



Choice Theory

I thought to share this information as an 'interesting to know' bit of information. It might help you identify areas in your life that might need "re-balancing," especially with regard to needs. Often, areas in our lives are out of balance and will affect our behaviour, responses and expectations from others.

Let us first have a look at the Word of God. There are numerous verses that emphasise human free will and the ability to make choices. Here are a few of them:

Deuteronomy 30v19-20 "I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Joshua 24v15 "And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Proverbs 1v29-31 "Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies."

Matthew 7v13-14 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Revelation 3v20 "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

These verses emphasise God's invitation to choose between life and death, blessings and curses, and to make decisions that lead to salvation and eternal life. They highlight the idea that God grants us the freedom to make choices and encourages us to choose His ways for our ultimate good.

Choice Theory¹, developed by Dr. William Glasser, is the explanation of human behaviour based on internal motivation. He explains that our behaviour is chosen as we continually attempt to meet one or more of the five basic needs that are part of our genetic structure. Understanding these needs can help us build and maintain better relationships with important people in our lives and lead happier, more satisfying lives. This can also be tied into attachment and the childhood unmet needs that develop due to wounding that become adult unmet needs. These are also potential areas of exploitation by the enemy. He will use our base

¹ *Choice Theory Toolbox PDF | PDF | Habits | Psychology.* (n.d.). Scribd. Retrieved from <https://www.scribd.com/document/342643378/Choice-Theory-Toolbox-pdf>

needs and desires against us if they are not filtered through the godly blueprint for these areas and how they should be met.

Whenever there is a void, there is potential for the enemy to use it to fill it with his desires; he can use it as a trap to take us captive or get us into situations we do not want to be in.

Choice Theory Basic Needs

1. **Survival** - This need is a physiological need, which includes the need for food, shelter, and safety. Because we have genetic instructions to survive, not only as individuals but as a species, this includes the need to reproduce.
2. **Love & Belonging** - This need and the following three needs are psychological needs. The need to love and belong includes the need for relationships and social connections, to give and receive affection and to feel part of a group.
3. **Power** - To be powerful is to achieve, to be competent, to be skilled, to be recognised for our achievements and skill, to be listened to and to have a sense of self-worth.
4. **Freedom** - The need to be free is the need for independence and autonomy, to have choices and to be able to take control of the direction of one's life.
5. **Fun** - The need for fun is the need to find pleasure, play, and laugh. Should you doubt that this is as important as any of the others, imagine a life without hope of any enjoyment. Glasser links the need for fun to learning. All of the higher animals (dogs, dolphins, primates, etc.) play. As they play, they learn important life skills. Human beings are no different. It is true that "play is a child's work."

The Ten Axioms of Choice Theory

1. **The Only Person Whose Behavior We Can Control Is Our Own:** This asserts that individuals have control over their choices and behaviours but cannot directly control the choices and behaviours of others. You can influence others but can't make them do something against their will.
2. **All We Do Is Behave:** This suggests that everything we do, including our thoughts and feelings, is a form of behaviour. It emphasises that our actions are a result of our choices.
3. **All Behavior Is Purposeful:** This posits that every behaviour, even seemingly irrational or destructive ones, has a purpose or fulfils a need for the individual. Understanding this purpose is key to addressing and changing behaviour.
4. **The Quality World:** Individuals have a unique mental image of their "Quality World," which includes people, things, beliefs, and experiences they value and desire. Our behaviour is driven by our efforts to fulfil the pictures in our Quality World.
5. **The Perceived World:** We all have our own perception of reality, and it may differ from objective reality. Our actions are based on our perception of the world, not necessarily on the way the world truly is.
6. **The Total Behavior Concept:** This states that human behaviour is comprised of four interconnected components: acting, thinking, feeling, and physiology (bodily reactions). Changes in one component can influence the others.
7. **Behaviour Is Chosen:** Individuals can choose their behaviours, even if external circumstances limit them. This emphasises personal responsibility for one's actions.
8. **We Can Only Satisfy Our Genetic Needs Through Our Behavior:** This highlights that humans have certain innate needs (survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun) that can only be satisfied through their behaviour.
9. **All Long-Lasting Psychological Problems Are Relationship Problems:** This suggests that many psychological issues, such as anxiety or depression, are rooted in unsatisfying or problematic relationships with oneself and others.

