths).

- To what extend do they value the self against social media messages with self-criticism (in other words lies).
- To what extend do they value the self as a unique, responsible creation of God with self-compassion and unconditional self-acceptance (in other words biblical truths).

Questions proposed by Nouwen (2006) (cf. 3.5.1):

This coming week ask yourself the following questions (notice levels of self-acceptance and self-compassion):

- Where have I come from?
- Where am I going?
- Who is God for me?
- How does God speak to me?
- Where do I belong?

#### 5.4.5.3 Establish specific goals

A specific definition of the problem and creating awareness of the exceptions lead to forming controlled target goals which are precise descriptions of the required change. The exercise here is to steer the counsees away from solely focusing on their problem(s). This is done by starting to form a vision based on Scripture for their future and developing specific goals on how to achieve it. The counsellor must assist the counselee to form a vision of his/her future by means of the right flow of questions and guiding, defining and seeking the goal and determining the steps of how he/she should go about to get there.

The following steps are suggested:

- From the problems identified during the second session, ask the counselee to choose one or two with the highest priority. Concentrate to keep focus on a single problem at a time.
- Be aware of not getting sidetracked into problems other than the identified problems addressed by the goals. The counsellor can acknowledge it suggesting that the point can be taken up after accomplishing the already set goals (make a note to follow up, after the completion of the existing goals if the counselee still feels the need to address the problem). As soon as target goals are achieved the counsellor and counselee can start the process over, identifying new targeted goals (if needed).
- Questions that can assist the counselee with forming a vision, “tell me how you want your life to be different in a month, three months, six months from now”.
- Guide the counselee to set realistic goals.

- A subtle way of addressing the identified problem(s) is to address it in past tense. At the same time refer to the vision as “when”. “What do you think will happen when you stop comparing yourself to social media images?” “When you accept yourself unconditionally, how does it make you feel?”, “When do you act compassionately towards yourself?”
- Be very specific with forming the vision. Ask the counselee to give examples of how behaviour and irrational thoughts will change by starting with “I will ...”
- Ask the counselee, “Suppose you wake up tomorrow morning with a healthy and strong self-worth, how would you know something changed in you?”, “How would your family know that you are different?”
- When the counselee only wants to talk about problems acknowledge it and redirect the conversation to working on solutions for the identified problem(s) by asking what is the difference between times when the problem is worse and times that the problem is better or “what will be the first sign that change is on the way?” This question will help the counselee to recognise the steps between identifying the problem and when their situation is as they wish it to be.
- When the counselee seems hopeless the following questions can be asked, “How do you cope?”, “How do you get through the day?”, “How are you coping as well as you are?”

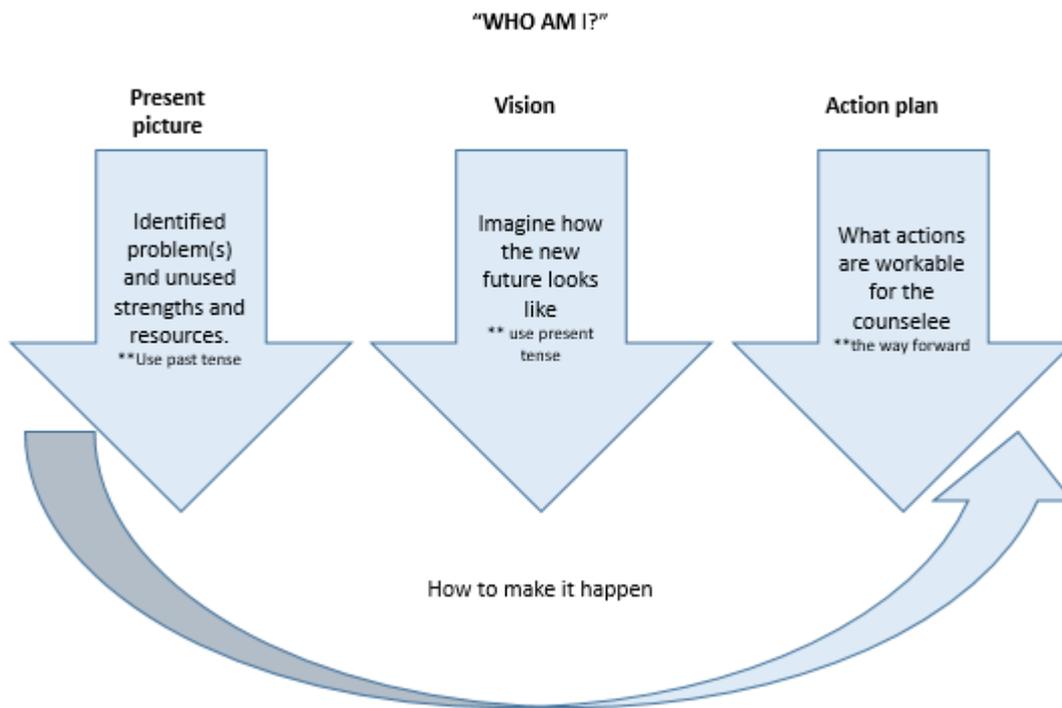
#### 5.4.5.3(a) Counselee homework: Vision

Following is first an exercise which the counselee must answer and secondly a diagrammatical illustration of how thoughts can be renewed:

Exercise task to ground the vision:

- What will it be like when the addressed problem is resolved?
- Spend time each day to envision it.

