

USING YOUR EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY
Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others
Dr. George O. Wood

People with high self-esteem tend to have fewer health problems. People with high self-esteem tend to experience fewer problems related to stress. Had a closer relationship with their parents. That's not too surprising since our basic understanding of ourselves and concepts of self esteem flow greatly out of our contact with our parents. People with high self esteem tend to be more involved in charitable activities and end to be more giving persons. People with higher self-esteem say they've been more productive in the last 12 months in terms of what they wanted to accomplish. People with higher self-esteem tend to measure success in terms of personal relationships. While people with low self-esteem tend to measure success in terms of financial rewards. Lower self-esteem people tend to invest a greater value in things. People with a higher sense of self-esteem tend to place the greater value on relationships. People with higher self-esteem are more likely to see God in personal terms – God is loving, caring, forgiving. People with lower self-esteem tend to see God in impersonal, abstract and negative terms.

Charlie Brown and Lucy in a clipping. Lucy is at her psychiatric lemonade stand. She says to Charlie Brown as she comes to her booth for counseling. "It's too bad you're not a self actualizing person, Charlie Brown." (A self-actualizing person is a person who is developing their potential.) She goes on to kick her feet up in the booth and lay back and philosophize and say, "Self actualizing people are free from fears and inhibitions. They accept themselves and they accept others. They have high self-esteem and confidence." Charlie Brown plaintively asks, "Can I become a self actualizing person?" Lucy hears the question, contemplatively with her chin resting on her hand. Then abruptly says in the last frame, "No way. Five cents please!" The cartoon signs off with Charlie Brown saying, "Sigh!"

I originally entitled tonight's message, "Getting control of your emotions," and realized that is not what I really wanted to say. So I changed it to "Effectively using your emotions."

The word emotions in French means, "to stir up." The French word as well as the English word comes out of the Latin word that means "to move away" or "to disturb." Therefore an emotion is that which stirs us. Moves us. It's feelings.

Again, Charles Schultz – Snoopy and Linus in respect to emotions. Linus comes and Snoopy's lying on his doghouse – up on the top, upside down. Linus says, "I envy you Snoopy." Snoopy flips over and sticks his nose down, nose to nose with Linus. Linus goes on, "You always seem so relaxed." Snoopy thinks to himself "I'm glad I give that impression." The fourth frame he's flipped back on his back. He thinks, "Unfortunately on the inside I'm a raging turmoil." Sometimes the self we present to others, on the outside is different from the self we feel on the inside. Emotions stir us up.

Why did God give us emotions? God made us to be emotional persons. We love, we laugh, we feel pain, we hurt, we weep, we long, we despair, we fear, we become angry, sad, happy, exhilarated, enthused. I think the word enthused comes from two Greek words that means "in God." A person who is enthused is animated by the presence of God. Enthusiasm today means a whole lot else.

USING YOUR EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others

We have these emotions that I have described because God made us to be emotional people. He didn't make us a machine. Why then did God give us emotions? It seems to me that as we look at the scriptures, and look at the analogy of our human lives we have some very clear reasons why God made us with emotions.

One and the key one, God made us like himself. God is emotional. I've had trouble with the first definition with the Westminster catechism which says that God is spirit and he's without body parts or passion." I have a rough time saying that God is without passion. Scriptures describe a God who is full of emotion. A God who is not a computer like mogul in the sky and putting everything on a data base and simply turning everything out on a chart on everybody at the end of the road. But a God who feels and identifies with feeling.

God lets us feel the story of the prodigal son. Jesus is the supreme story of the emotionality of the Father, how he races towards us. How there's joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.

God not only is a loving God but he's a jealous of God. Jealousy is a form of anger. There are right and wrong forms of anger. Jealousy in its right form is a mark of caring. If I'm in a marriage relationship and the person is being unfaithful, it's a mark of caring that I be concerned and jealous to protect that relationship and not simply adopt a cavalier attitude and say, They've got their own mind. They can do what they want to do. Jealousy in its proper way is a mark of caring. God shows emotionality in jealousy.

In its improper form jealousy is sinfully possessive.

