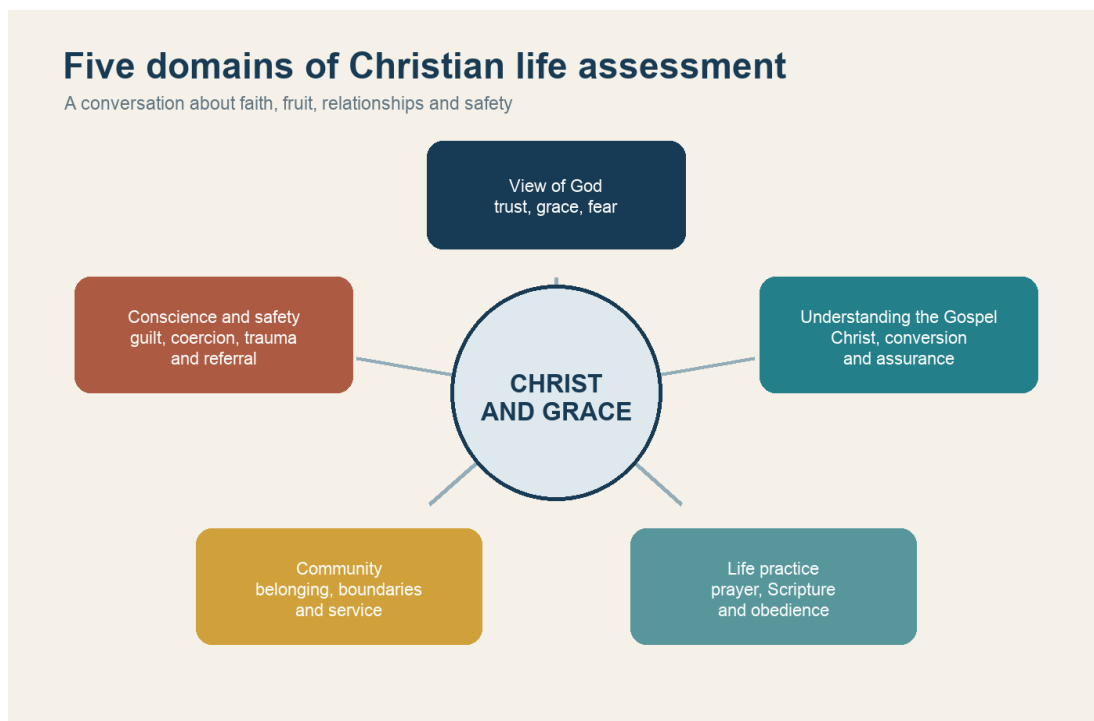


Diagnosing the Christian Life

The Engel Scale as a Missiological and Pastoral Framework for Conversation



Faith conversations attentive to grace, growth, community and safety

Gerard Feller

Revised and expanded edition 2026

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Purpose and scope

This handbook offers a Christian framework for carefully exploring a person's orientation toward faith, understanding of the gospel, conversion, integration into the church and growth in discipleship. The Engel Scale provides the main structure. It describes a process from initial awareness to a life of fellowship with God and service to others. The scale helps a facilitator listen for the next appropriate step. It does not judge a person's worth, sincerity or eternal destiny.

The term assessment is used here in a pastoral sense. It refers to taking a spiritual history and interpreting it together, not to making a clinical diagnosis or objectively measuring grace. The Engel Scale originated as a communication model in missiology. It was not developed or validated as a psychometric test. Contemporary sources on spiritual assessment therefore recommend open conversation, consent, respect for autonomy and awareness of the limits of one's expertise [5–8].

This book intentionally adopts a biblical Christian approach. It does not use concepts such as energy bodies, chakras, auras, vibrational levels, channeling or other New Age ideas. Nor does it assume that mental or physical health concerns have a direct spiritual cause. Faith, trauma, illness, personality, culture and relationships can influence one another and require careful professional discernment.

Safety warning

When there is an immediate risk of suicide, psychosis, severe confusion, violence, intoxication, withdrawal, abuse, coercion or medical instability, safety comes first. Engage appropriate professional or emergency services. Religious language can also form part of obsessive-compulsive symptoms, trauma or psychosis. Intrusive blasphemous thoughts, for example, do not automatically indicate consent or spiritual guilt; scrupulosity can be a form of OCD [9–10].

Pastoral guidance requires voluntary participation. The facilitator explains the purpose, confidentiality, record-keeping and boundaries in advance. Prayer, Bible reading or contact with a spiritual leader takes place only with consent. When there are signs of spiritual abuse, the facilitator should listen, avoid minimising the concern, and never use Scripture or prayer to silence a disclosure [8].

Summary

The Engel Scale was developed by James F. Engel and Viggo Søgaaard in the 1970s and became widely known by the publications of Engel and H. Wilbert Norton. The model organizes the spiritual decision process around conversion and then continues with integration and growth [1-4]. In the classical representation, the scale of -8, consciousness of a Supreme Being without knowledge of the gospel, passes through -1, conversion and belief in Christ, to +5, to make stewardship or disciples. The zero line marks the new birth.