The following diagram can be used to explain the vision homework in more detail:



#### 5.4.6 Session 4: Develop a plan (C in ABC)

Up to this point, rapport was built between the pastoral counsellor and counselee. The problem(s) were clearly identified and defined in workable solutions. Goals were put in place to realistically reach the desired outcome and identify exceptions. The next step is to develop a plan to assist the counselee with merging the self-concept with the truth and reality of his or her uniqueness as created by God in spite of body-ideal messages conveyed through social media (cf. 3).

Signs that progress is being made, will be when the counselee starts to gain insight, being less symptomatic, feeling more positive towards the self (self-acceptance and self-compassion), think more positive thoughts (rational thinking) and act in more adaptive ways concerning comparisons with social media images. With a solid foundation the counselee is now ready to put the work done so far into practice.

Start session 4 by following up on the previous session by asking how the counselee's thoughts and behaviour differed in the time between the last session to the current session.

The purpose of this questioning is to help the counselee recognise that change is not only possible but may already be happening.

The objective of session 4 is to help the counselee recognise the powerful role of social media on shaping their thoughts about the self, perceptions of identity and self-worth and that it calls for a transformational mind-set. “All healing, self-acceptance and building a healthy self-esteem start with being restored back into a love relationship with God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ” (Strydom, 2010:498) (cf. 1.3). It is time for the counselee to choose to take responsibility for their thinking processes, which will deliver good or bad results (fruit). Explain to the counselee (by starting with bad fruit):

- A. Bad results (fruit): Counselee over identify with and compare the self to social media images creating feelings of “not good enough” (cf. 1.3) which influence thought processes negatively (irrational thinking) resulting in insecurity, self-rejection and low self-worth.
- B. Good results (fruit): Counselee takes responsibility for thinking processes changing the mind-set to upward thinking based on scripture (rational thinking) and mind-set on Christ, resulting in high self-esteem (good fruit).

#### 5.4.6.1(a) Counselee homework: good or bad fruit

The following exercise can be given as homework or done during the counselling session. The counselee must reflect on the consequences of their thinking patterns.

1. Explain what bad fruit means. Give a relevant example.

Stop and ask the counselee to answer the following two questions:

- Who are you?
- Who do you belong to?

2. Explain what good fruit means. Give a relevant example.

Stop and repeat the two questions.

3. Allow the counselee a couple of minutes to contemplate on the different answers given.

Explain the difference between a positive view of self and a negative view of the self:

Self-esteem	
A positive view of the self will lead to:	A negative view of the self will lead to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Confidence in abilities</li> <li>○ Self-acceptance</li> <li>○ Not worrying about what others think</li> <li>○ Optimism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lack of confidence</li> <li>○ Want to be and or look like someone else</li> <li>○ Always worrying what others might think</li> <li>○ Pessimism</li> </ul>

Table 5: Source: The levels of self-esteem (Gbadamosi, 2018:85) (cf.2.4.2)

Normally all that is needed to get the counselee to move forward (regardless of how complex the problem appears) is the first small step (only one is needed to start the domino effect). Although developing a plan is mainly the responsibility of the pastoral counsellor, it is done in agreement of the counselee. Goals are now translated into specific tasks in the form of an eight-day Bible study programme that the counselee can embark on and implement into their daily lives. It is important for the counselee to recognise and believe that the homework tasks are reachable.

#### 5.4.6.1(b) Counselee homework: eight-day Bible study

As the last exercise to conclude the five scheduled sessions an eight-day homework programme is given to the counselee. Before commencing with the programme the counselee must plan and schedule time aside each day for the exercises.

##### i. Daily exercise during the eight-day Bible study programme:

Three questions are given to the counselee to contemplate on before Bible study, after Bible study and during the day. The purpose of the three questions is to ask the Holy Spirit to guide the counselee to the answers. The questions not only open the counselee's heart before sessions but keep their hearts open throughout the day, connecting with the Spirit in search of "Who am I?"

Contemplate daily on the following questions:

- Are you living up to your images as created by God?
  - Do you know how to live according to the image of God?
  - Do you know you are wonderfully and fearfully created by God as the crown of creation?
- *Reflect daily on these questions keeping the Bible study passages in mind when answering.*

### Day 1: *Lectio divina*

The counselee must choose one of the three texts. Explain that *lectio divina* is contemplative reading of a text that allows the reader to become still and aware of God's presence, opening up to the possibility of God speaking through the text (cf. 3.6). If the counselee is not familiar with how *lectio divina* works, go over the nine steps as suggested by Smith (2009:109) (cf.3.6) to make the counselee familiar and comfortable with the exercise.

#### BIBLE STUDY: DAY 1

##### 1. **LECTIO DEVINA** {choose one text}

Genesis  
1:26

Psalm  
139:14

Ephesians  
4:23

2. Write down words that grab your attention \_\_\_\_\_

3. What does God communicate to you from this text?

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**Day 2: Contemplative prayer on the three questions**

The goal of this exercise is to answer the following questions for him- or herself:

- Are you living up to your images as created by God?
- Do you know how to live according to the image of God?
- Do you know you are wonderfully and fearfully created by God as the crown of creation?