Why do we have emotions? Because God first of all made us like himself. God has given me emotions.

A second thing of why God gave us emotions is emotions help us to communicate. You'll never know how angry Jesus is unless he can have the expression of emotionality and anger to show. He is in a synagogue. A man is there with a withered hand. They're daring him to heal him on the Sabbath. Mark's gospel says, He looked around. The word that is employed is to connote an eyeball to eyeball, around the room contact with each person in that room – staring them down. Because of the hardness of their heart. He is angry over that hardness. He communicates through that anger.

At the temple cleansing he shows emotionality by taking the whip and overturning the tables of the moneychangers.

He shows emotions and he communicates with John by letting John lean on his breast. Something that in our homosexual society orientation is almost misunderstood. But Jesus is allowing John to be near him because it is in that nearness that John could come to a relationship understanding and perception of the savior's love for him.

If we do not use emotions in communicating we will never really be able to develop and relate from the inner core of our life to someone else. We can never show another person what's really going on inside of us.

USING YOUR EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others

It's been demonstrated that when you're together with people you communicate on five levels. The trivial level of "Hi, how are you?" Everybody does that. The second level we talk about facts, "What did you do today?" Then you might get into a discussion. Most families with the TV and the split schedule a lot of times will never get past the trivial and the factual level. The third level of communication where we move deeper into intimacy and understanding is the thought level. "What are you thinking? How do you perceive things?" But you go one step past that when you talk about feelings. "How did you feel about that? What were you feeling today? What emotions were you dealing with?" The peek intimacy level is where we can blend the deepest self-awareness of ourselves and transparency as we share with other people.

Emotions help us to communicate. God wants us to get past the communication with others as simply the trivial, the factual and the thoughtful level to get into the feeling level. Paul does that with the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 when he says good bye to them. There's a very touching scene where he falls on one others shoulders and weep. These early Christians were emotional people. Some people read the apostle Paul and think, There's an ivory towered theologian who writes with words difficult to understand. But if you've ever read the inside of Paul's letters and seen the revelation of his psyche, this self consciousness you'll find a deeply emotional human being who can laugh, who can cry, who can throw himself in tears upon another person's shoulders. He communicates. Unless you're using emotions rightly you will not be an effective communicator. Not just in a public sense by I'm talking about a one to one inner personal scenes because communicating requires the expression of emotionality. Emotions help us to communicate.

A third reason why God gave us emotions is that emotions help others find acceptance and strength. Not only do emotions help us communicate so that we reveal the inner core in us but others pick up something from us. We communicate to them and they by means of expression of our emotions find acceptance and strength.

When we're communicating with people and they talk to us it's important that we listen with our eyes. Don't be reading while people are talking to you. Nothing is more distracting or impersonal than when somebody's talking to us we're looking around.

When a person is hurting and spills their guts out we need to not just hear them. We need to put an arm around them, say we understand, we love you. Emotions help others find acceptance and strength. That's why God gave them to us.

A fourth reason why God gave us emotions is that emotions protect our wholeness as persons. We would be exposed to all kinds of dangers, both outward and inward unless we had emotionality. For example the emotion of fear is a very positive emotion.

There are other kinds of ways our emotionality lends toward wholeness as we express it. Laughing and weeping in our lives are release valves that God has given to us to help uncork us when we are all stuffed up with emotion and pain. Or when we're beside ourselves with joy. Joy or sorrow, God allows the emotionality of laughing and weeping to be the release valves for the cleansing of our inner life. Repressing anger therefore can be very harmful. You store it up and save it for another day. The scriptures say don't let the sun go down upon your laugh. Be angry but don't carry it into the next day. Release it. Let it be a safety valve and a cleansing in your life.

USING YOUR EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others

Emotions protect our wholeness as persons.

Fifth, emotions help us to achieve.

We become better achieving persons when a lot of emotion gets into what we do. David says, "By my God I leap over a wall." He got en theos. He got in God. What shouldn't be possible was made possible because something got charged within him. Emotions help us to achieve.