The power of the model lies in process-oriented listening. Not every conversation has to lead to an immediate decision. An appropriate step can also consist of restoring trust, clearing a misunderstanding, explaining the core of the gospel, getting to know a Christian community or getting to live from grace. The Holy Spirit works; The witness serves with truth, love, patience and clarity.

For the assessment of Christian life, this handbook connects the Engel Scale with five conversational domains: view of God, understanding of the gospel, daily life and practice, community, and conscience and safety. This prevents knowledge or church attendance alone from determining the assessment. A comprehensive questionnaire follows the descriptions of the phases. The result is a working hypothesis, not a verdict.

Main conclusion

Sound Christian life assessment does not seek the highest possible score. It seeks truth, freedom, fruit, connection and an appropriate next step, with Christ and His grace at the centre.

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Reader

The chapters on the Engel phases can be used independently. For professional or pastoral use, always read the foundation and safety boundaries first. The questionnaire at the back is intended as a conversation guide. The italicised key sentence at the beginning of each phase states its central pastoral task.

1 Basis and method

From classification to understanding

Christian life assessment begins with listening. A guide does not collect loose religious facts, but tries to understand how faith in concrete life works. What does God mean to this person? How is Christ understood? What happens to guilt, suffering, prayer and community? What sources give hope? What experiences bring fear, confusion or compulsion? The story precedes the layout.

Gerard Feller's original document rightly emphasises the relational and procedural character of man. Physical, psychological, social and spiritual aspects affect each other. A Christian human image resists reduction. At the same time it protects against another reduction: the idea that each complaint is primarily spiritual. A depression is not evidence of disbelief. A trauma reaction is not evidence of demonic influence. A question of faith is not automatically a psychiatric symptom.

Four principles

- Grace precedes achievement. The scale describes response and growth, but makes no one more valuable to God.
- Man remains an active subject. Ask permission, respect boundaries and leave room for doubt and contradiction.
- The assessment remains provisional. People can simultaneously display characteristics of different phases and fall back into periods.
- Work within expertise. Theological questions, mental health concerns and medical risk derivatives sometimes require different professionals.

The place of the Engel Scale

Engel described his model as a process of spiritual decision-making. It is therefore primarily a communication model. The phases before conversion describe increasing awareness, understanding, attitude and willingness to act. The later phases describe evaluation, integration, growth, fellowship and service. The scale helps the witness adapt communication and guidance to the other person's situation.

Later models made it clear that understanding and attitude are not always equal. Someone can know Christian doctrine well and yet reject church or faith. Another may be positive towards Jesus but hardly understand the essence of the gospel. The Gray Matrix therefore added a second dimension. In this manual, the classic Engel Scale remains leading, but each phase is complemented by questions about attitude, relationship and safety [4].

2 The Engel Scale in one overview

The Engel Scale as a conversation map

From first awareness to a life of discipleship



The numbers are orientation points. A person may show characteristics of more than one phase.

Infographic 1 The classic Engel Scale as a pastoral conversation card

The numbers are orientation points. They help the facilitator choose language that matches the other person's present understanding and openness. A person's position on the scale may differ by topic. Someone may, for example, trust Christ while having little trust in a church community. Always describe concrete signs and avoid labels such as 'a Phase -4 person'.

Range	Core Process	Primary Pastoral Task
-8 to -6	Awareness and first understanding	Listening, clarifying concepts, reliable witnesses
-5 to -3	Meaning, attitude and personal need	Discussing consequences, giving space to questions and pain
-2 to 0	Decision, conversion and new life	Explain Gospel clearly, guide voluntary response
+1 to +2	Processing and integration	Security, baptism, congregation, healthy relationships and basic formation
+3 to +5	Growth, community and service	Fruit, persistence, calling, stewardship and multiplication

3 The phases of the Engel Scale

The following fourteen descriptions develop the classic phases of the Engel Scale. Each description includes identifying features, open questions, an appropriate pastoral approach and a safety boundary. The examples are indicative. Always use the conversation partner's own words and record uncertainty.

THE ENGEL SCALE

GOD AT WORK

HUMAN RESPONSE



A process model for pastoral conversation

Phase –8 Awareness of a Supreme Being without knowledge of the Gospel

The first task is not convincing, but discovering which words and experiences one already connects with God.

Meaning of this phase

At this stage there is some awareness of transcendence, creation, destiny or a higher reality, but the person hardly knows the biblical message about Jesus Christ. The image of God may be vague, cultural, philosophical or made up of experiences. Someone who believes in something may also be suspicious of religion.

Possible signals

- If general words are used as "something", "higher power" or "higher power", or "more" must be "something"
- Knows Jesus primarily as a historical or cultural figure
- Has little language for sin, grace, cross and resurrection
- Can be open, indifferent or careful

Open Questions

- When do you experience wonder or meaning?
- What experiences have formed your image of God or faith?
- What do you think Christians mean by God?
- What would you not want a counselor to assume about you?

Appropriate guidance

Listen without immediately stacking Christian terms. Easily explain words and connect the conversation to the life story. A reliable relationship and an understandable introduction to the gospel are more appropriate than pressure for a decision.

Border and focus

Do not confuse openness to spirituality with understanding the gospel. Avoid joining occult or New Age concepts when not mentioned by the person himself. Discuss differences respectfully and clearly.