These axioms form the foundation of Choice Theory and explain why people make their choices and how they can take greater control over their lives and well-being. It emphasises personal responsibility, self-awareness, and the importance of understanding one's needs and values.

In a secular view, the quality world we build and the pictures we have for it will often be one that satisfies *our* desires for life. As a believer, this picture should be informed by the plans and purposes of God for your life and how those will be fulfilled. Putting God's plan for your life first will meet your desires. If we do not yet have a quality picture from God, it can make us feel a bit aimless and wonder if there is more to life. We never really feel satisfied with life. There is always a search for more.

Quality World

An important part of our Perceived World is the Quality World. Dr. Glasser describes the Quality World as a "personal picture album" of all the people, things, ideas, and ideals we have discovered to increase the quality of our lives. While the Basic Human Needs are the general motivation for all human behaviour, the Quality World is the specific motivation. The Basic Human Needs describe what we need, and the Quality World pictures detail how we meet those needs. The Basic Human Needs are universal; our Quality Worlds are unique.

The pictures in our Quality World:

1. Meet one or more of our Basic Human Needs - one of those being the desires of God in our hearts.
2. Are changing and changeable.
3. Are unique.
4. Often conflict with each other.
5. Vary in levels of intensity.
6. Vary in levels of attainability.

Perceived World

Dr. Glasser explains that our perceptual system is the only way we experience the real world. Information about the real world comes first through our sensory system: our eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skin. Next, these sensations pass through our perceptual system, beginning with what Glasser calls our total knowledge filter, representing everything we know or have experienced. When information passes through our knowledge filter, one of three things happens:

1. We decide that the information is meaningless to us, and the perception stops there.
2. We do not immediately recognise the information, but it may be meaningful to us, so we have some incentive to gain more information.
3. The information is meaningful to us and, therefore, passes through the next filter, the valuing filter.

When information passes through the valuing filter, we place one of three values on it. If it is something we have learned and is needs-satisfying, we place a positive value on it. If it is something we have learned and hinders our ability to meet our needs, we place a negative value on it. If it neither helps us nor hinders us in meeting our needs, we may place little or no value on it; it remains neutral. Because we all come to every situation with different

knowledge and experience, and therefore, different values, our perceptions of the real world are different. Therefore, we don't all live in the same "real world." We live our lives in our Perceived Worlds. By "values", Dr. Glasser means that which is important to us, not necessarily being limited to moral or ethical values.

Our Perceived Worlds are, for each of us, our reality. Because they are made up of perceptions, our Perceived Worlds are:

- Highly subjective: based on culture, education, experience, gender, age, etc.
- Unique
- Subject to constant change (new information, new experiences = new perceptions)
- Frequently inaccurate

Often, our perceptions are chosen. We can frequently choose to perceive people, places, and situations in a number of ways (consider cognitive distortions). For example, in driving to work, I might choose to think of the person who just pulled out in front of me as an inconsiderate jerk who is intentionally ruining my morning and feeling all the stress that that perception carries with it. Or I could think of the person as someone like myself who just made a mistake in judgment because he/she is in such a hurry. Then, I could relax so as not to do the same. In choosing our perceptions, it might be a good idea to ask ourselves which perception is better for us to hold.

Comparing Place

The Comparing Place describes a process that happens continuously in the brain. It is happening as you this. What you just experienced as you read the last sentence will help you understand the concept of The Comparing Place.