The counselee must continue with the same text as chosen in day 1. Explain that:

- Contemplative prayer improves qualities of empathy and self-compassion (Kristeller & Johnson, 2005:391-408) (cf.3.6).
- The prayer is a method of taking attention away from ordinary flow of thoughts by contemplating on a sacred word, inviting God into consciousness and life.
- Studies suggest that prayer provides positive effect, personal integration and well-balanced self-expression, also countering depressive feelings and helps individuals to cope with stress (Spilka, 2005:365-377) (cf. 3.6).

**BIBLE STUDY: DAY 2**

**CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER**

Day 1 text: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Choose a sacred word from **day 1** \_\_\_\_\_
2. Rest. Acknowledge God's presence within by introducing the sacred word.
3. Allow thoughts to flow into awareness just gently keep on returning to the sacred word.
4. Let go of emotionally charged thoughts as they enter consciousness. Offer emotions a way to vent. You are safe in God's presence – trust Him. Return to the sacred word.

Write down feelings and thoughts

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**Day 3: *Lectio divina***

Choose a different text and follow the same steps as day 1.

**BIBLE STUDY: DAY 3**

**1. *LECTIO DEVINA*** {choose one text}

Genesis 1:26	Psalm 139:14	Ephesians 4:23
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2. Write down words that grab your attention \_\_\_\_\_

3. What does God communicate to you from this text?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Day 4: Contemplative prayer on the three questions.**

The counselee must continue with text as chosen in day 3.

**BIBLE STUDY: DAY 4**

**CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER**

Day 3 text: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Choose a sacred word from **day 3** \_\_\_\_\_
2. Rest. Acknowledge God's presence within by introducing the sacred word.
3. Allow thoughts to flow into awareness just gently keep on returning to the sacred word.
4. Let go of emotionally charged thoughts as they enter consciousness. Offer emotions a way to vent. You are safe in God's presence – trust Him. Return to the sacred word.

Write down feelings and thoughts

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**Day 5: Lectio divina**

Choose the remaining text.

**BIBLE STUDY: DAY 5**

**1. LECTIO DEVINA** {choose one text}

Genesis 1:26	Psalm 139:14	Ephesians 4:23
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2. Write down words that grab your attention \_\_\_\_\_

3. What does God communicate to you from this text?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Day 6: Contemplate prayer on the three questions

The counselee must continue with text as chosen in day 5.

### BIBLE STUDY: DAY 6

#### CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Day 5 text: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Choose a sacred word from **day 5** \_\_\_\_\_
2. Rest. Acknowledge God's presence within by introducing the sacred word.
3. Allow thoughts to flow into awareness just gently keep on returning to the sacred word.
4. Let go of emotionally charged thoughts as they enter consciousness. Offer emotions a way to vent. You are safe in God's presence – trust Him. Return to the sacred word.

Write down feelings and thoughts

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**Day 7: *Lectio divina* on the new self**

**BIBLE STUDY: DAY 7**

**THE NEW SELF: Colossians 3:9-10**

1. *Lectio divina*

2. Reflect on the words that stood out:

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\* **NOTE TO SELF:** The new self needs constant renewal!\*

## Day 8: Contemplative prayer on the new self

### BIBLE STUDY: DAY 8

#### THE NEW SELF: Colossians 3:9-10

1. Contemplative prayer (go through the four steps)
2. What did God communicate to you?

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\* **NOTE TO SELF:** The new self needs constant renewal!\*

5.4.6.1(c) *Counselee homework: Who am I?*

After working through the three given texts by means of both *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer the counselee must write a follow-up essay on the “new” self.

Compare essays written on day 1 and day 9, to be discussed between counsellor and counselee during the last session.

Reflect on the growth (what changed?).

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Who am I?</b></p> <p><b>THE NEW SELF: Colossians 3:9-10</b></p> <p>1. Write an essay on “WHO AM I?”</p> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <p>2. Compare essay 1 with essay 2.</p> <p><b>* NOTE TO SELF:</b> The new self needs constant renewal!*</p>
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### **5.4.7 Session 5: Ending the counselling process**

This is the last phase of the treatment where the counselee-counsellor's contact ends and the counselee's level of responsibility increases (Sperry, 2010:181). The challenge for the counselee outside of therapy is to continue to practice and apply skills and strategies learned during the counselling sessions. The aim is for the practices to turn into a way of life to ensure continuing growth. The ultimate goal of the process is to empower the counselee to become his or her "own therapist" outside of counselling. It is essential for the counselee to understand that knowledge of Scripture and rational thinking processes are continuous processes throughout life (cf.4.5.1; 4.5.6; 4.7).

Before reviewing the process repeat the three questions asked in the first session:

- Who are you?
- How do you respond and perform?
- To what do you commit yourself?

Together reflect on the space that was created and how new perspectives and horizons changed thinking patterns caused by comparing with social media images. Compare the answers with the notes of the answers during the first session. This will enable the counselee to more clearly see their growth and significance of the homework. Reflecting on progress (how did your self-worth change?) that will also serve as a motivation to continue maintaining the homework.

This session must further be allocated to the following subjects of conversation:

- The counselee must be given the opportunity to express his or her thoughts and feelings about the therapeutic process.
- Also spending time to review the progress that has been made as well as which goals have been achieved.
- The challenge for the counselee is to stay on the positive course of growth that has been set in motion while continuing to keep on practising and applying the learnt skills.
- Possible setbacks must be anticipated in this session, implementing a relapse prevention plan that will ensure that the growth made thus far will be maintained.