Sixthly, the reason why God made us with emotions is they open us to God. Jesus told stories that had emotional power. He was emotionally received by others. His great stories of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan or the two debtors, the begging woman of the unjust judge. All of these stories are laden with emotional power.

He was emotionally received by others who touched him or clasped him and he them. Who were so audacious as to pour anointing oil or perfumed oil upon him. In the other church Pentecost was a powerful emotional experience. The early disciples were so inebriated with the Spirit's presence emotionally that they were mistaken as being drunk with new wine. Or cheap wine. Further, the disciples after the day of Pentecost partook of food with glad and generous heart. They probably ate the same food they ate before they became filled with the Spirit but now the food had a different taste. Because of the emotionality of the Spirit's presence they were open to God.

We ought to seek to be comfortable with the expression of emotion in worship. It's not always front and center, hands properly folded and quietly passive. But there is a place in worship for the lifting of the hands, the raising of the voice, the spontaneous applause, the lifting up of voices together, the dance. God has given us emotion to be fully able to worship and open ourselves to him.

Emotions open us to God.

Bottom line is if we suppress our emotions the opposite of these things will occur. To the extent we suppress our emotions we will be unlike God. We will not communicate to our potential. We will be less helpful in communicating strength and acceptance to others. Our inner life will not be as well or whole. We will not achieve as much. We will not be as open to God.

A second major statement we want to make about emotions is not only did God give us emotions but sin has effected the functioning of our emotions so that while our emotions always tell us the truth about ourselves they do not necessarily tell us the truth by which we are to live. Our emotions always tell us the truth about what's going on inside of us. If we are happy, our emotions are telling us we are happy. If we are depressed our emotions are telling us we're depressed. They do not lie about our inner state. They bear true witness to us. But sometimes our emotions do not bear witness to the truth objectively. They simply bear witness to what we are feeling. But maybe there is another kind of response we are to have.

Emotions must be brought into subjection to what God teaches us about the handling of the emotions or they become spent. Someone has said that emotions may be compared to the scripture in that the scripture is the riverbank and the river is meant to flow within the banks. If

USING YOUR EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others

it jumps the banks everybody's in trouble. So the scriptures teach us the proper functioning of emotionality but if our emotions begin to jump the banks of scripture they still may be telling us the truth about ourselves but they're not telling us the truth by which we are to live.

Emotions related to sexuality especially apply to this truth. People who get involved in romantic relationships and have sexual temptation outside of a marriage relationship where God properly allows sexuality to be expressed. Our emotions towards sexuality may be telling us the truth about how we feel. But we must bring that emotion under the application of truth, the way scriptures tell us to handle the emotion and live by it.

Depression and moodiness. Moments when we are totally depressed and moody are telling us again the truth about how we are feeling. But they must be brought into comparison with the truth by which we are to live.

Here we as Christians struggle. When our emotions come close to sin or actually become sin we pray "God, take them away. I don't want to be angry. I don't want to be bitter. I don't want to be lustful. Take my emotions away." We ask God to remove them. The problem is that they don't go away. Or we bury them. We ought to rather instead of asking God to take away emotions since he made us with emotions he's not interested in taking them away. Rather, he is interested in us using emotions rightly. So we do not use our emotions but learn to manifest them in a way that is pleasing to him.

David and Saul for example. Saul's life was ruined in the Old Testament because he handled emotion incorrectly. He was threatened. He was insecure and he was angry. If only at some point in his life he had come to grips and led the thing out. Called David in one day and said, "You're the best singer in my court. You're an outstanding warrior. You have tremendous good looks. More than anything else, God has put his approval upon your life and you're going to be king instead of me. David, I could go on being angry with you. I feel upset, insecure. I feel hurt that God has rejected me. I feel streaks of jealousy towards you. I wish this weren't the case but it is. I want to talk with you about this. I want to work with you. As long as God gives me the time to be king I want to be the best king I can. I want to show you everything I can show you about being king so that when it's your day you can be king as well and you can be a good king." If Saul could just have gotten a hold of emotions it would have been a new day. It'd been a different day for his family, a different day for himself, a different day for David. A lot of the problems David had he would have never had, had Saul learned to handle his emotions correctly.