Phase –7 First awareness of the gospel

The goal is recognition: What is the core of the Christian message and why is it about Christ?

Meaning of this phase

The person has heard or meets Christians in whom faith is visible. Knowledge is still composed of fragments. Known words may have gained a different meaning through media, education or negative church experiences. The facilitator not only investigates whether anyone has heard anything, but what is actually understood.

Possible signals

- Recognizes names like Jesus, Bible, church or cross
- Can mention one element of the message
- Has questions that are still strongly controlled by stereotypes
- Shows curiosity or slight resistance

Open Questions

- What have you heard about Jesus so far?
- Which Christians have left a positive or negative impression?
- What words of faith are unclear?
- What would you like to investigate without having to decide?

Appropriate guidance

Offer a short, narrative explanation: creation, breakage, God's search for man, Jesus Christ, cross, resurrection and invitation to new life. Check understanding by letting the other respond in their own words.

Border and focus

A trusted Christian vocabulary can give false understanding. Avoid tests like in school. Curiosity grows easier where questions are welcome.

Phase –6 Understanding the foundations of the gospel

The guide helps loose facts get coherence in the story of grace.

Meaning of this phase

Key concepts will be identified: God as Creator, the reality of sin and brokenness, Jesus as Son of God, His death and resurrection, and the call to faith. Understanding is not the same as consent. The person can be intellectually clear and keep emotional distance.

Possible signals

- Can tell the main line of the gospel
- See that grace and faith are central concepts
- Asks substantive questions about reliability and meaning
- Attitude can remain positive, ambivalent or critical

Open Questions

- What do you think grace means?
- Why is the cross important in Christian faith?
- What do you find convincing and what is difficult?
- What question should be taken seriously first?

Appropriate guidance

Distance between misunderstanding, moral objection, negative experience and lack of trust. Use the Bible contextually and give space to research. An apologetic answer only helps when it affects the real question.

Border and focus

Do not confuse knowledge with faith. The scale describes a process and justifies no pressure. Also, allow someone, after better understanding, not to agree for the time being.

Phase –5 Understanding the personal implications of the Gospel

The question becomes more personal: what would turn faith on Christ into identity and direction of life?

Meaning of this phase

The person understands that the gospel not only offers a worldview, but appeals to all life. Forgiveness, reconciliation, obedience, community and hope gain personal meaning. This can cause desire and resistance.

Possible signals

- Connects the message to your own choices or relationships
- Asks what imitation costs practically
- Experience tension between autonomy and surrender
- Think about change without making a decision

Open Questions

- What consequences would faith have for your daily life?
- What attracts you in life with Christ?
- What are you afraid of losing?
- What change would give hope and which feels threatening?

Appropriate guidance

Discuss both gift and calling. The gospel offers reconciliation by grace and invites a new life. Avoid a sales interview where only benefits are mentioned. Honesty about costs and community promotes trust.

Border and focus

Fear of family loss, prior mental compulsion or trauma can determine the reaction. Make safety and social consequences negotiable.

Phase –4 Positive attitude towards the gospel

Positive appreciation gets room to grow into personal trust without social pressure.

Meaning of this phase

The person is sympathetic towards Christ and the Christian message. There may be admiration for Jesus, desire for prayer or pleasure in fellowship. Nevertheless, a decisive personal appropriation may be lacking. Positivity can also be socially desirable behaviour.

Possible signals

- Speaks with respect or desire about Jesus
- Takes part voluntarily in conversation, celebration or Bible reading
- Experience Christian community as helpful
- Asks questions about personal faith

Open Questions

- What do you most appreciate in Jesus?
- In what does admiration for Jesus differ from trust in Him?
- Do you feel room to say no or not?
- What step would be fair and free for you?

Appropriate guidance

Invite you to personal research, prayer or reading a gospel. Name that faith is more than sympathy, but respect tempo and conscience. Check that ecclesiastical relationships are free and safe.

Border and focus

A counselor can interpret positive signals too quickly as conversion. Avoid group pressure, emotional manipulation and promises that faith solves all problems directly.

Phase –3 Recognition of a personal problem

Need opens a conversation, but vulnerability must never be used to enforce a religious decision.

Meaning of this phase

The person sees brokenness, guilt, emptiness, powerlessness or relational distress and asks if the gospel has any meaning in it. Recognition can be moral, existential, psychological or social. Not every need is sin and not every guilt is justified.

Possible signals

- Names own share or need for forgiveness
- Experience loss of direction or hope
- Asks for God's presence in suffering
- Can be strongly emotional or dependent on the helper

Open Questions

- What do you think is the real problem?
- What is in debt and what is in grief, sickness or injustice?
- What help is most needed?
- What would grace mean in this situation?

Appropriate guidance

Differentiate real guilt, false guilt, shame, grief, trauma and psychiatric symptoms. The gospel may sound clear, but practical safety and professional care may be needed at the same time.

Border and focus

Vulnerability increases influenceability. Explain options, guard autonomy and prevent the facilitator from becoming indispensable. In case of acute risk, direct referral follows.

Phase -2 Decision to act

The guide helps make a planned step concrete, informed and voluntary.

Meaning of this phase

The person is actively considering answering the gospel. This can be demonstrated by a desire to pray, confess sin, trust Christ, seek contact with a church or break a harmful pattern. Intention is important, but can still be unstable.