- To reduce the risk of a relapse specific stressors and high risk situations that may cause it must be identified with intervention plans to help the counselee manage the relapse if and when it occurs.
- Encourage self-therapy and growth by motivating the counselee to set their own Bible study agenda, review past homework, address particular problems and process it, decide on new homework (find their own texts to carry on with the exercises *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer) (Sperry, 2010:184).
- Reflect on remaining therapeutic tasks that the counselee might work on in the future.
- Discuss possible return appointments, let the counselee know that you have full confidence in his/her capabilities to grow and that counselling will always be there in cases of setbacks. Compliment the counselees for their efforts and growth during the process.

Follow up in a month and then again after three months.

## **5.5 EXPECTED ADVANTAGES OF THE MODEL**

The expected advantages of working on the negative effects caused by comparing with social media images is changed behaviour embracing an identity as given by God (cf. 4.3,4.4). The study suggests that changed behaviour will be accomplished with inner change by means of a biblical mind-set (cf. 4.5), learning to be self-compassionate (cf. 3.4) and accepting the self unconditionally (cf. 3.2.3). It is suggested that inner change will put the domino effect (cf. 5.4.1) in action. By renewing the mind, inner change happens and results in changed behaviour with the potential of affecting others as well. The domino effect thus has the potential to work not only on one area of the counselees' life (self-worth) but all behaviour which will be seen and experienced by people who come in contact with them. It holds the potential of growing further than one area of one individual.

## **5.6 EXPECTED CONSEQUENCES OF THE MODEL**

From a CREBT (Johnson, 1993) perspective thoughts and beliefs have an impact on the way people interact with their environment (cf. 3.2.1). From this study it was seen that the environment of social media can cause problems for some leading to feelings of not good enough and low self-worth (cf.1.3, 2.4.1, 3.2). The counselees must understand that maintaining a positive self-worth will require them to take responsibility (cf. 3.2.1) accepting

that renewal of thoughts is a continuous process under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The consequences of this statement are that:

- Renewal is an ongoing process.
- It is an empowering process.
- With long-term benefits.
- The counselee must take responsibility and allow him- or herself to be renewed through the Holy Spirit.
- It is a movement starting in the heart, moving to the head (thoughts) and then behaviour (cf. 5.3.11).
- The study extends on this statement by suggesting that it will not only change the counselee, but also the people in contact with the “new” person.
- Renewal of the mind has an effect on behaviour, the constant development of perceptions results in an ability to choose the good fruit (cf.4.8, 5.4.1), and ultimately an identity as given by God (cf. 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6).

## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

The focus of the chapter was Osmer’s (2008) pragmatic task which involves deep inner change. The aim is to work on low self-worth caused by the negative effects of social media. For the pastoral counselling guidelines the study introduced short term counselling therapy with the focus on changing the counselee’s perspective on the question “Who am I?”. The change is from “Who am I?” as someone who compare the self to social media images resulting in not good enough feelings and low self-worth. To “Who am I?” as created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), created wonderfully and fearfully (Psalm 139:14). Understanding the magnitude of “Who I am” brings renewal of thoughts (Ephesians 4:23) with the domino effect of a “new self” (Colossians 3:9-10). This movement is accomplished by working on the Christian based ABC model from the CREBT theory adding the conditions of acceptance of self and being compassionate towards the self. The new thoughts and behaviour are captured with an 8-day Bible study-programme. The counselee must take responsibility for their own emotions and realise that inner change is an ongoing process under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The researcher trusts that the pastoral counsellor by means of the suggested model will be able to help the counselees with guidelines to address the negative effects of social media on their self-worth.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conclusions and recommendations

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This chapter will discuss the conclusions of each chapter individually. Recommendations regarding future topic related research will also be deliberated on.

#### 6.1 CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING CHAPTER ONE

Chapter 1 offered an introduction regarding the effects of social media on self-worth, the motivation, goal and central theoretical argument of the study. The problem statement indicates that it has become the norm to compare the self against social media images leading to feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem. From the view of auxiliary sciences, it was shown that Christian Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (CREBT) is a key element to counteract the effects of social media by way of the believer's willingness to be mindful, reflecting on their thinking and being self-accepting. The research question involves which pastoral counselling guidelines can be formulated that will enable the pastoral caregivers to help believers find healing from the negative effects social media have on their self-worth according to biblical perspectives. The objective of the study was then to formulate pastoral guidelines that will base the believer's self-worth and identity on biblical principles. Osmer's model was used as a model to be able to answer to the aims of the study. The first and second tasks were done by means of critical comparative literature study looking at scientific articles, books, media articles *et cetera*. The normative aspects involved the exegesis on relevant texts. The pragmatic part of the study incorporated and processed the conclusions of the previous three tasks with the intention to formulate pastoral guidelines in order to help the believer grow to their full identity given by God. This task involves deep inner change where self-worth will be fundamentally altered through the changing of thoughts according to an attitude towards a biblical mind-set.

## **6.2 OBSERVATIONS FROM THE DESCRIPTIVE ASPECTS VIEWING WHAT CAN BE LEARNT REGARDING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE SELF-WORTH OF THE BELIEVER**

Before focus can be placed on guidelines for the pastoral caregiver to help the believer grow into an identity given by God, it was important to start by understanding the concept self-worth and the effects of social media on the believer's self-worth.

