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Healing and hope: using life-coaching principles within the context of pastoral care

Abstract

This article is the product of a qualitative, trans-disciplinary study that aimed to explore the use of life-coaching principles within the context of pastoral care. The research relied on the theoretical underpinnings of pastoral theology and life coaching. The problem that the article considers is that, while pastors are equipped with counselling skills, most of them are not equipped with the life-coaching skills necessary to assist people with personal and spiritual growth. We argue that pastors can enhance the pastoral care process by using basic life-coaching principles. Furthermore, we propose a pastoral care process that, on the one hand, focuses on counselling that addresses the coachee's past as part of a healing process and, on the other hand, on life-coaching principles that look to the future while encouraging growth, as well as personal and spiritual development.

Keywords: *Counselling; flourishing; healing; pastor; Pastoral care; personal growth; spiritual growth*

Opsomming

GENESING EN HOOP: DIE GEBRUIK VAN LEWENSAFRIGTINGSBEGINSELS BINNE DIE KONTEKS VAN PASTORALE SORG

Hierdie artikel is die produk van 'n kwalitatiewe, trans-dissiplinêre studie wat ten doel gestel het om lewensafrigtingsbeginsels binne die konteks van pastorale sorg te ondersoek. Die beginsels van Pastorale Teologie en Lewensafrigting het die vorm die teoretiese onderbou van die studie. Die artikel besin oor die probleem dat, alhoewel pastors oor beradingsvaardighede beskik, hulle meestal nie met die nodige lewensafrigtingsvaardighede toegerus is nie en dus nie bekwaam genoeg is om mense met persoonlike en geestelike groei te help nie. Ons redeneer dat pastors die proses van pastorale sorg kan versterk deur van basiese lewensvaardigheidsbeginsels gebruik te maak. Verder stel ons voor dat die proses van pastorale sorg nie net fokus op berading waar die persoon wat berading ontvang se verlede in ag geneem word nie, maar ook op lewensafrigtingsbeginsels wat kyk na die toekoms, terwyl groei, asook persoonlike en spirituele ontwikkeling aangemoedig word.

Sleutelwoorde: *Pastor, pastorale sorg, berading, lewensafrigtings, heling, persoonlike en geestelike groei.*

1. Introduction

This article reports the findings from a trans-disciplinary study that considered two main concepts, namely *pastoral care* and *life coaching*. The common understanding of pastoral care, which is facilitated during a process of counselling, is that it focuses on a healing process; a process during which a pastor assists a person in dealing with historical problems. The life coach is generally not concerned with the past or with the healing of the past, but rather focuses on actions that will inform change and growth in the coachee's future. While pastoral care normally focuses on the process of healing a person from the consequences brought about by events that happened to them in the past, life coaching aims to guide people through a process that would enable them to set clear and specific goals for the future. However, the 21st-century's

approach to personal well-being underscores a holistic approach that considers not only a human being's past, but also his future. The research problem that emerged from the need for a holistic approach was: How can life-coaching principles be used within the context of pastoral care? In this article we argue that, by combining the principles and concepts used in life coaching with pastoral counselling, it becomes possible for the pastor to assist a person through counselling regarding issues from the past, while also helping the person to grow and to reach new spiritual goals during the process of life coaching.

2. Conceptual framework

Existing literature on pastoral theology and life coaching constituted the conceptual framework of this study since the data gathered from such literature supported attempts to comprehend the coaching processes in life coaching, as well as the counselling processes in pastoral care. McDermott *et al.* (2006:8) describe life coaching as a '[c]onversational yet focused discipline that supports people in learning how to lead and manage themselves more effectively in relation to their issues, their resources, their contexts and their potential'. Collins (2001:58) describes the essence of life coaching as consisting of three parts, namely 'getting a handle on where the person is at present, focusing on what he or she wants in the future, and finding ways to get there'.

