

# Global Connections: Session 3 Mindfulness: Cultural Intelligence & Relationships

- Mindfulness can help our cultural intelligence, and our relationships with God and others
- What is the number one thing that negatively impacts our relationships, whether partner, husband, wife, parents, child, friend, colleague?

# Cultural and religious cruise control

- The problem is that in our everyday life our patterns of behaviour are guided by cultural norms out of our awareness. This being on autopilot culturally is what Thomas calls 'cultural cruise control'. Cultural cruise control is 'running your life on the basis of your built-in cultural assumptions'. David C. Thomas & Kerr Inkson, *Cultural Intelligence: Living and Working Globally*, Second Edition (Williston: Berrett: Koehler Publishers, 2009), 45, 46

# Cultural and religious cruise control

- When you bring together knowledge, mindfulness and behaviour, argues Thomas, you get CQ. (cultural intelligence)
- David C. Thomas, 'Domain and Development of Cultural Intelligence: the Importance of Mindfulness', 81.
- Just as when we can run our lives on cultural cruise control, so we can run them on religious cruise control

# Mindfulness and your autopilot

- This automaticity can become a huge problem ‘as you cede more and more control of your life to the autopilot...’
- ‘You need to learn to close down some of the ‘programs’ that have been left running in the background of your mind.’
- ‘You need to relearn how to focus your awareness on one thing at a time.’

# Overcoming bias and discrimination

- We need to build communities that are a foretaste of heaven – where people from every tongue tribe and nation gather
- ‘Our eyes are not only viewers, but also projectors that are running a second story over the picture we see in front of us all the time.’ Jim Carrey

# Awareness breaks down implicit bias

- Mindfulness can help people ‘think directly about the target of discrimination in various ways that made them think beyond the automatic stereotype of the target.’ Adam Lueke & Bryan Gibson, “Brief Mindfulness Meditation Reduces Discrimination,” *Psychology of Consciousness* 3 no. 1 (2016) 35.

# Stress and relationships

- Stress damages our relationships:
- Our relationship with our own self, with others, in intimate relationships, as parents, with God.
- Christianity says we were created to be relational, evolutionary psychologists say we evolved to be relational.
- Relationship is central to our everyday life.

# It's all about relationship

‘From the perspective of Trinity as interpersonal communion, human life in Christ by the Spirit is a call to loving communion with God, others and every living creature...a person is one toward-and-for-the-other in relationship.’ (*Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, Trinity and Spirituality*, p. 625)

# **Cognitive neuroscience of attention & awareness offers a mindful map**

- The cognitive neuroscience of attention and awareness (mindfulness) offers a mindful map of how our minds work in relationships, enabling us to handle stress better through mindful awareness practices.

# Mindfulness defined

- Williams and Kabat-Zinn define mindfulness as awareness itself, ‘Indeed, in essence, it is awareness itself, an entirely different and one might say, larger capacity than thought, since any and all thought and emotion can be held in awareness.’
- J. Mark G. Williams & Jon Kabat-Zinn, “Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning, Origins, and Multiple Applications at the Intersection of Science and Dharma,” in *Mindfulness: Diverse Perspectives on its Meaning, Origins, and Applications*, eds. J. Mark G. Williams & Jon Kabat-Zinn (London: Routledge, 2013).
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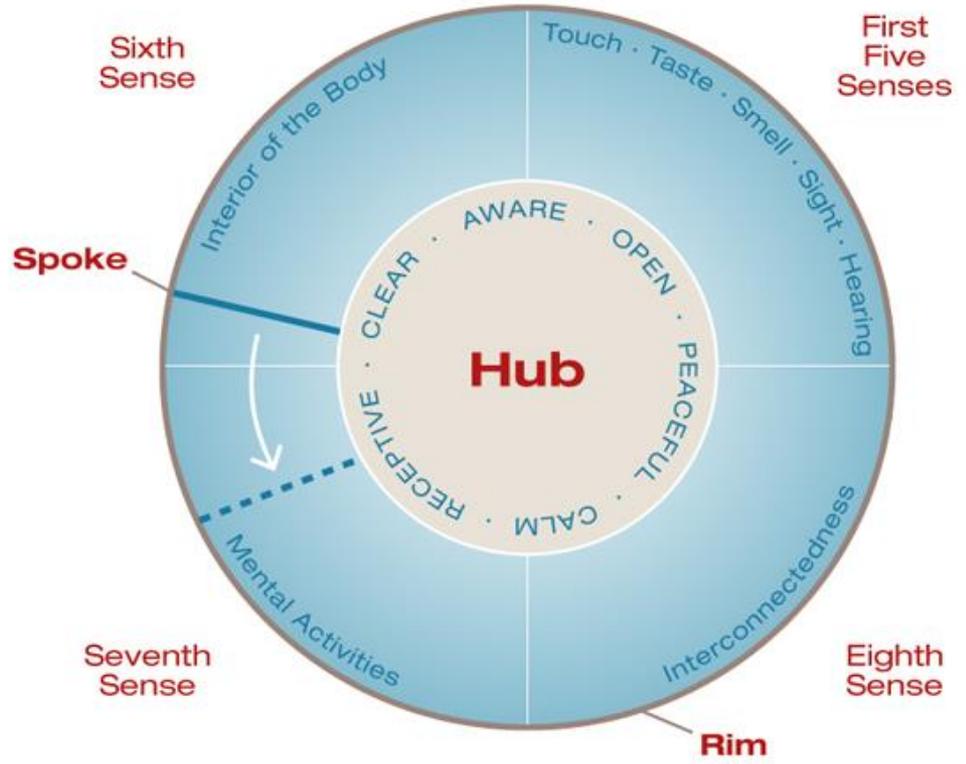
# Mindfulness in secular psychology