The descriptive task provided an insight into research literature, measures and definitions available in the field of self-esteem by firstly discussing the historical roots and the theories of self-esteem. Competence, connectedness and integration formed the foci of the self-determination theory (SDT). This theory places focus on the things that people find interesting, investigating why people value certain things and why they join certain groups, as well as the internalisation of social practices and reasons why they develop insecurities. The Sociometer theory suggests that a person's self-worth primarily comes from the feedback received from others.

From research it was noted that self-esteem develops in three processes. People come to understand and form an opinion of the self through their own understanding of the perceptions which others may hold of them by means of reflected appraisals. Here the self-concept develops through the process of role taking. In the case of social comparisons the individual weighs his or her abilities and virtues by comparing it to those of others. In the digital age the process of social comparison is particularly relevant as social networking sites, for instance Facebook and Instagram, provide abundant comparison opportunities more often than not causing feelings of inadequacy with poorer self-evaluations and experiences of negative effects resulting in an unclear sense of the self. The last process, self-attributions refer to people's tendency to make casual attributions about own and others' behaviour.

The characteristics of low- and high self-esteem showed that self-worth involves a degree of evaluation of either positive or negative views toward the self. Low self-worth has been studied as one of the psychological features that people have when excessively involved in social media. From the study it was noticed that four major factors influence the self-esteem, namely the reaction of others, comparison of others, social roles and identification.

Important elements that influence self-esteem, namely parental factors, gender, cultural orientation and social factors are important variables shedding light on factors influencing the self-worth. Parenting factors are a major element where it becomes a modern day belief that self-worth is anchored in early childhood on the foundation of parental trust, unconditional love and security. Gender stereotyped expectations also play a cardinal role in self-esteem, where it was noted that girls generally feel less confident during adolescence than boys. Lastly, the effects of culture as a variable of the development of self-esteem were discussed showing that modern societies became more individualistic that involves a greater awareness of own preferences.

The study on the descriptive aspects showed the importance of understanding the contribution of social media and the consequences thereof on the self-worth of the believer.

### **6.3 OBSERVATIONS FROM THE INTERPRETIVE ASPECTS CONCERNING WHAT SCRIPTURE TEACHES REGARDING THE SELF-WORTH OF BELIEVERS**

The aim of chapter 3 was to put self-worth into the framework of identity. The interpretive task entails the search for the answer to “why is this going on?” by entering into a dialog with interrelated arts and sciences. To answer the interpretive question, Nouwen’s (2006) question “Who am I?” was used as the fundamental question because it contains the search for meaning that resurfaces throughout life.

People operate within a system where their surroundings have an effect on their situations, as well as their perceptions, resulting in a continuous co-dependent interaction with the environment. To understand how identity and self-esteem develop within this network, the study used Erikson’s eight stage psychosocial theory on the development of identity. This theory determines possible weaknesses in the formation process in different life stages that might make people prone to compare self with others. This comprehensive lifelong theory of identity formation places emphasis on the role of culture and society, the conflicts within the self and the process of forming a sound sense of self. Within the development cycle, the study placed focus on the fifth stage (adolescence) that is well known as the stage of searching for a sense of self- and personal identity and thus finding the answer to “Who am I?”

To understand the effects of thoughts on self-worth, the study used the theories of rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT) and Christian rational emotive behaviour therapy

(CREBT). Both REBT and CREBT emphasise long-term change by focusing on solving emotional and behavioural problems and conflicts by this enriching the lives of people, as well as supporting self-effort and bringing about empowerment. The models also promote self-responsibility for own emotional experiences and behaviours, believing that it is not external circumstances (social media) or people that the person compares to that affects him or her, but the view they adopt about themselves. The pastoral counsellor in CREBT provides care, counselling and supports life changes while assisting the individual to strengthen his or her faith to reduce irrational thoughts and behaviour and support behaviour consistent with Christianity. Further pointing out that a new believer is a new creation in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). In terms of rationality and irrationality, CREBT leans on religious doctrine and prayer, while REBT focuses on physical aspects. A strong compatibility of the ABC model and Scripture is shown in for example the text of Proverbs 23:7 *“For as he thinks in his heart, so is he”* (NKJV). Because the Holy Spirit can change thoughts and behaviours, the ABC model can assist the individual to identify and change irrational beliefs.

From a para-centric focus, Christian counselling is rooted in the Scriptures, facilitating the kind of care Jesus illustrated in his earthly ministry and raising people up to fully live in his image. It is the influence of the Holy Spirit that is the distinguishing agent between Christian counselling and secular psychosocial theories. Since suffering and distress are universal, people will be better off to find healthy ways to live with it, find meaning in it and redemption through it. It is not a pre-requisite for the counsellor to personally endure suffering, but by allowing God to transform, heal and mature him or her through hard times will give the Christian counsellor a truly deep emphatic and compassionate insight to connect with the suffering of the counselee. As the Christian counsellor is cured, redeemed and made whole by the Holy Spirit they can “pay it forward” to their counselees. This thought relates to the broken-healer metaphor. The effective Christian counsellor applies God’s word in their personal lives and is passionate to reflect Christ’s life through their thoughts and acts, and is open to the Holy Spirit to work through them in order to bring change in own and counselee’s lives. Emphasis is placed on changing from the inside out. This change is a transforming life experience where God touches, heals and reshapes hearts and souls. A para-centric focus brings together knowledge and practice from the Scriptures, with clinical sciences as well as ancient and modern wisdom. Emphasising the relational encounter

