

# Navigating Life's Conflicts

## 4. Integrating our Perspective and Perception Tensions

We all agree that conflicts are inevitable in our current environment given the limitations that our embodied existence within a physical universe places upon us. And we all acknowledge that we learned the realities of conflicts within relationships at a very early age.

Of course, what we as two-year olds did not realise back then, was that their parental perspective was much larger and wiser than our two-year old perspective, and that their concern was more for our safety than about any perceived deprivation. This fundamental life-lesson that we first encountered as two-year olds has continued on into our adult years, and most of us are still grappling with it in one way or another.

This is all about beginning to understand the difference between our perspectives and our perceptions. This lesson involves us recognising our need to learn the skill of negotiating our way through the emotional white-water between our perspectives and our perceptions of our life-experiences in relation with those of others that we interact with.

So to get our thinking started, what do we mean by the differences between our own and others' perspectives and perceptions of life experiences?

### *Perspective & Perception*



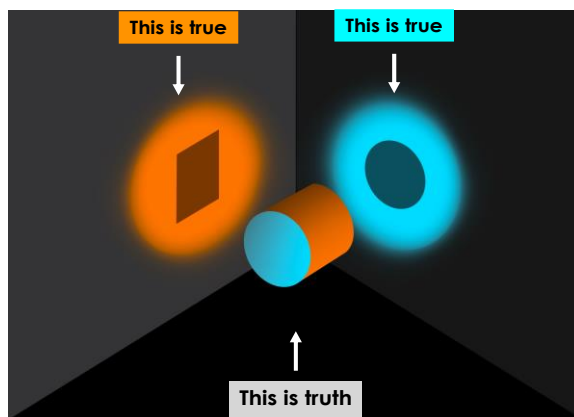
What are they and how are they different in effect?

Perspective:

Is where you stand in relation to an object, person, or situation.

Perception:

Is how you interpret what you see.



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*Perspective* – Put simply, our perspective is referring to 'our point of view' –  
It is a *positional* reality – from where I stand this is what I see!

- Picture a car accident happening on an intersection, and four people witness it each standing on one of the four corners. They have four different perspectives of what happened, and each may think things the others did not.

*Perception* – This is 'our interpretation' of what we *perceive* we are seeing after reflection.  
It is an *interpretational* understanding – it's what I 'believe' I was seeing

- Back to the car accident, each will interpret the situation on the basis of what they think they saw. They could all potentially be different, and not necessarily accurate!

## **The 'Seek first to Understand, then to be Understood' Principle**

The constant human shortcoming of limited perspective:

We never see the complete picture – we simply cannot see into another person's mind  
We tend judge ourselves by our motives, but we usually judge others by their actions.

Our big problem:

Our perspective of other people's motives is always limited, unless we take the trouble to better understand what their motives were.

Another way of looking at our 'perspective', our situation, is to think about our 'context'.  
Context is also 'positional' but incorporates a broader network of relationships and situations.

- Tell Covey's story of the man and someone's kids mucking around on the train.

Again, the key principle of 'seek first to understand, then to be understood' comes in!!!

## **A New Testament Example of Differing Perspectives and Perceptions**

Let's look at the interactions between Jesus and the Lawyer in Luke 10:25-27:

<sup>25</sup> *On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'* <sup>26</sup> *'What is written in the Law?'* he replied. *'How do you read it?'* <sup>27</sup> *He answered, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'*  
<sup>28</sup> *'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.'*

<sup>29</sup> *But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?'* <sup>30</sup> *In reply Jesus said: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead.'* <sup>31</sup> *A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.* <sup>32</sup> *So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.* <sup>33</sup> *But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was;*

*and when he saw him, he took pity on him.<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. "Look after him," he said, "and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have."*

*<sup>36</sup> 'Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' <sup>37</sup> The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'*

## **Integrating our Perspectives and Perceptions has Wide Applications**

This applies to almost every area of life because life is about relationships and different roles automatically create their own agendas:

Governments – Think for a moment about our Commonwealth and the State Governments:

The Commonwealth must have a bigger perspective than the States, since they are responsible for the whole country.

Each of the State Premiers have an agenda that suits their State's perceived needs, but it also needs to fit within the context of where they sit in the bigger national picture.

Marriage – Husbands and wives always have their own agendas, because their perspectives are different, but for a mutually beneficial life, they need to be looking for harmony on their shared common ground.

Business – Management and workforce always have different perspectives – management looking for maximum profit at minimum possible expense; whereas, workers want the maximum possible income for the least amount of effort. But for good outcomes both need to find agreement on their common ground within their bigger purposes.

These are all relational contexts within which we have to learn to differentiate between our own perspectives and resulting perceptions and those of the others that we are interacting with – this a fundamental life-lesson that we are all constantly learning.

Jesus is the 'gold standard' when it comes to conflicts within relationships. Paul expressed this point so well as a challenge for us to learn to apply personally:

*<sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*

*<sup>5</sup> In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: (Phil 2:3-5)*

Jesus' mindset was – *"Father, not my will but your will be done."* (Matt 26:39)

As Paul discovered, *<sup>11</sup> ...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in*

*plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength.*  
4:11-13)

(Phil

It's not about letting the other person always have their way, although it may feel like that at times; and it might even require that at times; but the real secret is being able to see God's bigger agenda, and then learning to live out of the contentment of his kingdom context!!!