Possible signals

- Formulates a concrete faith step
- Asks how conversion or faith takes shape
- Looking for confirmation that there's room for him or her
- Sometimes experience strong inner or social tension

Open Questions

- Which step do you want to take yourself?
- What do you understand under conversion and faith?
- Who can safely support you?
- Is there external pressure or do you feel freedom to choose?

Appropriate guidance

Explain the gospel once again. Ask the person in his own words to say what he or she wants. Prayer can be appropriate when the person himself wishes it. Speak immediately about aftercare, community and realistic expectations.

Border and focus

An emotional moment guarantees no lasting choice. Do not make a public statement without permission and do not attach the person to one leader.

Phase –1 Repentance and faith in Christ

The central movement is trusting in Christ and turning to God, not achieving a religious achievement.

Meaning of this phase

In the classical scale lies the conscious response of conversion and faith. The person confesses his own need and entrusts himself to Jesus Christ. Different traditions indicate this moment differently and not every human being can indicate an exact time. The fruit and direction of life help understand the meaning of the response.

Possible signals

- Confess personal trust in Christ
- Understand forgiveness as grace and not as merit
- Wants to turn away from known sin
- Desire for prayer, Scripture and communion

Open Questions

- Who or what do you trust?
- What does it mean that Christ died for you and rose up?
- What change do you desire from God?
- What support do you need in the coming weeks?

Appropriate guidance

Acknowledge God's promise and explain the basis of imitation. Plan follow-up contact. Discuss baptism and connection to a safe church according to the church context, without making grace dependent on organisational performance.

Border and focus

Avoid having doubts about pathologizing. Belief security can grow. Research in obsessive repetition of conversion prayers or scrupulosity.

Phase 0 Rebirth and new creation

The zero line marks God's innovative work and should not be reduced to a score or human technique.

Meaning of this phase

The classic image places the new birth around the transition from -1 to +1. Theologically this refers to life from the Spirit and a new relationship with God in Christ. The model cannot measure this mystery. It can only give language to faith, confession, direction and perceptible fruit.

Possible signals

- New orientation on Christ and grace
- Desire for truth and obedience
- Start of new relationships and practices
- Awareness that growth is still needed

Open Questions

- What do you think has changed in your relationship with God?
- In what do you experience peace and battle?
- What promises of the Scriptures do you bear?
- What helps to understand faith not only as a moment but as a life?

Appropriate guidance

Speak of justification, acceptance, the Holy Spirit and beginning of sanctification. Four graces without triumphalism. Normalize that old patterns, questions and emotions do not disappear immediately.

Border and focus

The guide cannot determine who is born again in God's place. Use language of hope and scrutiny, not absolute control over one's inner.

Phase +1 Evaluation of the decision

After a decision of faith, quiet processing is necessary so that trust is rooted in God's promise and not in the intensity of the moment.

Meaning of this phase

The person looks back at the step taken. Joy, doubt, shame, relief and confusion can co-exist. The question is what has really been understood and what expectations have arisen. Aftercare prevents normal struggle from being seen as evidence of failure.

Possible signals

- Tells what the faith decision meant
- Looking for security or confirmation
- Discovered difference between feeling and faith
- Needs simple basic formation

Open Questions

- What did you think would happen after your decision?
- On what do you base God's acceptance?
- What doubt do you want to discuss honestly?
- What little habit will help you now?

Appropriate guidance

Repeat the core of grace and use appropriate Bible parts in context. Help identify feelings without taking them as the only measure. Create a simple plan for prayer, Bible reading and contact.

Border and focus

Avoid endless reconfirmation in case of compulsive doubt. When religious uncertainty appears to be part of OCD, work with a competent handler.

Phase +2 Integration into the Body of Christ

Christian life grows in a secure community where truth, grace, participation and borders come together.

Meaning of this phase

The person seeks or finds a place in a congregation. Embedding includes more than presence in services. It is about knowing and becoming known, learning, serving, receiving and participating in sacraments or ordinances according to tradition. A healthy community allows questions and protects vulnerable.

Possible signals

- regularly participates in municipal life
- Develops reciprocal relationships
- Receives education and pastoral care
- Learn borders, responsibility and reconciliation

Open Questions

- Where do you experience security and solidarity?
- Can you ask questions and disagree?
- Who really knows your story?
- What form of participation suits your gifts and carrying capacity?

Appropriate guidance

Help a realistic choice for a community of faith. Discuss culture, leadership, protection, membership and expectations. Give room to people who are careful because of church trauma.

Border and focus

Church visits do not prove mental health. Note control, isolation, forced obedience, financial abuse and mental threat [8].

Phase +3 Conceptual and behavioural growth

Ripe faith connects increasing understanding with concrete fruit in character, choices and relationships.

Meaning of this phase

The person grows in knowledge of Scripture and learns to apply beliefs. Change becomes visible in love, honesty, forgiveness, self-control, justice and responsibility. Growth is not linear. Old patterns can return, while new skills slowly become firmer.