between at least three persons: God, Christian counsellor (as God's healing agent) and the counselee. Further, believing that self-compassion holds great promise for the counselee, seeing it as a skill that can be learned. The Christian counsellor using the para-centric focus can benefit from REBT, without falling prey to some of the troubling aspects of the system. Christian counselling begins with irrational thoughts that stem from comparing the self to social media images, from there moving to change these irrational thoughts to thoughts focused on Scripture and growing into unconditional self-acceptance.

Ellis refers to the concept self-esteem as an "emotional sickness" because it requires global rating that fails to be aware of the individual as a process of growth. Stating that both high and low self-esteem leads to vulnerability, because it is characterised by conditional self-acceptance and focuses on evaluations such as social comparisons. For these reasons, Ellis is a promoter of unconditional self-acceptance. An important aspect of the REBT theory is promoting self-acceptance in the counselee. Self-acceptance entails that individuals do not evaluate themselves based on behaviours and performances. It is suggested that the counselee accepts the self as God accepts him or her as a fallible self, not based on action or character but on Christ alone. Self-acceptance is a mindful decision where the individual must take responsibility for his or her own life creating their own personal world based on scripture and not social media. Since God is unconditional love (John 4:7), the counselee must abandon self-judgment and self-comparisons by coming into the light of God's presence by means of their thoughts, feelings and actions. This can be done through contemplation which is being alone with the Spirit and letting go of expectations while practising to letting go and receiving all that is good from the Spirit, thus waiting for deeper revelations. Once freed from attachments like social comparisons the counselee is free to glorify God in his or her inner and outer life. Outward actions will reflect through words, thoughts, sight and actions of the counselee. Glorifying God with inner action is done by contemplating on texts, practising to surrender to God and being still in his presence that allows the needed time and space for the Spirit to change thoughts according to the truth of Scripture. The Christian counsellor can incorporate unconditional self-acceptance, self-compassion and contemplating on Scripture by means of *lectio divina* and contemplative prayer which will give rise to feelings of being worthwhile and accepted, compassionate to self and others, seeing self as valuable with the purpose to find meaning and validity in life.

Self-compassion is a positive self-attribute assisting people to better cope with personal suffering and failure. Self-compassionate people understand their problems, weaknesses and shortcomings with kindness and acceptance, thus helping them to better cope with negative events. It calls for forgiveness of self-criticism and judging self and others, recognising shared humanity with others and realising that inadequacies are part of humanity. Self-compassion therefore removes the self-evaluation process of upward social comparison out of the picture by focussing on compassion toward self, boosting feelings of connection to others, instead of comparing self to others. Neutralising the threat system associated with insecure feelings and defensiveness, while activating the caregiving system associated with secure attachment and feelings of safety. Because self-compassion strengthens, resilience makes it an important contribution especially during the adolescent phase because this period is associated with the lowest self-compassion. The self-compassionate adolescent applies adaptive coping skills with positive self-perceptions and experience healthy levels of connections with others, which help him or her with an easier transition into adulthood with lifelong healthy behaviours. The self-compassionate person is further also less prone to shame their bodies or compare with others regarding their appearance, because focus is placed on a kind and accepting approach towards the body.

Nouwen addresses the lies to help people recognise that fragments of their character may be laying claim to the whole of their identity, leading to low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority. This leads to disconnection from Christian faith affirming that people are made in the image of God. It is from this truth that people take on the imprint of the Divine that identity will flow forward from. His question “Who am I?” helps to untangle the perplexity around the notion of the self. The answer is determined by how the person reacts towards circumstances and how much responsibility he or she takes on owning their own emotional world. The question leads to a shift from “Who am I?” or “how do I compare?” with social media images, to “Where have I come from?”

Keating’s framework for finding the true self puts emphasis on contemplative practices. According to Keating’s programme of happiness, the consequences of over identification are getting stuck developmentally, as well as spiritually. The programme works around two questions “Where am I to God, the self and others?” and “who am I?” The recommended practice for the first question is contemplative prayer which marks the beginning of being aware of the Divine presence leading to working on the second question. The quest for the

answer in the second question asks of the believer to drop all roles that the believer might have adopted. For Keating the self must be experienced with unconditional love.

Christian tradition holds two main thoughts, serving as the basis for a mindfulness practice with the potential to lead to unity with God. Early Christianity traditions follow *via negativa*, rooted in apophatic prayer, emphasising mystery and nonlinear route to unity with God. *Via positiviva* is the more contemporary Christian contemplatives emphasising *kataphatic* prayer which is a more linear prayer path to God. The contemplative form of prayer, known as centring prayer is a practice well known by Keating. Contemplative practices improve qualities of empathy and self-compassion. The goal of contemplative prayer is unity with God. Being in unity with God improves the ability to be silent and hear God. Apart from centring prayer the *lectio divina* technique also focuses on developing heightened awareness and self-reflection through meditative reading of texts.