2.1 Pastoral Theology

Thurneysen (1962) views the Bible as the basis for understanding pastoral theology (see also Tidball, 1997:233). Therefore, when discussing the theological basis of a pastoral care process that uses life-coaching principles, one would start with Scripture. However, the use of the Bible does not guarantee a pastoral theological approach to a pastoral care process that makes use of life-coaching principles. A reformed understanding of *sola scriptura* regards the Bible as the basis for our pastoral theological context, but more important is our hermeneutical focus (Gerkin, 1991:12). For this hermeneutical focus of pastoral care we should look at four pastoral theological guidelines to show us the way forward.

The first theological guideline is about the *care of the human soul (Cura Animarum)*, where the theological focus is on healing and change (Louw, 2014:2). Louw (2015b:4) sees the *caring of the soul* as an important theme in pastoral care because it focuses on the resurrection of Christ. *Cura animarum* or caring of the soul (Louw, 2015b:4) is an important aspect when discussing life-coaching principles in pastoral care because it centers on the renaming of God or changing the perception that people have about God. It is also about reframing of ideas meaning that a person's expectations of life can be changed by giving them hope and new direction. Lastly it is about new or soulful attitudes, meaning that a person's approach to life will be influenced by his relationship with God not only for the afterlife but also for this life (eschatology). The context of *Cura animarum* or care should have a consequence not only for the counselling context but in a life-coaching context it will incorporate not only healing, but also growing and flourishing.

The second theological guideline is a new focus on *Christology and eschatology*. Christology with its focus on soteriology is perceived as the baseline for new possibilities in life and eschatology puts the focus on hope within the Kingdom of God. The importance is that this hope goes above and beyond history (Purves, 2004:128). This approach will help a person become that which he *already is in Christ* (Louw, 1998:19). Incorporating eschatology in the pastoral care process is to promote a future and hope for this life (Purves, 2004:128) and not only for life eternal. Using life-coaching principles in pastoral care means that a person can be inspired to plan goals for a new life that is according to his status in Christ as a child of God (Romans 8:14–17).

The third theological principle is *Christian spirituality*. Christian spirituality means that we are able to experience the presence and movement of the Spirit of God here and now (De Jongh van Arkel, 2000:153). In a pastoral care process Christian spirituality is in the first place and primarily the work of the *Holy Spirit*. The work of the Holy Spirit is to guide a person in his heart and mind by a process of motivation, teaching and reminding. The work of the Holy Spirit also focuses on what Louw (2011:6) describes as the theological categories of grace, forgiveness and reconciliation, as well as resurrection and hope that is supported by fellowship, service and sacrament. It is also important for the pastoral coaching process that this spirituality is about a life that is determined by norms and values (Louw, 2015a:68), as well as fulfilment and hope (Herold, 2008:193).

The fourth theological principle is *human flourishing*. The concept of human flourishing can relate back to an understanding of eschatology that has implications for the present life as well as a holistic Christian spirituality, which can focus on wellbeing and human flourishing for all (McClure, 2008:198). Human flourishing covers every aspect of life and therefore one of its basic foundations is public theology because it has to do with the flourishing of the individual in regard to life's issues regarding public, social and economic policy (Cameron *et al.*, 2012:xvii). In the context of pastoral care, human flourishing can be the explanation of the biblical concept of abundance as we find it in John 10:10.

In the context of pastoral care it is Christ who, through His death and His resurrection, gave us life in its fullness (Lincoln, 2011:78). Fullness of life is through an understanding of the biblical concept of *shalom*, which relates to a relationship that implies a person to be at peace with God, one another and the world around us (Long, 2000:14).

2.2 Life coaching

Life coaching was shown to have its roots in the sports world as well when Tim Gallwey wrote a book, *The Inner Game of Tennis* (1972) that laid the foundation for life coaching. By using the same coaching concepts that he developed for tennis, Gallwey introduced workshops called the *Inner Game* franchise which focused on business managers and leaders. The business community realised the benefits of a coaching approach in their personal lives and in their businesses. The idea that the inner game of a person's attitude and psychology has a great influence on the outer game of his personal performance, is an approach that was based on positive thinking with an application for life coaching.