As we experience life, we constantly compare what we want (our Quality World pictures) with what we've got (our Perceived World). When the two match fairly well, we feel good. When there is a mismatch, as there probably was when you read the sentence above, you feel a degree of frustration, depending on how important the Quality World picture is to you. As Glasser terms it, that frustration signal is felt as an urge to behave in a way that will help us get more of what we want. As believers, we can often feel this as our seasons change. We feel frustrated with where we are at and know there is more. This is our opportunity to ask God what is next for us and what we must do to accomplish that.

As you read the sentence above, you probably felt a slight frustration signal when you read, "It is happening as you this." What you probably want (your Quality World picture) when you read something is for it to make sense. Since the word "read" is missing from the sentence, you may have experienced a frustration signal, which may have urged you to go back and reread the sentence. Once you did that, you probably realised a word was missing, and your brain supplied a word that would make sense in that sentence. Once you did that, the frustration signal disappeared. Glasser likens the Comparing Place to a set of scales.

When your scales are in balance, when what you want is what you have, you continue to do what you've been doing. This can also be a place of complacency and stagnation. When your scales get out of balance, you feel the frustration signal, the urge to behave. Consider that sometimes it is God who urges us out of that place of comfort to seek more from Him.

Total Behavior

One of Dr. Glasser's major premises is that *"All behaviour is purposeful."* That is, ALL of our behaviour is our best attempt at the time, given the resources at our disposal (knowledge, skills, etc.) to meet our needs. Another way of putting it is all of our behaviour is an attempt at making the real world conform to the pictures in our Quality World.

Most of the time, we choose behaviours that Glasser terms organised behaviours. These are behaviours that we are familiar with that we have used before. For example, when I want to meet my need for fun, I will plan an excursion day with my daughter, and we will explore and find some new galleries or quirky coffee shops to visit. That is a behaviour that has worked for me in the past.

If we do not have an organised behaviour immediately available, or organised behaviours that have worked in the past are not working in the current situation, we are capable of figuring out new behaviours.

Glasser terms this process reorganising - this is our creativity, which is always going on, whether we decide to use it or not.

According to Dr. Glasser, all behaviour is Total Behaviour, made up of four components:

1. Acting
2. Thinking
3. Feeling
4. Physiology

All four components are present all the time, and we name our current behaviour by the most obvious component. Like the wheels of a car, if one wheel changes direction or speed, the others follow.

For example, if I am going for a run, the **acting** component is the most obvious. But while I am running, I may be thinking a number of things: *"What a beautiful day!"* Or, *"I love these new running shoes."* Or, *"I wonder if I can make it in a certain time."* I also feel something: exhilaration, possibly gladness, or maybe even a little fear. Simultaneously, my physiology is pumped up. My heart rate is up, my muscles are working, and I'm sweating. This would be my total running behaviour.

All four components are present, but we name the behaviour after the most noticeable component, acting.

In contrast, a behaviour named after the **feeling** component might be being angry. But while I am angry, I may be thinking, *"How could this person treat me this way!"* I may be doing something like venting to someone or pacing up and down. And my physiology could include muscle tension and shallow breathing, among other things.

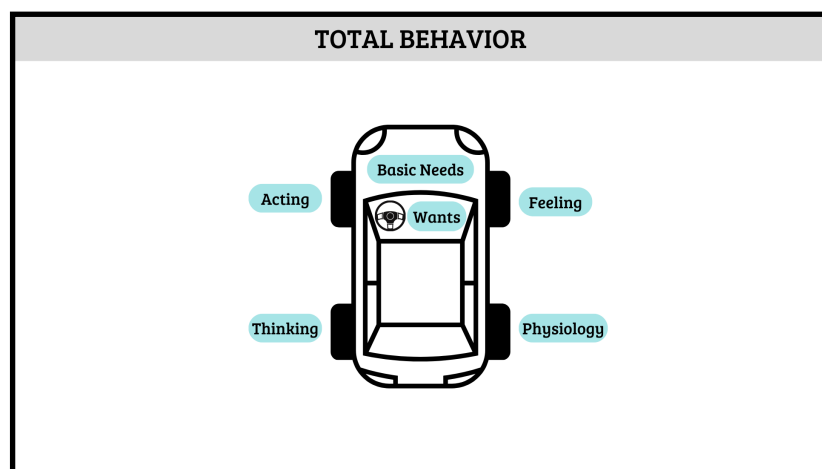
A behaviour named after the **thinking** component is meditating on the Word. While I am meditating, my acting behaviour is sitting. My feeling component would be contentment, and my physiology would be slowed down.