Possible signals

- Apply biblical truth to daily choices
- Can recognize debt and seek recovery
- Draws increasing fruit of the Spirit
- Develops a realistic picture of strengths and weaknesses

Open Questions

- Where do you see concrete growth over the past year?
- What recurring situation requires exercise?
- How do you respond to correction?
- What kind of fruit would your neighbors recognize?

Appropriate guidance

Work with concrete examples and feasible exercises. Connect learning and life without perfectionism. Encourage appropriate accountability and recovery after errors.

Border and focus

Behavioural conformity may result from fear or group pressure. Research inner freedom, motivation and relational security.

Phase +4 Community with God

Deepness is shown by dependence, love and perseverance, not by special experiences alone.

Meaning of this phase

The relationship with God becomes a bearing reality in prayer, Scripture, worship and daily life. There can be a growing ability to live with God in joy and suffering. Spiritual experiences get their place within truth, fruit, fellowship and humility.

Possible signals

- Knows a regular but not compulsive prayer life
- Can wait, complain, thank and listen
- Connects faith to work, relationships and suffering
- Shows humility in special experiences

Open Questions

- How do you experience God's proximity when feelings are lacking?
- Which forms of prayer help and which give pressure?
- How do you test impressions or guidance?
- What happens to your relationships when your spiritual life deepens?

Appropriate guidance

Support different biblical prayer forms: Worship, confession, thanks, intercession, complaint and silence. Key guidance to Scripture, character of Christ, wisdom and fellowship.

Border and focus

Intensity is not proof of origin. In the case of voting, commands, sleep loss, grandeur ideas or severe disruption, clinical assessment is required.

Phase +5 Stewardship and making disciples

Ageing takes shape in service that helps others grow without making them dependent.

Meaning of this phase

The person uses gifts, time, means and experience to serve God and the neighbor. Testimony becomes relational and fitting. Making disciples means presenting, teaching, resting and giving space. The mature believer remains teachable and accountable.

Possible signals

- Serves from calling and carrying capacity
- Shares faith with respect for freedom
- Helps others grow independently
- Accepts correction, limits and supervision

Open Questions

- Who receives more freedom and responsibility through your service?
- How do you guard peace and borders?
- Who do you answer to?
- How do you prevent people from becoming dependent on you?

Appropriate guidance

Connect vocation to character, community and competence. Discuss power differences, confidentiality and protection. Encourage teamwork and periodic evaluation.

Border and focus

Activity is not the same as maturity. Burn-out, messiah complex, border crossing and spiritual abuse can occur especially in influential leaders.

4 Five domains of Christian life assessment

Five domains of Christian life assessment

A conversation about faith, fruit, relationships and safety



Infographic 2 Five domains around Christ and grace

The Engel phase indicates where someone may be in the process of understanding and response. The five domains broaden the conversation. They prevent a single sign, such as church attendance or Bible knowledge, from determining the whole assessment.

View of God

See how someone experiences God now. Words like Father, Judge, Shepherd, Savior and King can be biblical and yet by personal history sound very different. Ask what experiences, education and Bible texts have shaped the image. A healthy image of God connects holiness and love, truth and grace. Watch for fear in which God appears random, manipulative or only punitive.

Understanding of the Gospel

Ask the person to tell in his own words who Jesus is, what cross and resurrection mean and where forgiveness rests. Distinctive knowledge of facts, consent and personal trust. Note morality, where acceptance depends entirely on performance, and on cheap grace, where conversion and imitation have no meaning anymore.

Life practice

Discuss prayer, Scripture, choices, relationships, work, rest and dealing with suffering. Practice is not a point system. They show what sources someone really uses. Ask for freedom, perseverance and fruit. Notice compulsive religious rituals, avoidance, perfectionism and a gap between public piety and hidden behavior.

Community

Christian life is relational. Ask for support, correction, conflict management, borders and participation. A healthy community tolerates questions, shares power, protects vulnerable and promotes responsibility. Note isolation, absolute obedience to leaders, secrecy, humiliation, financial pressure and the use of God or the Bible as a threat.

Conscience and security

Examine real debt, false debt, shame, recovery and the functioning of grace. Conscience needs formation through truth and love. Psychiatric complaints can get religious content. Ask for sleep, mood, anxiety, trauma, intrusive thoughts, substance use and safety. Refer where necessary.

Domain	Healthy signal	Possible risk
View of God	Awe and trust can exist together	Fear, randomness or magical thinking
Gospel	Grace leads to faith and imitation	Moralism or meaningless faith
Practice	Free, persistent habits	Force, avoidance or double life
Community	Reciprocity, questions and limits	Control, isolation or abuse
Conscience	Recognition, forgiveness and recovery	Hardening, false guilt or scrupulosity

5 Conscience, guilt and grace

The original document calls conscience a spiritual measure. That image requires precision. The conscience testifies to moral judgment, but it is not infallible. It is formed by scripture knowledge, education, culture, relationships, trauma and mental state. Therefore, it can function too spacious, blunted or oversensitive.

Real debt

Real debt concerns concrete responsibility for an act or omission. Good guidance helps face truth, make appropriate confession, receive forgiveness and seek recovery wherever possible. Forgiveness does not automatically eliminate all earthly consequences or responsibilities.

False guilt and shame

False guilt arises when one bears responsibility for what he could not control, for example abuse by another. Shame often doesn't say "I did something wrong" but "I'm wrong." The gospel appeals to man for responsibility and at the same time protects against condemnation that Christ does not pronounce.