After using his success as a sports coach Gallwey used the same principles and concepts in other areas of life especially in the business environment. This shift in focus to the business world led to the publication of his book; *The Inner Game of Work* (Gallwey, 2000). Gallwey developed the *Inner Game* concept further with John Whitmore, a sports coach in Britain. They formed an association for coaching in Europe. Whitmore used Gallwey's inner game metaphor in a book *Coaching for Performance* (1992) in which he developed the GROW model for coaching. The work by Whitmore became a standard publication in the business coaching world.

Whitmore's model promoted the idea to GROW people by enhancing their purpose as well as their personal performance. This model is about developing the skills of a person by using effective questions and active listening within a context of awareness and responsibility. The GROW model is illustrated in the diagram below.

Figure 2: Concepts of the GROW model

The **G** in Whitmore's model refers to specific goals that can be for the long, medium or short term. Goal setting is a twofold process focusing on goals for every coaching session and goals for the whole coaching process. Goal setting is done with the SMART (*Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time-framed*) process of Doran (1981) that brings focus and measurement to the planning of goals.

The **R** refers to how the coachee feels about the reality of his current situation and prospects. The purpose of this exploration process is to clarify goals better, because it can focus on sources of motivation and dissatisfaction.

The **O** refers to alternative options that the coachee can choose when planning goals. The aim of this process is not to find immediate solutions but to generate possible alternative actions and to evaluate them.

The **W** in Whitmore's model refers to the way forward and allows the coachee to identify and agree on specific actions and plans in order to reach the goals on which he and the coach had decided. This final life-coaching stage involves the progression from discussion of options to decision and specific actions.

2.3 Pastoral care

Within the context of pastoral care the pastor can enhance the process by using the steps of the above-mentioned life-coaching model as guiding principles, thus ensuring that the pastor who is not a trained life coach can still add value to the pastoral care process by focusing not only on the past (healing), but also on the future (growth). However, it is also necessary to consider which pastoral theological concepts are important in a process of spiritual growth.

Pastoral theology experienced a big shift at the beginning of the 21st century because of unease about the discipline's focus on psychology and the individual during the previous century, in which the Second World War played a significant role. For the purpose of this article, we focus on developments in pastoral theology during the past twenty years. These developments emphasize a new spirituality in Christology with a focus on soteriology and eschatology.

De Jong van Arkel (2000:153) defines this new spirituality from a Christian perspective: 'Spirituality refers to the subjective side of human life, to personal discerning and experiencing the presence and movement of the Spirit of God in the here and now'. Louw (2011:6) describes very specific traits in this Christian spirituality with a more confessional approach to. He explains that

[w]ithin Christian spirituality, one can identify the theological categories of grace (unconditional love); forgiveness and reconciliation; resurrection hope; the support system of *koinonia* [fellowship] and *diakonia* [service] and the sacraments as indication of God's faithfulness and fulfilled promises emanating into a life of joy and gratitude (Louw, 2011:6).

Louw's definition is important for the pastoral care process because it also addresses other issues that were highlighted in pastoral theology, such as *sharing* and *applying* with the inclusion of the concept of *diakonia* and communities and society with the concept of *koinonia*. This new spirituality not only includes Christology with eschatology that focuses on the present and after-life, but it also focuses on the importance of the context and all aspects of human life. For Louw (2015a:67) there is consensus in literature that spirituality '[r]efers to the integration between belief systems and concrete existential life events.' Louw (2015a:68) is of the opinion that the essence of spirituality refers to '[a] way of life determined by norms, values and convictions that gives meaning to life, motivate people to endure suffering and help to display a kind of resilience and hopeful anticipation.' The implication of integration between belief and existence in this new approach to Christian spirituality is important, because it indicates that there is a bridge between spirituality and human flourishing.