Finally, a behaviour named after the **physiological** component is shivering. While I'm shivering, I might be feeling frustrated. I might be thinking, *"Why didn't I wear a jacket?"* And I might be doing anything to get warmer, running in place, cuddling up to someone, etc.

All four of these components occur all the time, and when we change one of the components, the other three change accordingly. According to Glasser, we choose all of our behaviours. The component we have the most control over is our acting. The next most easily controlled component is our thinking. Therefore, if we want to change how we feel emotionally or physically, the most effective thing to do is to change what we are doing. If we can't change what we are doing because of the situation, we can change what we are thinking.

For example, if you have experienced frustration most of the day, you may be feeling angry, your body may be tense, you may be thinking, "I hate my job!" and you may be complaining about it to a co-worker. The acting component of your behaviour, complaining, may not be helping you feel better physically or emotionally. So, if you change that component and, perhaps, take a brisk walk, you will most likely change what you're thinking, which will help you feel better emotionally and physically.

The car illustration gives a visual representation of the operation of the components. The driver has direct control over the front wheels, and the back wheels will follow. The steering wheel will take the car in the direction it needs to go. Under the hood is the engine that powers the car. Our basic needs "power up" our car.



Let's dive in.

Our responses rooted in our past experiences can be hard to change, but once we recognise them, it becomes easier. This is why we must be intentional about being self-aware.

An example from my own life. My experiences influenced my thoughts and actions for a long time. My default was to feel intimidated by those who had more authority than me or whom I perceived to have more authority than me. This was a consequence of childhood trauma. This would instil fear into me; my brain would shut down, my body would go cold, my heart would start pounding, and my mouth would dry out. I wouldn't question anything - I would back down or come into agreement with the person. I wouldn't consider they may be wrong and that I can challenge that. After the fact, I would have an internal conflict about it but be unsure if I was right or wrong and if maybe they were right and I was the one at fault. As a result, I would make decisions I was not totally onboard with out of fear or insecurity.

Now, what happens when the person who is calling you out is a spiritual leader or someone you have respected in a position of authority? What do you do? This happened to me about 16 years ago. I was called to the pastor's office but was not warned about why. The moment I stepped foot into the office, not even in the privacy of his office but the office where others were also working, I was confronted with, "Did I give you permission to do so and so?" It pertained to a situation I was in during the time when my husband and I were in a time of separation during our marriage. I was coming to terms with things from my past I had to deal with; the separation was traumatic, and the emotional turmoil of everything was huge. On top of this, I was called out without all the facts on the table or consideration for where I was

emotionally during that time. The outcome of this led to me making a decision that, to this day, when I think of it, I would not have liked to make. It took many years to work out the effects that took place due to that. If it had been different, things might not have been as traumatic and altered many lives and paths. It also took some time before I realised why I had responded the way I did to that “threat”.

The bottom line is that we need to deal with our past hurts and the consequences of that in our lives. It will help us make better choices, evaluate situations through different lenses, and be stronger as men and women of God. I could have challenged what was put on me by that leader, but I felt so much shame and the feeling that I had let God down I didn't know what to do with it. In my mind, the only solution was to right a perceived wrong. I had to appease the person - not God - the person that was threatening me. But inadvertently, it is about our relationship with God. At that time, my identity in Christ was something I had never considered fully - my identity was rooted in who I thought I was through the lens of all the mistakes I had made. I had to keep righting wrongs instead of accepting God's grace and that He understands. Find who you are in Christ before the enemy uses your past against your destiny.

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