#### **6.4 OBSERVATIONS FROM THE NORMATIVE ASPECTS OF THE STUDY**

The third task of the study focuses on Osmer's normative task where Scripture serves as the basic guideline for answering the question "what does Scripture teach regarding the self-worth of believers?"

##### **6.4.1 Made in His image: Genesis 1:26**

The creation account expresses a rising order of significance with mankind as the final and peak creative act, God is the exclusive cause behind creating the universe and mankind. This message is a reminder to the reader that human life alone is created in the "image" of God, unlike animals mankind is referred to as a direct creation of God, the crown of God's handiwork, which makes humans significant compared to other living beings. Each person is created in God's image just a little lower than God, uniquely individual with equally unique personalities and characteristic features. "*Created in the image of God*" means people carry some elements of God's nature and character, therefore, something of whom God reflects in people. If this reflection has been obscured by for instance social media the person can "clean the mirror" of their soul in order to reflect his image again. Representing God in one's total being, humans must be faithful and adequate representatives. God as the ruler of the universe and as an interacting God desires and values a relationship with mankind, for this reason God gave the gift of freedom to man, since love cannot be forced. The word *bara*

highlights that God alone is the creator of mankind which indicates a unique relationship between God and mankind, giving people their unique worth and intrinsic value. Unconditional self-acceptance and a healthy self-esteem start with being restored back into a love relationship with God the Father through His Son.

#### **6.4.2 An identity as given by God: Psalm 139:14**

This text reveals human existence in all its dimensions in terms of God's knowledge, presence and power, reflecting an understanding of mankind surrounded in divine reality. The prime thought of this text is that every birth is a divine creation, wonderfully complex and marvellous workmanship of God who cares about the detail of each person. Wonderfully made is to be distinct, marked out, distinguished to be wonderful while marvellous means to be extraordinary. Creation affirms that humans are born of love and for love, created in the image of God who is love. Love is thus mankind's source and love is to be their fulfilment. Christ brings about new creation therefore one who is in Christ becomes a new creature, being a Christian then requires a new identity. Loyalty and humility are elements of a new identity which will bring the individual to a closer and more personal relationship with God.

#### **6.4.3 Renewing of the mind: Ephesians 4:23**

Paul appeals to the believers to grow spiritually in order for the Holy Spirit to renew their way of thinking. Renewed thinking patterns will lead to change in attitude and behaviour which will entitle the individual to resist comparing with social media images. Two main messages in this text teaches to put off the old ways of living which only lead to low self-worth and irrational thinking and that the maintenance of rational thinking patterns is a process of continual renewing. The renewal of thoughts takes place "by the Spirit of your mind" which refers to the Spirit renewing the mind. This renewal happens "in the spirit of your mind" meaning it is a process working from the inside. The renewing of the innermost mind is therefore a transformation that happens within the spirit of a person's mind. To be awakened by Scripture is awakening on a much deeper level than simply intellectually or academically. Rather believing scriptural truth starts in the heart of the person and then moves to the intellect (head). Radical transformation of thinking patterns is necessary for God's image and likeness to be fully redeemed in the person. Renewal of the inner person is of continuous nature which can only take place if and when the individual allows him or herself to be renewed.

#### **6.4.4 The new self: Colossians 3:9-10**

In Genesis 1:26 man is (naturally) created in the image of God, in Colossians 3:9-10 man is made (spiritually) in the image of God. Colossians emphasises the central role of Christ as the Lord and the believer's new identity in Christ. Teaching about the drastic change as a result of the cross and resurrection. These texts require of the person to exchange his or her whole nature not just refurbishes it. Knowledge of God and his ways are central to live a life pleasing to God. The richness of knowledge comes as a consequence of the renewal. Renewal refers to the newness of life consisting in knowledge which then transforms the person to the image of God while knowledge refers to an effectual knowledge. "*Renewed in knowledge*" is then to be enlightened through the working of the Spirit which brings the individual to a more effectual knowledge. The renewal of the new person is a continuous process of renewal in and growing in knowledge through the Spirit with the believer focussing on a way of life set on biblical principles.

#### **6.5 CONCLUSION CONCERNING GUIDELINES FOR THE COUNSELLING PROCESS**

Feelings of inferiority, not being good enough and low self-worth is, among other factors, the result of comparing the self to social media images. The consequences of this upward comparisons is criticising the self, not accepting the self, low self-compassion, feeling more discouraged, unhappy, depressed, unfriendly, aggressive and fearful toward others. In time these aspects lead to a diminished reflection of the image of God through people. Irrational thinking withholds people from living the characteristics of God which create a block through which the Spirit cannot enter for renewal to take place.

The pastoral guidelines that were suggested to remove this block, is through unconditional self-acceptance and self-compassion, which flow from the CREBT theory. The REBT and CREBT theories advocate empowerment, free will, self-determination and importantly for the individual to take responsibility for own emotions. In combination with the theory, the counsellor must apply the para-centric focus which is rooted in the Holy Scriptures. Through the suggested pastoral guidelines, the pastoral counsellor works with the counselee to find the biblical answer to the question "Who am I?" in the midst of technological advancements where social media platforms play dominant roles only to grow bigger in the future. "Who am I?" must stand firmly within a biblical context to empower the counselee to know where he or she came from, who created them as well as what is expected of the individual to

remain in a Godly mind-set. Traits of unconditional self-acceptance and self-compassion, reinforced with daily contemplative practices will assist the individual to develop and hold a strong self-worth regardless of messages and or images portrayed through social media platforms. The use of homework exercises is very important as an ongoing practice of gaining knowledge and growing in Christian maturity. It is important for the pastoral counsellor and counselee to realise that change and growth is a continuous process, long-term change is an inner process, mainly resting on faithful contemplative practices. It is both a choice and a responsibility to empower the self through biblical truths.