- “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally”. Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever you go, there you are: Mindfulness meditation in everyday life* (New York: Hyperion, 1994), 4, quoted in Zindel V. Segal, J. Mark G. Williams & John D. Teasdale, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression* (New York: Guilford Press, 2002) 40.

# What is mindfulness?

- What is mindfulness? It is enhanced self-regulation, involving: attention regulation, Body awareness, emotion regulation, including reappraisal, exposure, extinction and reconsolidation, and a change in perspective on the self.
- These interact closely ‘to constitute a process of enhanced self-regulation.’
- Britta K. Holzel, et al., “How Does Mindfulness Meditation Work? Proposing Mechanisms of Action From a Conceptual and Neural Perspective,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 6, no. 6(2011), 539, accessed May 25, 2016. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1745691611419671>.

# Mindfulness as Relationship (Dan Siegel)



# Automatic Relating

- The first pattern that mindfulness research maps out for us, is the automaticity of much our relating.
- We are on autopilot much of the time, and we react automatically to people in certain predictable ways
- A breathing space can help us become aware of our automatic relating

# Mindfulness opens door for relationship with God

- ‘Science shows that mindfulness can be the gateway to spiritual discovery.’ (Miller, 116).
- Mindfulness is embodied, relational awareness.
- ‘It is merely to assert that for human beings in this world the transcendent is accessed and the spiritual life is expressed exclusively through the medium of our material bodies.’
- Alister E. McGrath, *The Open Secret – A New Vision for Natural Theology*, 82.

# The key interpersonal skills

- Mindfulness research into the therapeutic relationship between a therapist and a counsellor shows that mindfulness cultivates the key interpersonal skills we need.
- The therapeutic relationship mirrors the relationships we all have – including cross-cultural ones. They are to be healed, and the same skills are needed.
- ‘The kingdom of God is creation healed.’

# Attention/compassion/empathy

- Remember your ability for focused attention and open awareness, within yourself and others
- ‘The therapist qualities that correlate most highly with client outcomes are those relating to empathy, compassion and understanding (Cooper, 2008).’ Meg Barker, *Mindful Counselling and Psychotherapy* (London: Sage, 2013), 38.
- ‘Research has found that mindfulness training increases empathy. This may well work by improving self-empathy and self-compassion, which has a knock-on effect of improving our empathy and compassion for others (Shapiro & Izett, 2008). Barker, 38.

# The ability to sit with difficult material

- ‘The way we relate to tough emotions, thoughts and sensations during mindfulness practice is to welcome them with acceptance and curiosity, not trying to eradicate or hide from them...We can become a witness to our feelings and how we relate to them, rather than becoming embroiled...’ Barker, 40.
- salt and water metaphor (affect tolerance)

# Self-awareness

- ‘An important part of this is awareness of our own motivations as a therapist. Mindfulness practice can help us recognize, for example, our desire for validation that we are a ‘good therapist’, or your yearning to help people who remind us of ourselves.’ Barker, 41.

# The science of mindful relationships

- Neuroplasticity – we can change the structure and activity of the brain, in terms of how we relate to people for the better
- This is through practices
- ‘Unfortunately most of the time we are ‘practising’ default mode.’ (Dr Richard Chambers & Margie Ulbrick, *Mindful Relationships* (Exisle Publishing, 2016), 26).
- Don’t forget the amygdala and Fight/Flight reaction
- This is often explored in Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB)

# Neuroplasticity & Relationships

- ‘A Crucial conceptual feature of IPNB is a dynamic interactive, reciprocal relationship between the mind, the brain, and relationships. This process is referred to as *neuroplasticity*, which asserts that the brain can be altered and new neurocircuitry can be developed experience (i.e. by training the mind, and through interactive relationship experiences, or both; Schwartz & Begley, 2002).’
- Tim Clinton & Gary Sibcy, “Christian Counselling, Interpersonal Neurobiology, and the Future,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 40, no. 2 (2012 )142.

# Relational transformation

- ‘The notion that relationship qualities can have powerful neurobiological effects fits well with a Christian worldview, demonstrating that humans are designed for intimate relationships with God and one another.’
- Clinton et al, 142.
- E.g. changing our attachment style

# We also have a tend-and-befriend circuit

- Like Daniel Siegel's eight sense we have relational capacities, sometimes called 'theory of mind' where we can step into other people's shoes and understand something of what they are experiencing. (See Chambers et al, p. 30).

# Loving kindness meditations

- The Ananias Prayer: may the love of Christ take hold of me, may the light of Christ shine in my heart, may the love of Christ flow through me like a river
- Secular meditations: may I be happy, may I be healthy, may I be peaceful, may I be safe from harm
- Say them for family/friends, strangers, enemies