PART 7: GROW INTO AN EMOTIONALLY MATURE ADULT

INTRODUCTION

- One of the turning points of my life, however, was at the 17-year mark of being a Christian.
    - It was when I finally heard Geri – I mean really heard her. She shared about how lonely she was in our marriage, like a single parent with our 4 girls. She didn't feel valued or cherished by me. Even though I loved her, she didn't feel that from me.
    - By the grace of God- I finally saw it. I was an emotional infant leading a church. Here I was – Mr Xian – and my own wife didn't feel loved by me.
    - I was embarrassed and ashamed. Of course, the quality of love inside the church is not really that different than the quality of love outside the church. And I was so preoccupied that the people around me didn't feel much love coming out of me either.
- In the first century, the Christians in the church in Corinth also failed to make that connection.
    - They were zealous, diligent, and absolutely committed to having God as Lord of their lives. And they were incredibly gifted. But they did not love people.
    - They had, like many today, a disconnected spirituality. Paul wrote: "*If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels…If I have the gift of prophecy… if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."*
        - Jesus always integrated the presence of God with the practice of loving people.
        - He summarized the entire Bible for us in light of this unbreakable union: *"'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.*
        - *And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*
        - What Jesus says is that the essence of true Christian spirituality is to love well.
        - This requires that we experience connection with God, with ourselves, and with other people.
        - God invites us to practice his presence in our daily lives. At the same time, he invites us to "practice the presence of people," within an awareness of his presence, in our daily relationships.

- Developing a Rule of Life is meant to keep our feet firmly planted on the ground. We are about both loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength and loving people. They are inseparable.
- Regardless of our chronological age, we are at different stages of emotional maturity. We can be in our thirties or forties physically, and yet be emotionally a teenager or infant.

FOUR EMOTIONAL STAGES

Emotional Infants

- Look for others to take care of them
- Have great difficulty entering into the world of others
- Are driven by need for instant gratification
- Use others as objects to meet their needs

Emotional Children

- Are content and happy as long as they receive what they want
- Unravel quickly from stress, disappointments, trials
- Interpret disagreements as personal offenses
- Are easily hurt
- Complain, withdraw or become sarcastic when they don't get their way
- Have great difficulty calmly discussing their needs and wants in a mature, loving way

Emotional Adolescents

- Tend to be defensive
- Are threatened and alarmed by criticism
- Keep score of what they give so they can ask for something later in return
- Deal with conflict poorly.
- Become preoccupied with themselves
- Are critical and judgmental

Emotional Adults

- Are able to ask for what they need, want, or prefer--clearly, directly, honestly
- Recognize, manage, and take responsibility for their own thoughts and feelings
- Can, when under stress, state their own beliefs and values without becoming adversarial
- Respect others without having to change them
- Give people room to make mistakes and not be perfect
- Have the capacity to resolve conflict maturely and negotiate solutions that consider the perspectives of others

EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY ADULTS

- When we accept Jesus Christ and become Christians, growing into emotionally mature adults is not natural.
    - It requires intentional discipleship. Nobody would debate that a spiritually mature Christian is one who loves well.
    - The problem is that few of us have learned practically how to do that.
- This is one of the greatest gifts we can give our world -- be a community of emotionally healthy adults who love well.
    - This takes the power of God and a commitment to learn, grow, and break with unhealthy, destructive patterns from our families and cultures—and in some cases, our Christian culture also.
- We learn many skills to be competent in our careers and at school. We don't learn, however, the skills necessary to grow into an emotionally mature adult who loves well.
- The Bible is clear what we are to do. But it does not give us the specific "how to's" that will change from culture to culture, generation to generation.
- Part of growing into an emotionally mature Christian is learning how to apply practically and effectively the truths we believe. For example:
    - be quick to hear and slow to speak
    - be angry and sin not
    - speak the truth in love
    - be a true peacemaker
    - do not bear false witness against my neighbor
    - get rid of all bitterness, rage, and envy
- Many of us believe loving well is learned automatically, that it is just a "feeling."
- We underestimate the depth of our bad habits and what is needed to sustain long-term, Christ-like change in our relationships.
- Growing into an emotionally mature Christian adult means I experience each individual (including myself) as sacred, or as Martin Buber put it, as a "Thou" rather than an "It". **PP**
    - It requires learning, practicing and integrating such skills as speaking respectfully, listening with empathy, negotiating conflict fairly and uncovering the hidden expectations I have of others…just to name a few.
    - This belief led Geri and me to begin creating a exercises and tools, so people could learn how love well-i.e. how to grow into an emotionally mature adults.
    - We wanted to move people from defensiveness, reactivity, and fear, to openness, empathy, and vulnerability.

- We realized people needed to experience a new, kingdom-way of relating that was outside their comfort zone.
- Practicing new skills like the one in this session will cause a level of discomfort initially. They are easy to understand but difficult to implement.
- This intentionality to grow into an emotionally mature adult, this commitment we made to learn skills to love well - transformed our marriage.
    - It also changed our parenting of our 4 girls. We then brought this to our church body at New Life Fellowship. Singles learned skills, married couples and young adults.
- Even now, at our staff meeting each week, we begin with an EH Skill that creates a wonderful atmosphere –
    - We share an appreciation of the previous week. It is simple but wonderful way to create a culture of thankfulness and praise…many people don't' grow up in that….
- We finally integrated the biblical truth that spiritual maturity and emotional maturity are inseparable.
- IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO BE SPIRITUALLY MATURE WHILE REMAINING EMOTIONALLY IMMATURE. **PP**
- Jesus knew that great messages to the multitudes alone were not enough for people to truly "get it".
    - So he chose twelve disciples, and he modeled the practical application of his teaching.
    - He had his disciples practice and he supervised them.

IN THIS SESSION…

- You will take some first steps at breaking the power of our pasts and growing into an emotionally mature adult in the new family of Jesus.
- So allow yourself to be stretched as you look at the famous parable of the Good Samaritan and then actually practice one concrete skill around the area of expectations.
- While we focus on one exercise here, on pages 186-193, four different tools are introduced that you may want to look at.
- Practically walking out what we believe and building a countercultural community that relates maturely is one of the greatest gifts we can give our children, young people, marriages the the world around us.