Christology's emphasis on eschatology and soteriology, informed the development of a holistic Christian spirituality that focuses on wellbeing, as well as the flourishing of

individuals and their communities. McClure (2008:190) is convinced that the reasonable description of the project of pastoral theology is promoting the *flourishing of all* (my italics). He states that 'pastoral theology seeks to address a person's distress and the alienating dimensions of human life; to identify and overcome the challenges of human flourishing' (McClure, 2008:190). When Taylor (2007:5) discusses spirituality he uses a very important term (*fullness*) to explain that it should focus on a flourishing existence. He explains that '[s]omewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worthwhile, more admirable, more what it should be' (Taylor, 2007:5). As one of the concepts in Christian spirituality, fullness implies that wellness and human flourishing should be the outcome of the process of pastoral care.

When one contemplates human flourishing from the perspective of the New Testament, human flourishing relates to the idea of *abundance*. Abundance explains human flourishing within the context of pastoral theology, as well as within the context of life coaching with its focus on the future. This is evident when one considers John 10:10 that states Jesus Christ saying: 'I have come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly.' Biblical imperatives like hope and abundance in Christ, make Christ's promises (like the one made in John 10:10) visible in the day-to-day activities of his followers. As Christians, we believe that, through His death and resurrection Christ gave us 'life in all its fullness'. For Louw (2008:430) the fullness of life should be seen in the context of the right relationship with God. Life coaching contributes to this relationship by assisting a person to reconstruct his life according to a new relationship with God through Christ. For Louw (2008:432) this new relationship with God, that was made possible through salvation on the cross and the resurrection of Christ, refers to a coaching process that includes the '[e]stablishment, maintenance, transformation and transfiguration of life and hope (Louw 2008:432)'.

3. Discussion: pastoral life coaching

Having discussed the main concepts relevant to this study, we will now consider what a pastoral life-coaching model might entail. Referring back to Whitmore's concepts of GROW, the following table summarizes some ideas for a pastoral life-coaching model.

Counselling	Goal	Reality	Opportunity	Way forward
Healing, Cure	The issues that should be address	Values beliefs attitudes and actions	New options and opportunities for the future	Implementation of goals
Resolving past issues.	Challenges and concerns	Rethink reality and current situation.	Re-aligning goals and options	How will actions steps look with God in mind.- <i>God information.</i>
Forgiveness	What is important for coachee Use wheel of life	Issues that can influence the future. <i>Rename current situation in light of what is possible for God.</i>	Future with relationship with God taken into account Reality from a <i>God perspective</i>	SMART goals Feedback

The first phase of the pastoral care process should be the counselling process. This phase entails the normal counselling model of the pastor. This process looks at one or more historical events that had a negative influence in the life of the coachee. Even in this

counselling phase the pastor can make use of coaching principles in spiritual healing by identifying goals and actions regarding forgiveness, reparation and restitution. However, the pastor will also add the following dimensions to his counselling.

- He will build a foundation of mutual rapport with the person that is being counselled; a relationship that is based on respect and trust. He will focus on the counselling approach to communicate honesty and trust. The important role of mutual pastoral care (Graham, 2006:256) is taken into account because in this process the pastor and the person he counsels will take responsibility to care for each other and become equal conversation partners.
- In order to become equal conversation partners, both parties should try to find common ground regarding their shared values and they should decide upon which of these values they can agree.
- The pastor will determine which common values he shares with the person he counsels and it will extend to a mutual understanding of the importance of the Bible in the life of the person he counsels. They should agree on the values they share and the fact that these values are defined by Scripture. There should be an agreement that the values they agree upon are defined by Scripture.
- Both parties should agree on their definition and understanding of Christian spirituality and should agree that the Holy Spirit plays an important role in the counselling and coaching process. The Holy Spirit brings agreement and understanding of Scripture and values. The presence of the Holy Spirit also helps to ensure perceptions of a safe space for the counselling and coaching process. Louw (1998:19) explains the importance of the soteriological and eschatological in the understanding of Christian spirituality in that it '[i]mplyes practising the Christian faith in such a way that it creates an awareness of God's presence.'
- Both parties should acknowledge the role of the salvation of Christ in their own transformation.
- The pastoral care process can only work if a safe space is created where a person can discuss his history and future without fear for rejection and failure. By removing fear of rejection and failure an environment is created not only for healing but also for new ideas and new goals.