## **6.6 FINAL CONCLUSION**

From the study it turned out that practical guidelines regarding the negative effect of social media on the believer play an important role in a holistic approach in the prevention of low self-worth. The effects of social media on self-worth are a universal phenomenon on the increase affecting emotional as well as physical well-being of individuals drastically and negatively. Comparing the self to social media images is a great contributor to harsh criticism of the self which leads to the problem of low self-worth, which is the way people lose themselves. The challenge is to assist the individual to find his or her way “home”. Interdisciplinary support from pastoral counsellors, medical doctors and psychologists or psychiatrists is important to help with this issue to empower the person with low self-worth to grow into accepting the self, while showing compassion to the fallible self. How to heal the self from false identities reinforced by social media is the beginning point of entering a sense of dignity, the innate value ascribed to one’s essence of reflecting a good and loving God. The truth of the question “Who am I?” can flow forward when people start with the grace of resting in their Godly identity. To grow spiritually, knowledge of Scripture is compulsory in order for the Holy Spirit to renew thinking patterns, which then lead to a change in attitude and behaviour, which will entitle the counselee to resist comparing with social media images and criticising the self. Pastoral counselling in building self-worth teaches that true knowledge of the self and God can only be known in the light of God through the working of the Spirit. This renewal must be continually renewed in and growing in knowledge. Pastoral counselling further requires that those struggling with low self-worth must start to accept the self and treat the self with compassion. Scripture teaches the individual that God, who is love, created mankind out of love and for love to stand in relationship with them. The counselee must be guided by the pastoral counsellor to accept the self as God

unconditionally accepts and loves each person. From the interpretive task it was deduced that self-compassion and unconditional self-acceptance could provide an alternative to shameful, critical thoughts and feelings towards the self, because focus is shifted on a kinder and more accepting approach towards the self. Thus, strengthening resilience towards self-perceived flaws. Pastoral counselling in self-worth requires from the counselee to take responsibility for growing in biblical knowledge as an ongoing life process by means of practicing contemplative practices and treating the self with compassion and acceptance.

## **6.7 RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING FUTURE RELATED TOPICS**

The following areas for further research are suggested:

- If self-knowledge, on the traits unconditional self-acceptance and self-compassion, on the question “Who am I?”, possesses the potential to positively influence people of all ages, as seen in the study, it justifies a critical reflection about the implications of these traits within theological studies, parenting practices, schools’ curriculums and workplace environments. If self-compassion is a trait that can be learned, then all ages are susceptible to change vulnerable self-worth to healthy self-worth. How then, can school curriculums be adjusted to guide the teachers to inspire the children to be self-compassionate and unconditionally accept the self? For children the quality of their relationship with God reflects the quality of parental relationships. How can the parents, schools and churches support and educate the parents to be examples of these traits to their children in everyday life? How can self-compassion and acceptance influence the morale in the workplace environment? How can companies introduce and maintain these traits?
- In what way will different temperaments be resistant or vulnerable towards social media images? For example: are extroverts who not only recharge through social interaction with people, but also interact with strangers on social media platforms more vulnerable to all the portrayed “perfect” images which may lead to comparing the self to others? Can introverts who prefer being with small groups of people that they are familiar with, recharging by means of alone time, be less vulnerable in the exposing to social media images?

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**ADDENDUM – ETHICAL  
APPROVAL LETTER OF  
STUDY**



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**ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY**

Based on approval by **Research Ethics Committee of Theology (TREC)** on **10/09/2018**, the North-West University Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-RERC) hereby **approves** your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-RERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

<b>Project title:</b> Pastoral counselling guidelines to address the negative effect of social media on the self-worth of believers.	
<b>Project Leader/Supervisor:</b> Dr AL du Plessis	
<b>Student:</b> M. Rossouw	
<b>Ethics number:</b>	<b>N W U - 0 0 6 5 0 - 1 8 - A 6</b>
<small>(Status: 3 = Submitted; 4 = Exp/Submitted; 5 = Approved; 6 = Withdrawn; 7 = Rejected; 8 = Suspended; 9 = Cancelled)</small>	
<b>Application Type:</b> Full Single Application	
<b>Commencement date:</b> 2018-09-01	<b>Expiry date:</b> 2019-08-31
<b>Risk:</b>	<b>Minimal</b>

**Special conditions of the approval (if applicable):**

**General conditions:**

*While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:*

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the TREC:
  - annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project;
  - without any delay in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project;
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the TREC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date, a new application must be made to the NWU-RERC via TREC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-RERC and TREC reserves the right to:
  - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project;
  - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
    - any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected;
    - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the TREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
    - the required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately; and/ or
    - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- TREC can be contacted for further assistance via [Rudy.Denton@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Rudy.Denton@nwu.ac.za).

The TREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU-RERC or TREC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

**Prof Rudy Denton**  
Chair NWU Theology Research Ethics Committee

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