Scrupulosity

Scrupulosity is excessive religious or moral fear within the spectrum of OCD. Intrusive thoughts, repeated confessions, searching for absolute certainty and compulsive prayer can control the life of faith. Pastoral reassurance can unintentionally strengthen the compulsion. Cooperation with a controller who understands OCD and faith is then appropriate [9-10].

Questions for conscientious diagnosis

- Can you name the concrete action for which you are responsible?
- Which Bible text or conviction determines your judgment, and has it been read in context?
- Does guilt lead to honest recovery or endless control and repeat?
- Can you receive forgiveness, or demand your inner measure absolute certainty?
- What influence do trauma, depression, anxiety or ecclesiastical pressure have?

6 Discerning spiritual experiences

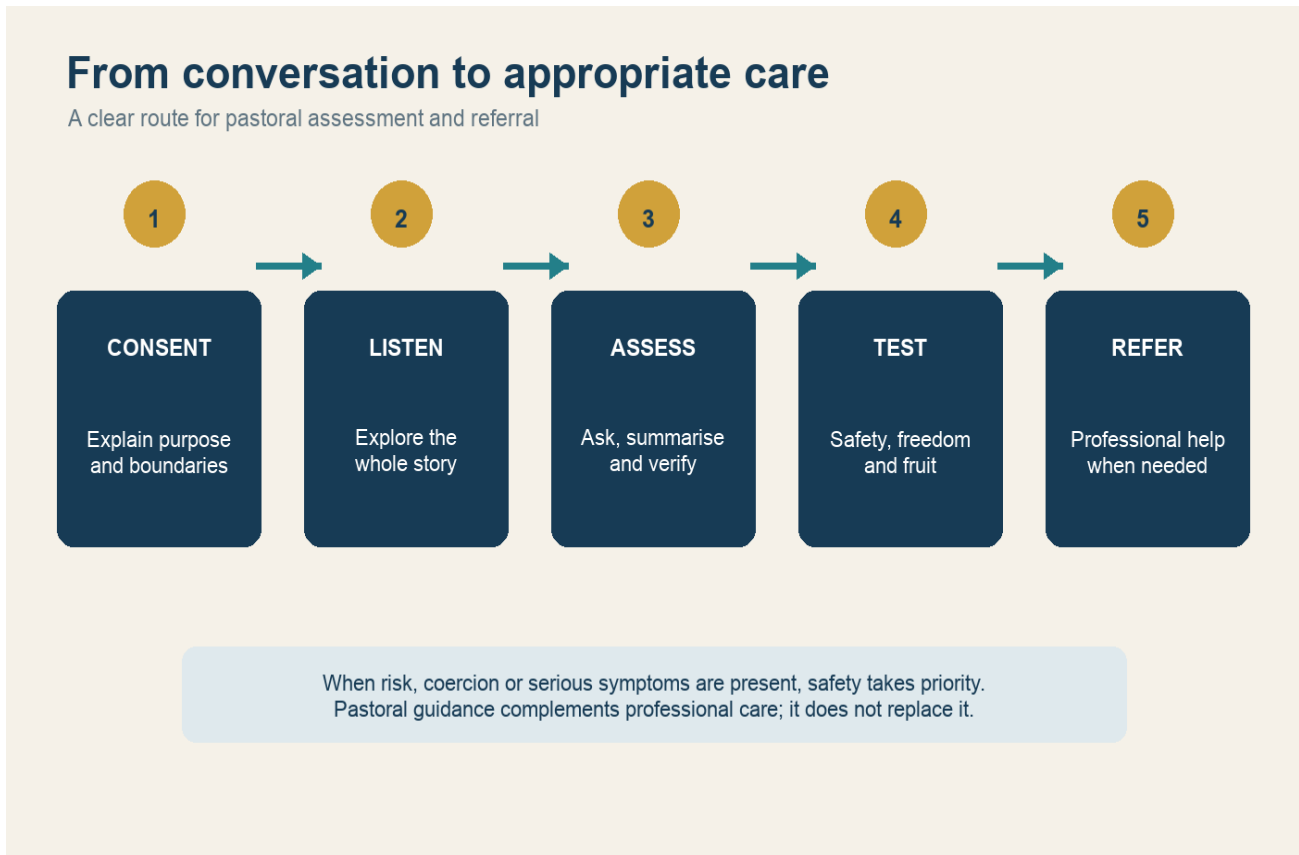
People can report dreams, images, strong impressions, prayer interrogations, guidance or spiritual struggle. A Christian guide takes the story seriously without pre-recording the origins. Experience is judged by Scripture, the character of Christ, the fruit, community and reality.

Key demand	Healthy indication	Warning signal
Truth	Fits within the broad line of Scripture	Insulated text justifies damage or power
Christ	Leads to humility, love and obedience	Increases the person above correction
Fruit	Peace, self-control and responsibility	Fear, compulsion, chaos or recklessness
Community	Can be discussed and tested safely	Demands secrecy or absolute obedience
Reality	Takes into account facts and consequences	Loss of reality testing or daily functions

Where professional assessment is required

Speak by voices that command damage, fixed beliefs that are not correctable and fall outside the shared culture of faith, severe insomnia, grandeur ideas, confused speech, strong loss of function or danger. The WHO mentions delusions, hallucinations, incoherent speech, agitation and severe withdrawal as relevant signals in psychosis [11]. A pastoral companion does not need to make the final diagnosis to organise timely help.