In the counselling phase the focus is on healing by redressing the history of a person. Even at this stage the pastor can make use of coaching principles by identifying goals and actions that will assist with forgiveness, reparations and restitution. In the pastoral care process the focus should be on a conversation with God and, therefore, the important role of prayer should be highlighted. Part of this focus on prayer is to help the person to ask for forgiveness, but also to forgive others.

The second phase involves setting goals and begins with a change of direction. The pastor now focuses on the future. In this phase the pastor should discuss challenges and concerns that the coachee has identified. During this phase, the pastor can use a life-coaching tool called the *wheel of life* to assist the coachee in identifying the specific topics, issues, concerns and priorities that he wants to address.

In the pastoral care process this shepherding function (Hiltner, 1958:3) is used to discover what is important in the life of the coachee. During this phase the focus is on the role of the Holy Spirit who assists in determining priorities that are not only important for himself but also for God. Pastor and coachee discuss an agenda for the future. The coachee should answer an important question before rethinking and reviewing his vision of the future,

namely: *As a person healed by Christ, what are the most important priorities in my life?* The coachee should review the concerns in his life in relation to his priorities according to his vision of what God wants for him. The pastor should help the coachee to describe his vision for the future in practical terminology and with practical goal that will enable him to reach this vision. This vision can only be achieved with very specific goals and a person's vision is clarified by determining his purpose in life. The goals for the future are identified by verbalizing the vision and by rethinking it in the context of abundance, hope and the meaning of life.

The third phase requires the pastor to help the coachee do a reality check. The coachee's reality is evaluated by discussing his values, beliefs, attitudes and actions with the pastor. The coachee should ask the question: *What is happening now in my life and how is it going to change?* This is a very sobering process, because the coachee should rethink the reality of his current situation. The problem that can arise in this phase is that the coachee can become disheartened. Therefore, the pastor should guide the coachee in understanding how God sees the latter's reality. The pastoral care process should counter the negative feelings about the coachee's reality with a perspective of what God wants for us. An example is the promises that we find in Ephesians 3:20, 21.¹

However, the pastor should be able to give an honest and truthful perspective of the coachee's situation by focusing not only on the problems of life (Lotter, 2007:3), but also on the issues that can inform the future. The important element in this pastoral care phase is for the pastor to assist the coachee to *rename* his current situation by thinking of how it can be changed with God in mind. The coachee should answer the question: *What is possible for God?* The process of renaming is a concept that was introduced by Louw (2011:7) to explain the re-examining of certain truths in relation understanding and our image of God. The coachee should reconsider whether his situation or reality within the context of that which is possible for God. The coachee should rename his reality or current situation within the context of the new possibilities that create courage, hope and assertiveness (Louw, 2008:432).

The fourth phase requires the pastor to assist the coachee to not only think about his current situation and renaming them with God in mind, but also to also help the coachee look at new options and opportunities in the future. This is a process of *reframing* that involves the re-aligning of goals with the options and opportunities that are available. The coachee should reframe his goals according to that which is important and possible for him as he takes God into account when discussing new possibilities. The question that the coachee should answer is: *How will I reframe my goals with God in mind?* The pastor should assist the coachee in thinking about his future in relation to his status in Christ. This status will have consequences regarding his responsibility and accountability as he plans his goals and actions.

Louw (2015b) describes this reframing as evaluating available opportunities and options in light of meaningful ideas about life and hope instigators. The pastor assists the coachee with reframing his goals according to his expectations of his life when his relationship with God is taken into account (Louw, 2011:6). The pastoral implication of the process is that, because of the renaming of reality from a *God perspective*, the coachee will be able to focus on new goals that instigate hope, instead of old goals with a negative connotation.

Phase five in the pastoral life-coaching model focuses on the way forward. It contemplates the implementation of possibilities or goals and plans action steps. The pastor should guide

1 'Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.'

the coachee to ask the question; *What action steps will I take to reach my goals if I keep God in mind?* The coachee should reframe his attitudes and actions in a *God perspective* as he describes his action steps and as he commits to them. Action steps should be tested and evaluated according to his new set of values that operates from a God perspective. A helpful tool that the pastor can use when actions steps are planned, is the SMART² (Doran *et al.*, 1981) guideline for goals. This tool will help with the formulation of measurable goals that are time specific.