On a more practical level. Maybe in the home a mother is here who gets angry with kids. You get mad and then you realize you were mad without cause. You say to God, "Lord, forgive me. Take my anger away. I don't ever want to get mad with Johnny again. God, forgive me." When maybe we need to be saying, "Lord, my tremendous anger, the way I just slapped Johnny is totally inappropriate. It's a wrong response. Lord, show me the reason I'm acting the way that I am. Maybe I'm tired. Maybe the kids are cranky. Show me so I can learn to manifest the right emotion to Johnny."

Emotional life is really like our lives are a cup. There's liquid in the cup and we carry it around. Whenever the cup is bumped, whatever is in the cup spills out. If emotionality is in our life it's in a good sense love and joy and peace and we're bumped, out that will spill. But if anger, hatred, rage are in the cup that will spill out as well.

USING YOUR EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others

Sin has effected the functioning of our emotions. When we begin to walk in wrong emotions rather than feeling condemned about that maybe that emotion is tipping us off as a signal to the fact that we need to get something going in our life. Maybe God's using that emotion in our life to make us aware of something we wouldn't otherwise be aware of. Depression for example could be a real tip off of things we need to deal with in our life. We do not want depression or anxiety but they may alert us to our deeper needs. The problem comes when we get stuck in anger and depression and sadness and don't come out of it.

We often cannot help how we feel. It's what we do with our emotion that counts.

When a person for example is grieving. There's been a loss, a death. A person cannot help feeling grief. We're wrong as believers to come along and say, "Don't cry. You'll see them again in the resurrection." That helps but it doesn't help. We need to let people express their true emotions without getting stuck on grief. It's what we do with that emotion grief that will ultimately count in the long run.

This then raises the question how then can we control our emotions? How can we use our emotions effectively? We do not want to needlessly reign in our emotions, nor do we want to suppress them. We want to have our emotions benefit us rather than harm us. As we move to positive emotional expression our self esteem naturally grows better because we're more at home with ourselves and others are more at home in our presence and we make them feel accepted and loved.

How can we therefore effectively use our emotions and control them?

First we need to be honest with ourselves and others. If our emotions are out of control or if our emotions are wrongfully expressed or if we are denying any expression to our emotions we need to move that up to our level of consciousness. And also share what we are going through with someone else. In the honest admission there begins to be a release of God, authentic honesty to one another. Satan loves to work in darkness. He loves to work in secrecy. He loves to work in loneliness. He likes to get us picked off. He likes to make us think we're the only one, the only one who has ever struggled with that problem, we're the only one who has ever wrongfully expressed emotion or suppressed emotion. Or denied emotion. He wants to bring us down. And God wants to bring us out through a level of vulnerability, transparency and honesty where we can trust each other to be true to one another.

This by the way points out the importance of belonging to a small sharing group. And the importance of authentic family communication where we can be open to one another and share the deeper levels of our needs. If we can't find that in a small group or within a family context we need to maybe share it within a counseling context. But begin to deal with the need for honesty and the expression of our emotions.

A second thing we must do to begin to effectively use emotions is make a conscious decision to change. If we're using the emotions wrongly we must remember that the heart is under the head. Maybe some of the conscious decisions we need to make if we're kind of a stuffed up person and don't really show love let's go ahead and say honestly, I want to experience more emotion. I decide before the Lord that with God's help in the coming months, I'm going to be able to show

USING YOUR EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others

more emotion. Or maybe we don't handle anger well in my life. But with God's help I want to begin handling anger well in my life and resolve this issue of bitterness. Make a conscious decision. Don't put off the change. Remember the words of Jesus "today is the day of salvation."

A third step we can take in effectively using our emotions is we should expect a process of time. We do not suddenly become a different person. We become that over a period of time. I'm a lot different person today than I was ten years ago because I've learned a concept from scripture that one of the things God calls us to do is open up and be honest with one another. One of the tendencies we have to minister the truth of God's word is that that truth is so sacred and so precious we don't want anybody to ever think that we who proclaim it ever let it down. Yet if we only project our success and come with a sterile cold message nobody can ever have a ground for home or change in themselves. So gradually God has been working on me to be a more emotionally expressive person – something I find very difficult to do. The series on sexuality last spring was a real step for me because I could not even say the word "sex" in the pulpit let alone give a whole series on it. But there is a step, a progressiveness in my life where God made it possible for me to come to that level of sharing.