7 Cooperation and referral



Infographic 3 A safe pathway from conversation to appropriate care

Good care is often shared care. A pastor or spiritual counsellor contributes knowledge of religious language, church life and meaning. A general practitioner, psychologist or psychiatrist assesses medical and psychological factors. A safeguarding professional or confidential adviser supports concerns about abuse. Cooperation takes place with consent, except where legal duties or an acute safety risk require otherwise.

Situation	Primary responsibility	Additional collaboration
Question of faith without safety concerns	Pastor or spiritual counsellor	Theologian or church mentor if needed
Persistent anxiety, depression or trauma	General practitioner or licensed clinician	Pastoral support with consent
Scrupulosity or religious compulsion	Clinician experienced in OCD	Pastor who does not reinforce compulsions
Psychosis or severe confusion	Urgent medical or psychiatric assessment	Pastoral presence without diagnostic claims
Spiritual abuse	Safeguarding professional or	Trauma-sensitive pastoral and

	competent authority	psychological support
Risk of suicide or violence	Emergency care and a safety plan	Family members and pastors as advised by professionals

8 Christian Life Assessment Questionnaire

This questionnaire supports a conversation lasting about sixty to ninety minutes or several shorter conversations. It has not been validated as a test. Let the conversation partner skip questions. Write down literal examples and context. Use a score only to make conversation changes visible, not to determine spiritual value or salvation.

Answer Scale

Score	Meaning
0	Not applicable or unknown
1	Barely or very uncertain
2	Uncommon or partial
3	Regular and usually helpful
4	Clearly present and sustainable

Do not use a total score in risk questions. A single serious signal may require immediate action.

A Faith orientation and Engel phase

No.	Statement	Score	Example or explanation
1	I can describe what I understand by God or a higher reality.	0 1 2 3 4	
2	I can explain in my own words who Jesus Christ is.	0 1 2 3 4	
3	I understand the essence of the gospel about grace, cross and resurrection.	0 1 2 3 4	
4	I see what personal meaning the gospel can have for my life.	0 1 2 3 4	
5	My attitude towards Jesus and the gospel is predominantly open.	0 1 2 3 4	
6	I recognize in my life a personal need for reconciliation or new life.	0 1 2 3 4	
7	I have deliberately considered or decided to rely on Christ.	0 1 2 3 4	
8	I can describe what conversion and faith mean to me.	0 1 2 3 4	

Open Follow-up Questions

What gives life and hope in this area?

Where do you experience tension, standstill or deterioration?

Which next step suits your situation?

B View of God and understanding of the Gospel

No.	Statement	Score	Example or explanation
1	My image of God contains both holiness and grace.	0 1 2 3 4	
2	I experience space to speak honestly about doubt, anger and grief.	0 1 2 3 4	
3	I do not base God's acceptance solely on my achievements.	0 1 2 3 4	
4	I can distinguish between receiving forgiveness and restoring consequences.	0 1 2 3 4	
5	Bible passages guide me without isolated verses continually threatening me.	0 1 2 3 4	
6	I can explain why Jesus' resurrection is important.	0 1 2 3 4	
7	I experience Christ as Lord and Savior, not just as an example.	0 1 2 3 4	
8	My faith leaves room for physical and psychological help.	0 1 2 3 4	

Open Follow-up Questions

What gives life and hope in this area?

Where do you experience tension, standstill or deterioration?

Which next step suits your situation?

C Prayer Scripture and daily practice

No.	Statement	Score	Example or explanation
1	My prayer life knows freedom alongside discipline.	0 1 2 3 4	
2	I can worship, thank, confess, ask and complain.	0 1 2 3 4	
3	I read the Bible with attention to connection and context.	0 1 2 3 4	
4	My faith affects work, relationships, money and rest.	0 1 2 3 4	
5	I can admit a mistake without writing myself off completely.	0 1 2 3 4	
6	I seek reconciliation and concrete recovery wherever possible.	0 1 2 3 4	
7	I recognize growth in love, loyalty and self-control.	0 1 2 3 4	
8	I can live with questions I haven't answered yet.	0 1 2 3 4	

Open Follow-up Questions

What gives life and hope in this area?

Where do you experience tension, standstill or deterioration?

Which next step suits your situation?

D Community boundaries and service

No.	Statement	Score	Example or explanation
1	I have at least one safe Christian relationship where I can be honest.	0 1 2 3 4	
2	In my community of faith, I may ask questions and express differences of opinion.	0 1 2 3 4	
3	Leaders respect my boundaries and personal responsibility.	0 1 2 3 4	
4	I'm not controlled by threat, shame or secrecy.	0 1 2 3 4	
5	I receive and give support within my capacity.	0 1 2 3 4	
6	My service helps others become more independent.	0 1 2 3 4	
7	I can rest without feeling worthless.	0 1 2 3 4	
8	I know whom I can approach with concerns about abuse or boundary violations.	0 1 2 3 4	

Open Follow-up Questions

What gives life and hope in this area?