This phase is also the ideal time for feedback in the pastoral care conversation. Feedback is important because it determines whether the coachee was able to understand and complete the action steps upon which both parties had agreed. It is important to note that a pastoral care process that incorporates life-coaching principles, is a cyclic process where the conversation can continuously go back to one of the previous phases. Sometimes it might also be necessary to revert back to the previous step when something is not clear to either the pastor or the coachee. Both can revert back and start at a previous phase. It is possible, for example, that – during the life-coaching phase – the pastor can determine that there is still a historical issue that is unresolved and that is hampering the coaching process. He can then revert back to the counselling phase.

4. Conclusion

At the beginning of this article we set out to determine how life-coaching principles can be used within the context of pastoral care. We considered the concepts of pastoral theology, life coaching and pastoral care, before discussing a possible pastoral life-coaching model. Having done all this, it is clear that when the pastoral life coach employs life-coaching principles within the context of pastoral care, his focus is not only on curing and healing through a counselling process, but also on growth and flourishing in a coaching process. The coaching process builds on the counselling process. Unresolved issues and things that did not work in the past, and that were addressed during the counselling process, brings the coachee to a point where he should make certain changes and adjustments to his own mind set. By using both counselling and coaching principles the pastoral life coach can accommodate the process of cure, healing, change and adjustment. The process can address the coachee's history with a counselling process that focuses on acceptance, forgiveness and resolve. The implication of this focuses on acceptance, forgiveness and resolve is that some of the goals of the coaching process would be to resolve some of these historic issues. Even in the counselling step coaching principles can be used with the implication that historic issues and problems that is identified will be resolved with specific action steps and goals.

Furthermore, pastoral life coaching is also about the development of the coachee –from a healed person to one who has experienced spiritual growth. This growth is driven by the knowledge that God wants us to live life in abundance. In pastoral life coaching the positive transformation process focuses on the future, but it also takes into account that a person's distress and the alienating dimensions of human life is identified and that pastoral life coaching can overcome the challenges of human flourishing (McClure, 2008:190). The process looks for untapped potential in the coachee and seeks to develop it. Pastoral life coaching also takes both life coach and coachee into uncharted territory – not only of transformation, but also of reinvention, in order to find new ideas and explore new ways.

Finally, within the context of pastoral life coaching, it would be important for the pastoral life coach to perceive himself as one that the New Testament refers to as a shepherd who is caring for his sheep and who is steering them to greener pastures. This metaphor will help

2 The SMART (Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and in time) guideline for goals is included in the most basic life coach training.

the pastoral life coach understand his role as healer and guide to the future. By adding life-coaching principles to the pastoral care process the shepherding metaphor is used because the shepherd does not only care for the flock (counselling) but he also steers and guides them to greener pastures (life-coaching principles). The metaphor of shepherding can align with the concepts of tending, care and flourishing.

Secondly, the pastoral life coach as a spiritual person should envisage the pastoral care process within the context of a very specific Christian spirituality that focuses on a personal relationship with Christ. The content of Christian spirituality has as its focus salvation, through grace on the cross and the resurrection of Christ. This focus cannot exist without an understanding of the important role that the Holy Spirit plays in the process of pastoral life coaching. A pastoral life-coaching model should focus on the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God implies that there is no aspect of life that falls outside of the jurisdiction of God. An understanding of God's presence is not threatening but it is a confirmation of security that we as Christians have.

Ultimately, such a pastoral life-coaching model enables both pastoral life coach and coachee to gain new perceptions of the future because they have a new understanding of themselves and of God. This new understanding allows them to heal and have hope for a future where they can grow, flourish and achieve wellness in Christ. They can have a life of abundance in the Kingdom of God as was promised by Christ in John 10:10.

'I have come that you might have life, and have it more abundantly'

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