More and more in my life I'm seeing the presence of Jesus within us as growing seed. At conversion, at the new birth, we become impregnated with the living Christ. And that living Christ is being formed in us and is growing in us and by process we are growing into his emotionality and into his headship and into his fullness.

The fourth way that we can effectively express emotions is we can profit from roll play or practice.

We talked a little bit about this last week. Scripture says "Whatever a man or woman thinketh in his heart so is he." If we are in a state of emotionality that is not what we want or what God wants for us then we need to begin projecting ourselves mentally away from that and seeing ourselves in different terms.

We, I think, especially as parents can do that effectively with our children. I've found when our children were smaller that roll playing was a lot of fun. God has given us singing as a means of roll playing. You can talk without emotion but you cannot effectively sing without emotion. It's difficult from simply reading the text and doing it correctly. Singing that reaches the heart is singing that reaches us emotionally as well as content wise. Sing. Begin to sing and lift up your voice to the Lord and praise him! We find as we begin to do that God fills our hearts with song. We become more demonstrative. We become more feeling persons.

A fifth thing that we are to do in effectively using our emotions is we should seek good models to pattern after. I've never been a touchy feely kind of person. It made me uncomfortable.

Finally we need to develop reflective responses to replace harmful reflexive responses. By reflective I mean you go to the doctor and he taps you on knee and hits something and the knee flies out. That's a reflexive action. Emotions are like that. Somebody's driving down the road and they cut in front of us. The reflexive action is hit the horn, drive close to their fender at 60 mph you can and let them know you didn't like what they did. We do things reflexively without thinking. The Lord is saying to us be reflective.

USING YOUR EMOTIONS EFFECTIVELY

Developing Self Esteem in Yourself and Others

What do I mean by that? The eighth beatitude is “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Jesus says when you’re persecuted for righteousness sake what is your response to be? Be joyful and exceeding glad.” I submit to you that is not a reflexive response. If somebody does something to you your immediate response is to get even. The reflective response is to hear the word of the Lord. Rejoice and be exceeding glad.

Paul is in a jail experience in Acts 16 and his back is ripped in ribbons of blood. His reflex should be sadness and gloom and God what am I doing in this stinking jail. But his reflective action is to lift songs of praise unto God.

There comes times when we need to command our emotions to get in line with God’s word. Substitute a positive emotion for a negative emotion. When somebody really lets you down or somebody really turns on you or somebody says an unkind word instead of responding reflexively, responding with the Lord’s help reflectively. And begin to use emotions in a positive way rather than using emotions in a harmful way.

As we take these words to our heart, God is able to help our emotions to accurately reflect the image of God in us.

Our Father, we come to the conclusion of this evening and lord all of us in here have had moments where we have used emotions wrongly. Some of us in here have used emotions wrongly by never using them at all. We wanted to reach out and just say to somebody, I love you. But because our background as the kind of background where nobody ever said anything like that for years we can’t say that. Or we wanted to reach out and hug somebody. Or cry. But because our background is telling us to have reserve – especially men – we’ve never done that. You want to open us up to experiencing the full dimension of life. To kind of feel with your feelings. To use feelings for why you gave them to us. We pray Lord, that for those of us in this room who are wrapped up and entrapped in emotions so that we do not express them, that you will bring us to a freeing process. Lord, there are others who don’t have control of their emotions. Their emotions are out of control. They rage and seeth with anger and self interest, sexuality. Lord we’re bringing that to you tonight. We’re asking you Lord to begin a process in our life which leads us away from emotions which are not controlled or channeled and therefore become harmful because they simply radiate from the wounded core of life. Like a bull chasing a red cloth we’re moving against everything and lacking the discipline of your grace. Teach us, Lord, that there is a time to laugh and a time to weep, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to play and a time to work. Teach us, Lord, to be whole people for your honor and your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.