Where do you experience tension, standstill or deterioration?

Which next step suits your situation?

E Conscience freedom and psychological safety

No.	Statement	Score	Example or explanation
1	I can distinguish concrete guilt from general shame.	0 1 2 3 4	
2	After confession and recovery, I can receive forgiveness.	0 1 2 3 4	
3	My beliefs are not primarily intended to neutralize fear immediately.	0 1 2 3 4	
4	I do not automatically regard intrusive thoughts as my will or identity.	0 1 2 3 4	
5	I sleep enough and retain my daily responsibilities.	0 1 2 3 4	
6	I can allow spiritual impressions to be examined.	0 1 2 3 4	
7	I feel free to say no to a religious leader or counselor.	0 1 2 3 4	
8	I know when professional help is needed.	0 1 2 3 4	

Open Follow-up Questions

What gives life and hope in this area?

Where do you experience tension, standstill or deterioration?

Which next step suits your situation?

F Safety and referral questions

Please ask these questions calmly and directly when this is necessary. A positive response requires further assessment; Do not add the answers.

No.	Question	Yes	No.	Action or contact
1	Are you thinking of hurting yourself or anyone else, or do you have a plan?	☐	☐	
2	Do you hear voices or experience commands that frighten you or encourage dangerous behaviour?	☐	☐	
3	Are you seriously confused over the past few days, virtually without sleep or unable to perform daily tasks?	☐	☐	
4	Are you threatened, isolated, humiliated or forced into secrecy by someone with religious arguments?	☐	☐	
5	Are minors or vulnerable adults potentially unsafe?	☐	☐	
6	Are you using medication or substances in a way that creates an immediate risk?	☐	☐	
7	Do you repeat prayers, confessions or controls especially to temporarily reduce unbearable fear?	☐	☐	
8	Do you have access to a general practitioner, clinician, trusted person or safe place to stay?	☐	☐	

Acute action

In case of immediate danger: stay with the person if possible, engage local emergency services and involve a safe close by according to professional and legal guidelines. Do not perform long-term theological analysis during a crisis.

9 Interpretation and guidance plan

Step 1 Describe in words

First, sum up what the person himself says. Write down sources of hope, questions, meaningful relationships, complaints, risk derivatives and desired help. Separation of perception.

Step 2 Formulate a preliminary Engel phase

Choose the phase that best fits the current combination of understanding, posture and response. Note up to two adjacent phases when the image is mixed. For example, write: The person understands the main line of the gospel and examines the personal consequences; provisionally appropriate for -6 to -5. .

Step 3 Name differences between domains

After conversion, a person can fit theologically with +2 or +3, but experience little community due to church trauma. Describe this difference. The goal is an appropriate plan, not an average score.

Step 4 Choose one or two next steps

A next step is concrete, voluntary and testable. Examples include reading a gospel together, working out a question about grace, contacting a safe congregation, preparing a recovery conversation or consulting a general practitioner.

Step 5 Plan evaluation

Decide when and with whom the progress is discussed. Ask what helped, what didn't help and whether new risk derivatives are visible. Change the working hypothesis when the story gives rise to it.

Component	Working Note
Provisional Engel phase	
Key words of the person	
Sources of hope and support	
Main obstacle	
Safety or Reference Point	
Next step	
Who supports	
Evaluation date	

10 Case examples

Case 1 Curious but ecclesiastical distrust

Sara says there's got to be lake between heaven and earth. She knows Jesus mainly from the media and connects church to hypocrisy. She asks sincere questions and doesn't want conversion pressure. The first working hypothesis is -8 to -7. The guide acknowledges her experience, asks what events formed her image and offers to read one gospel story together. The next step is understanding and relational reliability, not an immediate decision.

Case 2 Decision of faith with compulsive doubt

Thomas consciously expressed his faith in Christ several times, but repeated daily a prayer of conversion for fear that the previous prayer was not perfect. It fits around +1, but the repetition and need for absolute certainty may indicate scrupulosity. The pastor avoids endless reassurance, confirms grace in a non-religious way and stimulates judgment by an OCD expert handler.

Case 3 Active leader with unhealthy power

A municipal leader teaches, prays and makes disciples. Activity suggests +5, but he tolerates no questions, uses Bible texts to enforce obedience to himself and isolates critics. The Engel Scale must not crown this activity as maturity. The domains of community, conscience and security show serious risk. Safeguarding and independent research are needed.

Case 4 Faith growth during depression

Mary has a clear Gospel concept, is embedded in a church and lives faithfully, but a depression causes her to experience little joy or God's nearness. Her mood doesn't mean she's falling back spiritually to a negative phase. The plan combines medical or psychological treatment with pastoral proximity, complaint prayer and practical support. Spiritual maturity can be demonstrated by honesty and perseverance without strong feelings.

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Bible references

Important Bible sections in this manual include Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 8; John 3; Romans 5 and 8; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 2:8-10 and 4:11-16; Colossians 3; Hebrews 10; James 4:7; 1 Peter 3:15-16; 1 John 1 and 4.

Bible texts must be read in their literary and theological context. The questionnaire is not a substitute for exegesis, church responsibility or professional assistance.