

Session 1.3 : The Emotional Self

Objectives:

1. To make the participants realize that emotions are indicators to their well-being
2. To help the participants learn how to handle their emotions
3. To help the participants become more aware of the appropriate response to the emotional needs of others

Scripture Passage: Mark 3:1-6

1 Another time he went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. **2** Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. **3** Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone." **4** Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. **5** He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. **6** Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

Discussion Questions

Jesus looked at them in anger and was deeply distressed at the stubbornness of their hearts. The Greek word translated 'anger' in that verse describes a rational, calculated anger or wrath, rather than an outburst of unreasoned anger. That means that Jesus had legitimate reason to be angry with these people. Mark also adds that he was 'deeply distressed' (grieving and sorrowful in his spirit) because of their stubborn refusal to acknowledge the truth.

1. Would Jesus get a better response from his audience if he had been calmer in dealing with them? How would you respond if you were in Jesus' shoes?
2. Is anger always wrong? Why? What is the difference between self-control and repression?
3. What are some ways that you can keep track of your own emotions? Are there some emotions that you just do not want to feel?
4. What sort of emotions should we clamp down as Christians? Which emotions should we express? Are strong emotions a bit of a problem for you at times? How are they a problem?
5. Jesus seemed to be always poised and in charge. He had obviously found a "place to stand" in order to manage His emotions and manage life. What are some things that can make people lose their poise? How can you find such a "place to stand"?
6. How openly can we share our emotions? Which emotions are best kept private? How should we respond emotionally to others around us?

Reflection

It is extremely important that we learn to understand and accept all of our feelings. They must be experienced directly as they occur and, as much as possible within social constraints, expressed completely. Bottled up emotion will damage its container. The first step toward emotional literacy is to understand that a person's feelings are neither good nor bad. Feelings just simply occur and the only decision to be made about a particular emotional response in a particular situation is whether that response is the one we wish to have. With a little effort, a person can consciously change the way he/she responds emotionally under a given set of circumstances. If we remember that feelings are to guide our behavior, then the question to ask is: does this feeling lead to the type of behavior that I wish to have in this situation?

The uncomfortable feelings of sorrow or sadness which accompany the loss of something(one) important remind us of the value of that which was lost so that we will remember the value of similar things in the future. Sorrow often leads to the behavior of crying which helps to release the highly charged energy state of the sorrow to allow us to get on with using that energy for other things such as finding creative solutions to the problems we face. The hot, flashing feelings of anger often lead to behaviors which act to warn others that they have or are about to violate us in some way. The warm tender feelings of love remind us of the value of life and underscore the meaning of our intimate relationships.

The other obstacle that we must overcome is emotional confusion. "I think" or "I believe" refer to thoughts, the currency of the intellect. "I feel" refers to an emotional state. Using these terms correctly in conversation helps to prevent the common thought/feeling confusion. Furthermore, it is easy to become confused and overwhelmed by the vast array of terms in our language which refer to, often exceedingly subtle, nuances of feeling. This wonderful complexity is one of the things which makes life so very rich and interesting. According to Dr. Gerald Jampolsky, there is a very simple lesson which can help us bring some order to this (paraphrased here from his book: *Love Is Letting Go of Fear*):

There are really only two emotions, love and fear. All other states of feeling can be seen as facets of one, or the other. Only one of these, *love*, is *real* in the sense that it is a basic irreducible aspect of our nature and the single greatest factor in separating us from other forms of life. The essential state of love is one of *extension*, (meaning that it naturally flows outward from one person toward another thereby forming the bond which joins us one to the other) and of *expansion*, (meaning that it cannot be used up; we cannot give it all away since it always expands to fill the available space no matter how much is given away). There is no need to be stingy with love.

The other basic emotion, fear, is an idea created by our minds, in an attempt to provide protection from things threatening or simply from things whose nature is not known. *Fear* is therefore essentially *unreal*. Love and fear may not be experienced simultaneously and therefore fear

often blinds us to the presence of love which is always there. It is important for us to divest ourselves of our irrational fears as we become aware of them because they limit our ability to experience life fully. In our relationships with others, we should practice only love for that is the truest expression of what we are.⁽¹⁾

As long as we are honest and direct in the experience and expression of our feelings we will keep our emotional selves balanced and growing properly. As long as we take the time to examine our feelings and how they affect our behavior we can achieve a harmonious equilibrium of the emotional self to the other aspects of our nature.

We need to get a handle on our emotions by first of all identifying them and secondly making a conscious decision about which emotions to express and which to deny. Our mental model of the Christian faith will greatly affect how we express or repress emotions. Our mental model serves as a sort of Christian master plan that guides our destiny, thoughts, emotions and behaviour. It is shaped by culture, conditioning and our community of faith with its traditions as well as our own conclusions about God and Jesus. It needs to be revised now and then when it has outlived its current usefulness. We need to move to ever more Christ-like mental models and these in turn will pattern our thoughts, and behaviour. As we become Christ-like we will express and repress the right emotions, in the right way and at the right times for the glory of God and the extension of His Kingdom.